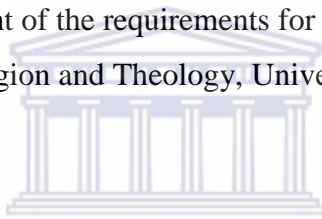


Hamartology and Ecology: A critical assessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's view on the nature of sin

By

Newton Millan Cloete

A thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister Theologiae
in the Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape.



Supervisor: Professor E.M. Conradie.

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Key words

Sin

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Domination

Consumerism

Alienation

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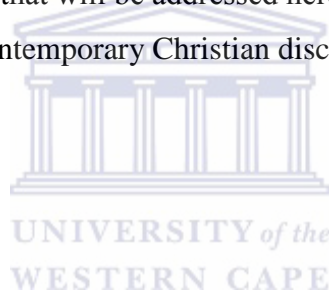
Greed

Pride



Abstract

Contemporary ecological concerns are addressed in a wide range of disciplines, including Christian theology. This task is addressed especially in Christian ecotheology which may be approached from within all the traditional theological sub-disciplines. This research project will contribute to discourse in Christian systematic theology where various aspects of the Christian faith are revisited in the light of ecological concerns. One such aspect is the Christian doctrine of sin (hamartology) with specific reference to an understanding of the nature of sin. In ecotheology sin is re-described in various innovative ways, for example in terms of anthropocentrism, domination in the name of differences of species, consumerist greed and the alienation of humans from the earth community. This project will investigate, more specifically, the contribution made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to a Christian understanding of the nature of sin. The question that will be addressed here is how Bonhoeffer's position may be assessed in the light of contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology.



Declaration

I declare that Hamartology and Ecology: A critical assessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's view on the nature of sin is my own work, and that it has not been submitted before at any other university, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Newton Millan Cloete

November 2013

Signed.....



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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

1.2 Context and relevance

1.2.1 Christian discourse on ecology

1.2.2 The Christian doctrine of sin

a) Historical development

b) Six themes addressed in current discourse

1.2.3 The nature of sin

1.2.4 Sin and Ecology

1.3 Demarcation and statement of research problem

1.3.1 Bonhoeffer's life: A brief description

1.3.2 Bonhoeffer's literacy works

1.3.3 Bonhoeffer's legacy

1.3.4 Statement of research problem

1.3.5 Limitations of the study

1.4 Research procedure

1.5. Significance of the study

Chapter 2: The Nature of Sin

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Classic understanding of the nature of sin

2.2.1. Sin as pride (*superbia*)

(a) Development in the Christian tradition

(b) Reinhold Niebuhr: "Three forms of pride"

(c) Karl Barth: "Human pride in the light of the humility of the Son of God"

2.2.2. Sin as greed (*concupiscentia*)



- (a) Developments in the Christian tradition
- (b) Reinhold Niebuhr: “The relation of sensuality to self-love”
- (c) Paul Tillich: “Estrangement as concupiscence”

2.2.3. Sin as moral failure (hamartia)

- (a) Developments in the Christian tradition
- (b) Paul Tillich: “From essence to existence”
- (c) Other contemporary views on sin as moral failure

2.3. Sin as a “hydra”

2.3.1. The Seven Deadly Sins

2.3.2. Ted Peters: “Seven steps down the path to radical evil”

2.4. Sin as deprivation of the good (*privatio boni*)

2.5. Conclusion

Chapter 3: Christian hamartology in ecological discourse

3.1. Introduction

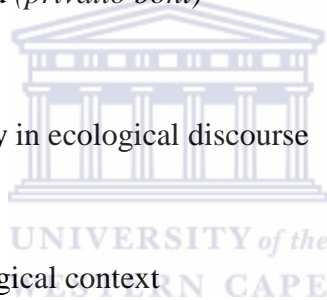
3.2. Re-describing sin in an ecological context

3.2.1. Anthropocentrism

- (a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support
- (b) Anthropocentrism as ecological sin
- (c) A biblical example of anthropocentrism: The man from the land of Uz
- (d) Conclusion: Alternatives to anthropocentrism

3.2.2. Domination in the name of differences of species

- (a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support
- (b) The impact of major world developments
 - (i) Agricultural civilisations
 - (ii) Science and technology
- (c) Domination in the name of differences of species as ecological sin



- (d) Double domination: an ecofeminism perspective
- (e) Conclusion: Alternatives to domination in the name of differences of species

3.2.3. Consumerist greed

- (a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support
- (b) The impact of industrialisation
- (c) Consumerist greed as ecological sin
- (d) Conclusion: Alternatives to consumerist greed

3.2.4. The alienation of humans from the earth community

- (a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support
- (b) The impact of Western dualism
- (c) Alienation of humans from the earth community as ecological sin
- (d) The place of humans: Are we home?

3.3. Conclusion

Chapter 4: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life, work and legacy

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Bonhoeffer's life

4.2.1 Family life and youth

4.2.2 Student, pastor and teacher

4.2.3 Resistance and martyrdom

4.3 Bonhoeffer's literacy works

4.3.1 *Act and Being*

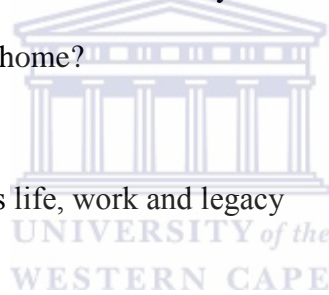
4.3.2 *Creation and Fall*

4.3.3 *Ethics*

4.4 Bonhoeffer's legacy

4.4.1 Reception and interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theology

4.4.2 The International Bonhoeffer Society (IBS)



4.4.3 Bonhoeffer's relevance for ecology, politics and other contemporary issues

5. Conclusion

Chapter 5: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's understanding of the Nature of Sin

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin in *Act and Being* (1996)

5.2.1 Act and being: "in Christ" vs. "in Adam"

5.2.2. Unfaith: Act and being "in Adam"

5.2.3. Faith: Act and being "in Christ"

5.3 Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin in *Creation and Fall* (2004)

5.3.1. The Beginning

5.3.2. God's word and work

5.3.3. Human beings in the image of God

5.3.4. The two trees, the woman and the serpent

5.3.5. "*Sicut Deus*": Being like God – knowing good and evil

5.3.6. The fall into sin

5.3.7. The effects of the fall

5.3.8. Overcoming sin through the Cross

5.4 Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin in *Ethics* (2005)

5.4.1. The centrality of Christian Ethics

5.4.2. Resisting realm thinking

5.4.3 Attempting to know good and evil: The sin which separates humans from God

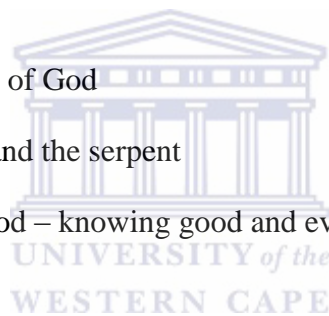
5.4.4 Humans in disunity with God

5.4.5 Overcoming disunity through faith in Christ

5.5 Conclusion

Chapter 6: Critical assessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's view on the nature of sin

6.1 Introduction



6.2 Anthropocentrism

6.3 Domination in the name of differences of species

6.4 Consumerist greed

6.5 Alienation of humans from the earth community

6.6 Conclusion

Concluding Remarks

Bibliography

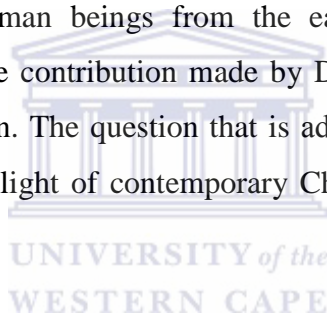


Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Contemporary ecological concerns are addressed in a wide range of disciplines, including Christian theology. This task is especially addressed in Christian ecotheology, which may be approached from within all the traditional theological sub-disciplines. This thesis will contribute to discourse in Christian systematic theology where various aspects of the Christian faith are revisited in the light of ecological concerns. One such aspect is the Christian doctrine of sin (hamartology), with specific reference to an understanding of the nature of sin. In ecotheology, sin is re-described in various innovative ways, for example in terms of anthropocentrism, domination in the name of differences of species, consumerist greed and the alienation of human beings from the earth community. In this study I investigate, more specifically, the contribution made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to a Christian understanding of the nature of sin. The question that is addressed here is how Bonhoeffer's position may be assessed in the light of contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology.



1.2 Context and relevance

1.2.1 Christian discourse on ecology

There is no need to focus here on the gravity of the environmental crisis. There is widespread consensus that environmental problems such as climate change, toxic pollution, overpopulation and a loss of biodiversity have become more ominous than the initial concerns over “limits to (economic) growth” as expressed in the report to the Club of Rome in 1972.¹ The environment is a theme that is addressed in almost all disciplines, including the humanities and social sciences and clearly requires a multi-disciplinary approach.

In Christian theology there has been a long-standing interest in studying the so-called “book of nature”. Contemporary debates in the field of ecological theology, however, were prompted especially by the famous essay of the American historian Lynn White on “The

¹ This report conveyed the first reservations pertaining to the feasibility of sustained economic growth. It explored energy availability, non-renewable-resource utilization and human population growth (Meadows *et al* 1972).

historical roots of our environmental crisis” (1967). In this essay White argued that Christianity “bears a huge burden of guilt” for the ecological crisis, given the underlying anthropocentrism of much of (Western) theology, rendering religious support to the notion that the world has been created primarily for the benefit of human beings. Many Christian theologians responded to such accusations by retrieving the ecological wisdom embedded in the biblical roots of Christianity, its subsequent history, Christian doctrine, the liturgy and Christian praxis. Others have acknowledged that the legacy of Christianity is far more ambiguous than such apologies may suggest.² On this basis, some have called for an “ecological reformation” of the Christian tradition. James Nash (1996), for example, suggests that an ecological reformation of Christianity implies that there are significant flaws in the Christian tradition – otherwise a reformation would not be necessary. It also implies that these flaws can be corrected – otherwise a reformation would not be possible.

Conradie (2006:63) observes that this task of an ecological reformation of Christianity is addressed in all the traditional sub-disciplines of Christian theology, including biblical studies, biblical hermeneutics, the history of Christianity in its many traditions and forms of expression, Christian doctrine, Christian virtues and values, the liturgy and worship, preaching, ministry, pastoral care, Christian education, Christian mission and a theology of religions. This thesis contributes to such discourse through a reinterpretation of Christian doctrine and more specifically, the doctrine of sin.

There is certainly a need to revisit Christian doctrine from the perspective of Christian ecotheology. Obviously, the focus is often on creation theology and especially a theological understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature. Many other themes have been explored in the light of ecological concerns, however, including the trinity, God as Father, humanity, sin, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments and Christian hope.

In several contributions,³ Conradie has identified four especially crucial areas where an understanding of the Christian faith continues to undermine an ecological ethos, spirituality and praxis, namely a worldless notion of God’s transcendence, dualist anthropology, a personalist reduction of the cosmic scope of salvation and an escapist eschatology. Conradie

² See Santmire (1985).

³ See, for example, Conradie (2006).

suggests that any ecological theology will remain shallow unless an adequate response to these four problems can be provided.

An additional aspect that necessitates further reflection is the Christian notion of sin, reinterpreted in the light of ecological threats. A common assumption, at least in Christian environmental discourse, is that the environmental crisis may be understood in terms of the structural impact of human sin. Alternatively, one may suggest that the Christian doctrine of sin offers a re-description of the roots of the crisis that may also be described in terms of historical, sociological and economic variables. Either way, this raises numerous further questions both inside and outside of the Christian tradition. Is the language of sin appropriate in (secular) environmental discourse? Exactly how is the concept of sin understood? In what manner should sin be re-described within the context of ecological destruction? That such a reinterpretation would be required should be obvious, given the cultural tendency to avoid or trivialise language about sin and the predominance of a personalist reduction of sin, particularly in evangelical circles.

Such an ecological reinterpretation of the Christian notion of sin would require an understanding of the traditional Christian doctrine of sin, especially the nature of sin, and a survey of recent contributions to an ecological reinterpretation of the Christian notion of sin in literature on ecotheology. The objective of this research project is to contribute to such literature by retrieving insights from the work of the famous 20th century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945).

1.2.2 The Christian doctrine of sin

The Christian doctrine of sin is of course highly complex, given the long tradition of reflection on an understanding of sin. It would be impossible to offer a history of interpretation or a detailed survey of the available literature of the last century on the doctrine of sin. Instead, I hereby offer a very brief sketch of the main historical developments in this regard, drawing on some standard textbooks in the field.⁴ Then, drawing from the work of Jaap Durand (1978), who taught systematic theology at UWC in the 1970s and 1980s, I identify and briefly describe six themes that are typically addressed in Christian literature on

4 Textbooks and chapters: Durand (1978), Hodgson and King (1985); Berkouwer (1971); Brunner (1952); Berkhof (1976); Cumberlege (1955); Anderson (2009); McFarland (2009); Hampson (2007:479-482); Williams (1985:194-219); Veldsman (1998:49-79); König (1998:81-109); Maimela (1998:111-119); Keane (1998:121-135), Herholdt (1998:215-229) and Hick (2007).

sin.

a) Historical development

The Christian doctrine of sin, including the notion of the fall, gradually developed over time. St. Augustine's work was the first to significantly contribute to its development. Augustine had a pessimistic anthropological view of sin and supported the concept of original sin. He believed that humans are originally created good, and that sin is a defection from the natural order of creation, which takes the form of a self-imposed bondage of the human will. Pelagius on the other hand, maintained that the notion of original sin has no scriptural basis. In his opinion, sin is a purely deliberate, conscious choice to do evil. Although it is pervasive in nature it is not a universal condition. Augustine's response to this claim is that the bondage of sin implies a bias toward evil that dominates conscious and deliberate choices. Furthermore, he interprets the fall as an historical event, which corrupts both Adam and his offspring.

Regardless of minor differences, Thomas Aquinas (in the Catholic tradition), agreed with Augustine's literal historical interpretation of Genesis 2-3: Human beings are inherently sinful because of original sin transmitted by Adam and Eve. In Aquinas' view, sin is *formally* the privation of original righteousness and habitual grace, and *materially* concupiscence or unrestrained desire into which humanity is plunged, through the fall, from grace. The Protestant tradition, following Luther and Calvin, views sin as more than a mere defect. Building on the Augustinian idea of concupiscence, sin is eventually understood as a corruption of the entire human nature, expressed in the notion of "total depravity".

During the time of the Enlightenment, the doctrine of sin was attacked, given that it contradicts two fundamental modern convictions – essential human goodness and the supreme value of human freedom and autonomy. Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, acknowledges this contradiction and argues that if original sin is not regarded as an essential part of human nature and thus, not outside the sphere of human responsibility, how can it be an inherited corruption and inevitable? Although sin is universally present among humans, it is not natural in the sense of being necessary. Because of such contradictions in the doctrine, it became virtually superseded by the modern secular view that evil is embedded in institutional and social structures.

Regardless of the weighty criticism faced during the Enlightenment period, a number of Christian theologians continued to engage in discourse on the doctrine of sin. In the 20th

century, the Christian understanding of sin was shaped by the various theological schools that emerged, became dominant and often dissipated later. Evangelical Theology,⁵ in its radical view of sin, maintains that human nature fails not only through weakness, but also as a result of alienation from God. According to dialectical theology⁶ (associated with Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Reinhold Niebuhr), humanity is entirely incapable of responding to God in the correct way, as its fallen state is one of total depravity following a broken relationship with God. Existentialist theologies⁷ (associated especially with Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich) returned to a notion of sin prevalent in liberal theologies, namely a failure of authenticity in the individual person's way of living in God's presence. In secular theologies⁸ (associated with Harvey Cox and John Robinson) an emphasis on sin became underplayed, except in terms of the side-effects of urbanisation. John Hick (2007), for example, rejects the doctrine of the fall. He claims that the point of departure for sin is the ontological imperfection of creation, which finds expression in humanity's instability and ethical-religious immaturity. In various forms of (Western) postmodern theology⁹, as well as in the context of discourse on science and theology (associated especially with Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, Philip Hefner and others) the classic notion of the fall of humanity is called into question so that a discussion of (human suffering) is treated in terms of the theodicy problem and not in terms of a reflection on salvation from sin.

In the context of political theologies¹⁰ (associated especially with Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz) the focus shifted to the impact of structural violence, with specific reference to anti-Semitism, the conflict of powers during the so-called "Cold War", the failure of "development" and communist oppression. This emphasis on the impact of structural violence and systemic injustices was radicalised in the context of liberation

5 This very broad and diversified movement was developed in England and North America and later also Africa and includes representatives of a number of denominations. Evangelical Theology (in the German sense of "evangelisch") includes scholars standing in the Anglican, Scottish Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Holiness, Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions. For further reading, see König (1998) and Carl (1957).

6 Barth (1957), Brunner (1946; 1950; 1943, 1964) and Niebuhr (1996).

7 See Tillich (1951; 1957a; 1952) and Bultmann (1958).

8 See Cox (1966) and Robinson (1963).

9 See Peacocke (1981), Barbour (1997) and Hefner (2008).

10 See Metz (1969, 1981) and Moltmann (1967, 1988).

theologies (associated especially with Gustavo Gutiérrez and several others¹¹), black theology (associated especially with James Cone¹²), feminist theologies (associated with Sallie McFague and many others^{13 14}) and womanist theologies (see Beverly Harrison).¹⁵ Accordingly, structural violence was understood in terms of various forms of domination, such as the impact of industrial capitalism, the legacy of slavery and racism, patriarchy, sexism and a combination of these ideologies. This tendency is complemented through a variety of indigenous theologies (especially various forms of African theologies¹⁶), in which the lasting legacy of colonialism is highlighted and the need for a retrieval of indigenous wisdom emphasised. Towards the end of the 20th century, various forms of ecotheology emerged in different bioregions. As indicated in the following, this led to a new interest in the notion of sin, but also to rather diverse reinterpretations of the nature of sin.

b) Six themes addressed in current discourse

In the history of Christian reflection on sin, a number of crucial problems have typically been addressed. Durand (1978:9) identifies six main themes that are addressed in current discourse on the doctrine of sin, namely the origin of sin, the relationship between sin and demon possession, the relationship between sin and suffering, the notion of original sin, the knowledge of sin, and the nature of sin. Durand offers a survey of the available literature on each of these themes up to the end of the 1970s. For my purposes it would suffice to indicate the underlying theological problems that are addressed in each case.

¹¹ See Gutiérrez (1973; 1987; 1984).

¹² A particular theological response to the experiences of people of colour in North America and South Africa faced with racial discrimination and oppression. See for example Cone (1970).

¹³ This type of theology calls the church's attention not only to the issue of the oppression and exploitation of women, but also to other forms of injustice such as ageism, ableism and racism. See McFague (1975; 1982).

¹⁴ In an early article entitled *The Human Situation: A Feminist View* (1960), Valerie Saiving expresses her defiance of contemporary theology. She argues that terms such as pride, exertion of power, exploitation, self-assertiveness and the like do not indicate a universal predicament but rather illustrate the modern male's form of existence. Saiving believes that the temptations of women – who experience sin in a dissimilar manner to men – are better described by terms such as worthlessness, distractibility, faintness, lack of organising focus and reliance on others for their own self-definition.

¹⁵ See Harrison (2004).

¹⁶ See for example Mbiti (1977) and Mugambi (1990).

One classic debate is on the origins of sin. Where does sin come from? A possible answer could be that sin is the result of evil forces, perhaps symbolized by the figure of the devil. One may also argue, however, that human sin is the origin of evil. This requires further reflection on the dialectic between sin and evil. One aspect of this debate is the use of the term “original sin”, although this term is perhaps best used to indicate the seriousness of sin and not the mythical origins of sin. Durand (1978:77-78) maintains that the search for the origin of sin is futile – seeking to make sense out of the senseless. At the same time, it can also be a dangerous task from the point of view that it may negate human guilt altogether. Therefore, the origin cannot be explained; sin can only be confessed as guilt.

Durand (1978:90-94) argues that although the Scriptures do not deny a relationship between sin and demonic possession, temptation by evil forces outside of humanity does not provide a demonic justification for human sin. Sin is not an unavoidable, overpowering misfortune; rather, through his own sin “man” *chooses* the devil as his father. As such, the sinful human is “from the devil”, making sin an inevitable part of his nature, unless he is born of God. Furthermore, the biblical message does not reveal an original dualism between God and the forces of evil. The devil’s realm of darkness only becomes known through the light of the gospel of Christ. Evil forces have no autonomy against God, but are subject to His authority.

The above acknowledgment also highlights the theodicy¹⁷ problem and underlying questions on the relationship between sin and suffering. Suffering is not a natural or fatal occurrence, but an alien intruder in God’s creation because it is linked to the alien character of sin. Although various forms of suffering can sometimes be clearly connected to specific human guilt, the Scriptures only disclose a *general* relation between sin and suffering. The theodicy question is therefore unfathomable, given that the deepest form of the mystery of sin is the mystery of suffering (Durand 1978:109-113).

Concerning its universal character, Durand (1978:126-131) holds that sin is not carried over from generation to generation. Yet, there is indeed a historical continuity that manifests throughout all generations on account of the destructive nature of sin from the very beginning. The notion of original sin implies that sin is a historical power that reigns *via* human addiction to sin. As a result, original sin can never be an alibi for humanity’s guilt.

¹⁷ An argument in defence of God’s goodness despite the existence of evil. Attempts to address the theodicy question mainly diverge in two directions: God is the originator of suffering, or He Himself is subject to suffering. Both these points are irreconcilable with the Scriptures, however (Durand 1978:107).

The correlation between sin as historical power and the addiction of human nature is obscure and inexplicable – just as sin is strange and mysterious to God’s creation.

On the knowledge of sin, Durand notes that two essential aspects have to be recognised: the *Law* as measure, and the *Gospel* as the way along which humans encounter the true nature of their sin. The Law is not eliminated, but the Gospel, which leads to confession and forgiveness has everything to do with it – sin in its most profound form only becomes known and understood through faith in the Lawgiver. The Law, which fuels sin, has an unveiling function in the knowledge of sin. Yet, through the redemptive power of Christ alone is the deepest reality of human guilt revealed – the only knowledge of sin that leads to faith and conversion (Durand 1978:138-143).

Durand (1978:156-157) claims that while the deepest nature of sin cannot be localized, there is one culmination point in which all types of sins are bound up. In his opinion, Genesis 3 is not only an expression of pride, but also of deception, the lie, disobedience, transgression and desire. The serpent awakes in human beings unbelief in God (“You will not surely die... For God knows...” – Genesis 3:4, NIV), that breaks the relationship of trust between the latter two. The lie, unrighteousness and fleshly desire ultimately leads to the rejection of Christ, therefore all human sin culminates at the point of *unbelief*.

Underlying each of these problems there is still a need to reflect on the very nature of sin. What is sin? As the history of Christian theology suggests, sin can be defined in many different ways. It is contested, however, whether it is even possible to define it. That may presume that one can locate, isolate and eradicate sin. Many classic theologians have maintained that sin cannot be defined or explained – given that to explain it may well amount to an excuse or apology of sin. Instead, one may insist that sin is utterly meaningless. This project heeds this warning, but the next section nevertheless explores the always inadequate attempts to understand and re-describe the very nature of sin in more depth.

1.2.3 The nature of sin

Sin has many faces and cannot be reduced to any one thing. This is noticeable in the diverse terminology applied to the nature of sin in Christian theology.¹⁸ Three specific attitudes

¹⁸ Conradie (2005a:12) cites a diversity of terms to express the Christian notion of sin, including “shame, pride, presumption, selfishness, greed or covetousness, concupiscence, (sexual?) desire (lust), unfaithfulness and faithlessness, petulant disobedience, idolatry, as active rebellion against God and as passive resignation in the face of evil (*acedia*), as opposition to God’s grace’ as the negation of the good (*privation boni*), as

identified as grounds for human sin significantly influenced the Christian doctrine, however; the concepts of sin as pride (*superbia*) and greed (*concupiscentia*), which initially contoured the Christian tradition, and moral failure (*hamartia*), which followed afterwards. These expressions constitute the classical view of sin. While some scholars argue that sin may also manifest itself in various forms, i.e. as a “hydra”, others believe that sin has no ontological status and can only be described as a deprivation of the good (*privatio boni*). Sin, however, in whatever form it may be, is the groundwork for broken relationships. The nature of sin will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

1.2.4 Sin and Ecology

In recent debates all these ways of thinking on the nature of sin are being reinterpreted in the context of Christian ecotheology, whereby sin is re-described in various innovative ways. For the purpose of this study, “ecological sins” are expressed as anthropocentrism, domination in the name of differences of species, consumerist greed, and the alienation of humans from the earth community¹⁹. A comprehensive survey and classification of available literature on these categories is offered in Chapter 3.

1.3 Demarcation and statement of research problem

The current discourse on hamartology and ecology can obviously be enriched by contributions from the history of Christian theology. In this study I explore the position of the famous German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, on the nature of sin. My assumption is that such a retrieval of insights from widely recognised theologians may assist contemporary attempts to address new environmental challenges.

1.3.1 Bonhoeffer’s life: A brief description

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, born on 4 April 1906 in Breslau, Germany, was an influential teacher, theologian, ethicist and pastor. He is renowned for his instrumental role in the battle against Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime and anti-Semitism. Bonhoeffer’s participation in the German resistance movement and his involvement in the assassination attempt on Hitler subsequently

“falling short” of God’s desires for us (*hamartia*), and of our own potential (?!), as “self-centred turning in upon oneself” (*incurvatus in se*), as using God as a means to secure enjoyment and money (and thereby inverting the relationship between transitory means and final ends), and as enmity or alienation from a relationship with God”.

¹⁹ While these terms are dealt with separately, in many instances they overlap.

led to his arrest on 5 April 1943. After being charged with high treason, Bonhoeffer was hanged on 9 April 1945 at the Flossenbürg concentration camp, just days before the Nazi's surrender. Although there is some degree of objection, Bonhoeffer is considered by many to be a martyr.

The context and events of Bonhoeffer's life immensely influenced the formation of his theology. Accordingly, his literary works echoes a multitude of ideas and themes unique to his class.

1.3.2 Bonhoeffer's literacy works

Bonhoeffer's theological works have now been collected in a scholarly edition comprising sixteen volumes published in German as the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke (published by Chr. Kaiser Verlag) and translated into English as the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (published by Fortress Press).²⁰

This thesis focuses on Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin. His books *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall* and *Ethics* therefore serve as primary sources for this study.

1.3.3 Bonhoeffer's legacy

Commemorated as theologian, pastor, spiritual writer and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a source of inspiration in both religious and non-religious circles. Although his work is often subject to misinterpretation and distortion, he nevertheless became so influential over the years that he is currently one of the most renowned modern theologians.

The International Bonhoeffer Society (IBS) aims to preserve the memory and to enhance the knowledge of this dynamic scholar and his legacy. It operates primarily through conferences and meetings held both domestically and internationally, where various academic papers on Bonhoeffer's work are presented, ensuring an ever-increasing expansion of his theology.

Bonhoeffer's work is not only instrumental among scholars, but moreover, in the midst of Christian witnesses within the political sphere. His theology encompasses valuable resources, which aids the struggle for liberation and justice and had a profound influence on leading figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. and former Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Bonhoeffer's work is also regarded an essential point of reference for gaining an

²⁰ Bonhoeffer's publications have gone through numerous editions. In this thesis I will work only with the scholarly edition.

understanding of the notion of sin. A number of scholars has written and published secondary material on Bonhoeffer's view of sin.²¹ In addition, Bonhoeffer's writings are also considered an indispensable source in the field of ecotheology.²²

1.3.4 Statement of research problem

This project investigates the contribution made by Dietrich Bonhoeffer to a Christian understanding of the nature of sin. The question that is addressed here is how the significance of Bonhoeffer's position in this regard may be assessed in the light of contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology. On this basis, the research problem investigated in this study may be formulated in the following way:

What are the similarities and differences between Dietrich Bonhoeffer's understanding of the nature of sin and current discourse on the nature of sin in available literature on ecology and hamartology?

The research problem as stated above assumes the validity of my overview of the literature on hamartology and ecology that was developed below. My argument is that contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology can be captured in terms of the rubrics of sin as pride (read anthropocentrism), domination in the name of differences of species, greed (read consumerist greed) and the privation of the good (read alienation). In this study, such discourse will be placed in juxtaposition with Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin. This invites a mutually critical correlation as indicated previously in terms of identifying and discussing the similarities and difference that may emerge through such juxtaposition. Various questions are elicited, for example whether Bonhoeffer's understanding of the nature of sin is perhaps falling in the very traps that are widely recognised and criticised in contemporary ecotheology? Alternatively, may a retrieval of Bonhoeffer's position perhaps yield insights that tend to be forgotten in contemporary discourse? Or are such discourses so divergent that mutually critical correlation is hardly feasible? Can one indeed construct something of an overlapping consensus despite very different contexts? Or do emerging ecological insights perhaps provide fresh lenses through which Bonhoeffer's writings may be read, leading to new perspectives for secondary scholarship on Bonhoeffer's legacy? Although these observations are preliminary, Chapter 6 offers a more definite response to the research question.

²¹ See for example, Robinson (2005); Gregersen (2007); Tietz (2007); Dabrock (2007) and Mathews (2000).

²² See Chapter 4, 4.4.1, and Chapter 6.

1.3.5 Limitations of the study

This research project focuses on relevant literature from the last century on hamartology and ecology published in English and Afrikaans (given my language abilities), including books, journal articles, essays in edited volumes and postgraduate theses. As a result of the vast amount of available writings on sin, an exhaustive study in this regard is beyond the scope of this research project, as only a limited selection of texts can be contained within. This study only focuses on hamartology and ecology in Christian theology, and not on theological reflections in the context of other religious traditions, for example Judaism, Islam or the Baha'i faith.

1.4 Research procedure

This thesis is a literature-based study on the basis of a survey of available literature on hamartology and ecology. The first step required to investigate the research problem is to gain an in depth understanding of the different ways in which the nature of sin has been understood in the Christian tradition. A full description is almost encyclopaedic in scope. Instead, I used some of the main reference works in this regard in order to offer a brief survey of this history. Sources that were employed in this regard include Tillich (1957b), Niebuhr (1996), Barth (1960), Hick (2007), Pannenberg (1994), Heyns (1978), Peters (1994), and Durand (1978). The results of this brief survey are documented in Chapter 2.

Secondly, the research problem necessitates reflection on narratives on the notion of sin in the light of the contemporary ecological crisis. An in-depth survey of relevant literature on hamartology and ecology, including works of contributors such as Birch and Rasmussen (1978), Nash (1991), McDaniel (1995), Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003) and Conradie (2006), thereby constitutes Chapter 3 of the thesis.

A brief description of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life, work and legacy, drawing from contributions of, among others, Bethge (1995) and Nelson (1999) is documented in Chapter 4.

Bonhoeffer's *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall* and *Ethics* were utilized in order to offer a detailed critical analysis of Bonhoeffer's view on the nature of sin. This is documented in Chapter 5 of the thesis.

The manner in which the nature of sin is understood in ecotheology, i.e. anthropocentrism, domination in the name of differences of species, consumerist greed and alienation of humans from the earth community, is juxtaposed with Bonhoeffer's understanding of the nature of

sin. Chapter 6 thus contains the ultimate results yielded by this thesis. The thesis is brought to a close by means of a few concluding remarks.

1.5. Significance of the study

This research project is situated in the context of the *Christian Faith and the Earth* project. This is a collaborative project involving more than 100 scholars from around the world. Its aim is to assess the state of the debate regarding the reinterpretation of the core symbols of the Christian Faith in the context of Christian ecotheology and to offer a sense of direction for the way forward. This project was initiated in January 2007 upon the initiative of Prof Ernst Conradie, who is also the supervisor of this project. The project culminated in a recent conference held from 6 to 10 August at the Sustainability Institute near Lynedoch. At a planning session during the conference, a number of themes were identified that requires further collaborative work, including reflection on the relationship between sin and the suffering of God's creatures. It is likely that this will lead to further collaborative work, consultations and conference in years to come. My research project therefore builds on the insights that emerged from the larger project and will contribute to the plans for the future.

More specifically, the significance of this project has to be understood in terms of other considerations. While there is some conviction that the doctrine of sin is indispensable in analysing the root causes of contemporary environmental evils,²³ it is to a large extent neglected in ecotheological discourse.²⁴ Also, though there have been some contributions on

23 McGrath (2002:79-80, 83) believes that environmental degradation needs to be explored in the light of human sinfulness. In support of this argument, he refers to Leviticus 26:16 and Hosea 4:3. He argues that the Christian understanding of sin inevitably impacts human environmental attitudes. Conradie (2006:52) also advocates the idea that the human roots of ecological destruction suggests a diagnosis of the human state which is quite similar to the doctrine of sin. If, in classic Christian terms, sin is identified the root of evil, then societal evil, in this case environmental degradation, must be the collective result of human sin.

24 Theologians have identified various reasons for this. Becker (1992:155-156), for example, asserts that in a society which seeks to maximize individual freedom and rights, it is very difficult to promote the doctrine of (original) sin. Conradie (2005a:4) shares a similar view. He holds that modernity would rather believe in humanity's essential goodness and dignity instead of relishing the unpleasant images ("stern Calvinism, disciplinarians and punishment, patriarchy and cultural pessimism") evoked by the doctrine of sin. On the other hand, Berry's stance is that Christian theologians are guilty of overemphasizing the process of human redemption from sin (thus Christ the Redeemer), thereby understating God as Creator and His presence and concern with creation. They attempt to resolve this preoccupation with redemption by shifting Christian theology toward a new focus on the whole of creation as an expression and revelation of God (1988:126).

hamartology and ecology, I offer a detailed survey and classification of the available literature to the advantage of further discourse. Furthermore, this research project carries significance for dialogue on Bonhoeffer's legacy. While there are some secondary existing writings on Bonhoeffer's notion of sin, there is nothing yet that relates that to hamartology and ecology. My study is thus a contribution to filling this gap in available literature.



Chapter 2

The nature of sin

2.1 Introduction

In the hope that Christian theology could address the ecological crisis at hand, a careful understanding of the doctrine of sin, with specific reference to the nature of sin, would have to be acquired to examine the essence of this problem. In the Christian tradition the nature of sin is defined in countless ways. In classic terms it is described as pride (*superbia*), greed (*concupiscentia*) or moral failure (*hamartia*). Others argue that sin may also manifest itself in various forms, whereas others believe that sin has no ontological status and can only be described as deprivation of the good (*privatio boni*).²⁵

A comprehensive study of Christian narratives on the nature of sin is beyond the scope of this project. This chapter therefore serves to offer a concise survey of viewpoints in this regard. In order to execute this task, the chapter is structured as follows: Sin is described in classic terms, i.e. as pride, greed and moral failure. Each of these categories comprises a section on historical developments in Christian theology, as well as a section on the views of modern scholars who significantly researched the relevant subject. This is followed by a discussion of sin as a “hydra”, and a discussion of sin as deprivation of the good, respectively. The chapter is brought to a close with a few concluding observations.

2.2 Classic understanding of the nature of sin

2.2.1 Sin as pride (*superbia*)

God is the Source of life, the centre of everything. Pride is the human being’s desire to be like God and the rejection of His divine superiority as the Creator of all things, thereby becoming his or her own centre. Based on a system of hierarchy, the self is valued highly, above others. Human beings are innately inferior to their Creator and limited in their capacity for knowledge and success. To overcome this constriction, they rebel against God in attempting to be like Him – in control and the source of life – an idea encountered as early as the biblical creation story (see Genesis 3:5). The sin of pride extends to include other similar flaws such

²⁵ For additional reading on the nature of sin, see Augustine (1947); König (1991); Brunner (1939); Hick (2007); Shuster (2004); Gunton (2002); Van Ruler (1989); McGrath (2001) and Sakuba (2004).

as arrogance, rebellion and egoism. Despite the fact that pride may also be deemed a virtuous quality, it is only “good” to the extent that it supports a sense of self and community and “bad” or “deadly” insofar as it relies on subtle or overt alienation (LaMothe 2005:239).

a) Developments in the Christian tradition

The biblical witnesses are quite consistent in maintaining that the sin of pride is the most basic form of sin. The apostle Paul’s account of human self-glorification – changing the glory of the incorruptible God into a figure made like unto corruptible human²⁶ – in actual fact represents an excellent summary of the entire biblical doctrine of sin (Niebuhr 1996:186).

The notion of sin as pride was significantly developed by St. Augustine. Identifying the very core of sin, he poses the question: “What could begin this evil will but pride, which is the beginning of all sin?” Augustine goes further to define pride as a “perverse desire of height” as a result of the soul forsaking God – the very one to whom it is solely supposed to cling – and making the self the source of life. In addition to abandoning God to whom it ought to cling as its end, the soul unduly exalts itself and thereby becomes an end in itself (Niebuhr 1996:186-187). In the view of Augustine, pride is therefore the core of perverted desire – the perverted will which replaces God with the self and makes the latter the centre and principle of everything. This pride or love of self, which attempts to set the self in the place of God or wanting to be as God, ultimately implies hatred of God, and thus inevitably fails in this attempt (Pannenberg 1994:243). Augustine believes that pride causes the self to be absolutised at God’s expense (in Hodgson and King 1985:199).

Having laid the foundation for ascribing the deepest nature of sin to pride, the ideas of Paul and Augustine extensively influenced the thinking of their successors, for instance Thomas Aquinas. In the view of Aquinas, “disordered desire” stems from a more basic sin – the fact that someone loves the self inordinately – what he refers to as self-love. Although he maintains that greed is the essence of all sin, he argues that the purpose of acquiring material riches “is the attainment of distinction and importance” (Aquinas 1991:268). From this

²⁶ “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served and created things rather than the Creator ...” (Romans 1:21-25).

viewpoint, pride (self-importance) is the point of departure for all sin. In Blaise Pascal's definition of pride, the "I" is perceived to be hateful. For him, this "I" has two fundamental characteristics: "It is essentially unjust in that it makes the self the centre of everything and it troublesome to others in that it seeks to make them subservient". In both cases, Pascal argues, "I" is the "enemy and would be the tyrant of all others" (quoted in Niebuhr 1996:187).

The Augustinian idea of pride was significantly expanded by the Protestant Reformers. Martin Luther applies the terms "pride" and "self-love" synonymously. In his opinion, the turning of the soul to the creature, and away from God, is an expression of the general lust of the soul. Furthermore, Luther regards self-righteousness – the unwillingness of a sinner to admit their sins – as the ultimate form of pride (Niebuhr 1996:187, 200). John Calvin, who affirms the Pauline definition of sin in Romans 1, holds that those who are prideful arrogate themselves more than is right and as a result, wilfully darken and infatuate themselves with pride, vanity and perverseness. Calvin believes that pride is a folly rooted not only in vain curiosity, but also in the excessive drive to surpass the limits of human knowledge (Niebuhr 1996:187).

The notion of sin as pride constitutes a significant element of modern hamartologies. Emil Brunner (1952: 92-93), for instance, maintains that the root of all sin is rebellion and pride. Wanting to be as God, the person attempts to become on par with his Creator and thereby become independent of Him. This desire for autonomy and enmity against God is an act of spiritual defiance – "the denial of God and self-deification; it is getting rid of the Lord, and the proclamation of self-sovereignty". According to Wolfhart Pannenberg (1994:248), sin is the product of one of two possibilities. On the one hand, it may be because of our desperate striving for self-fulfilment based on our finiteness, rather than accepting our finite lives as a God-given blessing. On the other hand, sin may be the consequence of our pursuit to surpass our finiteness in our attempts to become like God, instead of acknowledging our finite creaturely nature. Larry L. Rasmussen (1996:275), making reference to the views of Reinhold Niebuhr, describes pride as follows: "To sin is to overstep and overshoot finitude, deny its potentialities and its limits and reject creatureliness."

At this point we now turn to a somewhat more comprehensive discussion on the sin of pride, explicated in the hamartologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth.

b) Reinhold Niebuhr: "Three forms of pride"

Reinhold Niebuhr (1996:186-188) notes that Christian theology has been fairly consistent in

maintaining the Augustinian definition of pride. In his own exposition, which draws from political, sociological and psychological knowledge, Niebuhr argues that the sin of pride has many faces, yet it manifests most clearly in three specific forms, that is the pride of power, the pride of knowledge and the pride of virtue. The latter – the pride of self-righteousness – however, gives birth to a fourth type, namely spiritual pride. Although not a form of pride in itself, it may well be described as pride in its deepest and all-encompassing form.

Niebuhr (1996:188-190) believes that anxiety is the precondition of sin, which then springs from the self's attempts to secure and enhance its safety and well-being. The pride of power finds expression in two (provisionally) distinct forms. The one type of pride hinges on the possession of human freedom and self-mastery. Hereby the ego assumes itself to be self-sufficient and its own master, and believes itself to be secure against all vicissitudes. Failing to recognise the finite and dependent character of its life, it deems itself the author of its own existence, the judge of its own values, as well as the master of its own destiny. This particular form of the pride of power is mostly characteristic of individuals and groups who possess or seems to possess an extraordinary degree of social power and security.²⁷

Closely related to the first kind of pride of power is the lust for power with pride as its end. The ego is prompted by a threatening sense of insecurity to grasp for more power to make itself feel secure. It regards itself insignificant and not respected or feared, and consequently, pursues the enhancement of its own position, even at the expense of other life. This type of pride is particularly attributed to the less secure or the advancing individuals or groups in society in terms of social recognition, economic stability and even physical health. What arises is the temptation to defeat or conceal insecurity by arrogating a larger degree of power to the self. Every so often this lust for power is expressed in humanity's conquest of nature, whereby their legitimate freedom and dominion over nature is tainted into the mere exploitation of it. A person's dependence upon, and their gratitude for nature is destroyed by

²⁷ In Biblical prophecies of doom, this proud pretension of security is declared to be false, and those assuming it are warned against an impending doom. The prophet, Isaiah, warns Israel's rulers who are designated "the crown of pride" that their "glorious beauty is a fading flower", and in the day of judgement The Lord will destroy their power (Isaiah 28:1-5). In Isaiah 47, which describes the pride of Babylon, this impending doom is defined as an exposure of Babylon's weakness and insecurity. Ezekiel, on the other hand, frequently accuses the nations of the world of foolishly overestimating their security, self-mastery and independence. In Ezekiel 30, for example, Egypt is accused of supposing itself to be the creator of the Nile River. In all these prophecies and throughout history, God is revealed as the one and only source and end of life, and those who overestimate their own power are thereby disillusioned (Niebuhr 1996:189-190).

the self's arrogant sense of independence and greedy attempts to overcome its insecurity by gathering from nature's resources beyond natural limits. Greed is thus a form of the will-to-power. Because this insecurity flows from the vicissitudes of not only society and history, but also of nature, the ego seeks to overcome social, as well as natural insecurity and thereby expresses the impulse of "power over men", as well as "power over matter". The will-to-power is responsible for accentuating the very insecurity that it seeks to eliminate, as the threat of a competing human will is overcome by inferiorating that will to the ego and by utilizing the power of many subordinated wills to protect itself against the enmity created by such inferioration. In simple terms, the will to power implicates the ego in injustice, as it seeks security beyond the limits of its human finiteness. Furthermore, it is a direct form and indirect instrument of pride regarded as sin in its quintessential form (Niebuhr 1996:190-192).

This distinction between the two categories of the pride of power can only be regarded as strictly provisional, as it is clear that the proudest and most secure person is compelled to proclaim themselves beyond limits in part by a sense of insecurity, partly as a result of the fact that the greater their glory and power, the greater the incompatible fate of death becomes visible. In addition, what also escalates is the fear of losing their prominence, forfeiting their treasure, or being discovered in their pretention. The will-to-power in itself is therefore a manifestation of insecurity, even when it has achieved what an ordinary person would consider complete security. The more immediate insecurities are eliminated, the more apparent a person's finiteness, dependence and weakness becomes to them. "Thus man seeks to make himself God because he is betrayed by both his greatness and his weakness; and there is no level of greatness and power in which the lash of fear is not at least one strand in the whip of ambition" (Niebuhr 1996:192-194).

With reference to intellectual pride, Niebuhr (1996:194-195) states this is a more spiritual sublimation of the pride of power. It is embedded in the unwillingness to recognise that all human knowledge is blemished with an "ideological" taint, that it is finite knowledge, acquired from a particular viewpoint, that it is not final and neither infallible. Similar to the pride of power, intellectual pride stems, on the one hand, from the ignorance of the finiteness of the human mind, and on the other hand, from attempts to obscure the known conditioned character, and the taint of self-interest in human knowledge. It thus fails to acknowledge that it is involved in a temporal process and instead regards itself in complete transcendence over history. Niebuhr (1996:195-198) further holds that the pride of knowledge is more than the

mere “ignorance of ignorance” because it always involves a conscious or subconscious effort to disguise a known or partly known taint of interest – that the truth is not final and that the ego is boosted with this truth. Particularly significant of this type of pride is the inability of the adherent to recognise the limitations of perspective in him/herself that they detect in others. This is an expression of the desperation of the adherent to veil the finiteness and determinacy of their position. The temptation of both human freedom, as well as human insecurity is thus apparent in this situation. Intellectual pride finds full expression in cases where the universalistic note in human knowledge becomes the groundwork for dominating others who does not conform to it, for example in the discrimination of majority racial groups against minority racial groups.

All constituents of intellectual pride are involved in moral pride, which is revealed in a person’s own self-righteous moral standards are final and absolute, condemning others for failing to live up to these standards. The self judges itself and others by its own standards – which are regarded God’s standards – and consequently finds itself good and others evil in the event of their standards failing to conform to its own. Moral pride hence makes virtue as such the very vehicle of sin. The self-righteous person neither knows God as Judge nor needs God as Saviour. The sin of self-righteousness is therefore responsible for many of a person’s cruelties, injustices and transgressions against other life (Niebuhr 1996:199-200).

When moral pride has been conceived, it gives birth to spiritual pride, Niebuhr (1996:200-203) argues. Religious sin, which is the ultimate sin, makes the self-deification implied in moral pride explicit by relating human partial standards and achievements to the unconditioned good, thereby claiming divine sanction. Religion is not perceived as religion in the usual sense – that is the virtuous human quest for God – but becomes the ultimate theatre of war between a person’s self-esteem and God. As such, even the most devout practices may possibly become instruments of human pride. For this reason, the worst form of class domination, intolerance and self-assertion is found on a religious level, whereby a dominant priestly class subjects subordinate classes to social disabilities, and finally exclude them from sharing in any universe of meaning. Christianity is a religion of revelation which reveals a holy and loving God as the source and end of existence against whom a person’s self-will is shattered and their pride abased. However, when the Christian, by means of possessing this revelation, regards him/herself more righteous and penitent than others, they just add to the sin of self-righteousness and thereby make religion the tool of their pride.

c) Karl Barth: “Human pride in the light of the humility of the Son of God”

The hamartology of Karl Barth – in which the sin of pride takes central place – is revealed through his Christology. Barth (1961:413-415) maintains that only through the obedience of Jesus Christ, the son of God, can we truly have knowledge of sin. In his view, “the sin of man is the pride of man ... [Therefore,] [s]in in its unity and totality is always pride ... The sin of man is the human action which does not correspond to the divine action in Jesus Christ but contradicts it.” Barth (1961:414-418) believes that pride concretely takes on the form of disobedience and more precisely, unbelief – unbelief in the sense of rejecting God’s grace, giving rise to disobedience which rests on our self-alienation from God’s majesty. The being and activity of Christ reveals four distinct aspects: God became flesh, sacrificing Himself in His divine Lordship, being the divine Judge, yet bearing the judgement of our sin and in everything remaining our Helper and Redeemer. It is through these four standpoints that one discovers the human disorder, which is the complete opposite of divine grace. Thus, in each instance one is able to see how human pride, which is always concealed, contrasts and opposes God’s humility.

The first standpoint that Barth (1961:418-432) emphasises, is that through Christ the Word became flesh. Having to face the same challenges, temptations and ultimately death, God became human. He is the one and only true God who is by nature free and able to become flesh. In fact, this was the execution of His divine will – becoming human for the sake of humanity. It is precisely through this act of God’s humility that our pride is exposed. The proud person, being a creature of God, wants to be God. Though we lack the freedom and power, we attempt to exalt ourselves as God, wanting to exceed our creaturely limits. This is a self-contradiction which results in destruction – while it may be natural for God to become human, for humans to become God could only have devastating effects. Our pride is concealed, however; the fact that we strive to be our own source of living and being does not appear to be an act of pride. Yet, although the concealment of pride is powerful, it cannot hide the three things which take place with the concealment: First and foremost is our erroneous self-alienation in which we believe that we can truly be human by exalting ourselves. Even if this occurs in the most pure, noblest, or even pious and philanthropic forms, we humans inevitably fail in this task and thereby become supremely non-human. Secondly, we cling to the absurd desire that we are our own source and standard. The aseity that we ascribe to ourselves can naturally only belong to God, and thereby we rob God of what essentially belongs to Him. Finally, what takes place with the concealment is the fact

we, in positioning ourselves as absolute, honour and worship a false god – the self. In choosing that which is not, we ignore God's grace, renounce our responsibility to Him and thereby portray God as the devil.

Barth (1961:432-445) maintains that the second aspect of Christ's being and activity in which the sin of the unreconciled, alienated and prideful person is revealed is through the Christological fact that the Lord humbly and obediently – in his royal omnipotence – became a servant for the sake of humanity. Yet, in our pride we want to become lord. When we humans are at peace with God, He gives us the power to rule with Him. However, in our pride we forfeit this power by alienating ourselves from God – relying on ourselves. We seek to master and control the world, our fellow humans, our own destiny in vain, and even want to play a superior role in our relationship with God. Yet, the more we seek to control, the more we ourselves are controlled. In folly we despise being servants. Once again one should note that the concealment, which hides evil under the name of good, is powerful: Our legitimate use of power, knowledge, judgement and capacity that ensures our superiority may well appear to be the will of God. In reality, however, we find ourselves in a state of self-alienation and self-destruction: In our folly we regard what is infinitely less as infinitely more; believing that we cover ourselves with glory we cover ourselves with shame; wanting to exalt ourselves we actually fall; in revolting being servants we become slaves. These are clear acts of rebellion, disorder and chaos. Our every standard is false; all our thoughts and words are self-contradictions; our every act and attitude are perverted. Finally, in His majesty we turn the Lord Himself into becoming a creature, a human being, a servant.

God is the divine Judge, yet He executed the judgement in such a manner that he took to Himself the accusation rightfully laid against humanity, causing Himself to be judged in the process. This is the third aspect of the being and activity of Christ through which our human pride is revealed, Barth (1961:445-458) argues. The prideful person is the exact opposite of this – seeking to be their own judge. God, being the one true Judge, accuses, sentences, judges and accordingly, is also the One who freely gives Himself to be crucified. For us humans to play the judge – judging ourselves and others, distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong – is thus a futile case. Pridefully and self-righteously moving against God, defending and maintaining our own right, we put ourselves in the wrong. One may notice once again how our human pride is concealed by what appears to be good. It may seem praiseworthy that we are able to judge and distinguish between good and evil in our everyday tasks. Yet, under this concealment hides the very essence of our pride: In the first instance, in

our desire for knowledge and the fact that we want to be judge, we totally misunderstand and over-estimate ourselves. Rejecting the idea of God as the absolute Judge, we renounce our obedience to God's will and in the process lose our freedom. Furthermore, in our pride we desire that which is objectively evil. Thinking that we are doing good – wanting to be judge – we want to stand alongside God, protecting the world of chaos and disorder, yet not aware that we ourselves are unleashing chaos and disorder in the process. When we falsely believe that we humans can take God's Word and explain and apply it ourselves, it can only bring wrath. Finally, this concealment is rooted in the fact that we, as proud humans, have a seriously erroneous understanding of God: Doubting His honour on which our very existence depends; thinking that His role as Judge can be seized; and doing evil instead of good by thinking that God is in need of our human assistance and counsel to execute His role as Judge.

According to Barth (1961:458-478), the last aspect of Christ's being and activity that exposes humanity's pride is the fact that He, being the Son of God – God Himself – cried out for His Father's help on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"²⁸ This cry most clearly shows how Jesus, out of the depths of complete helplessness, needed and would not let go of God's help. Out of humility for humanity, God, the great Helper and Redeemer, received Jesus into His hands. In contrast to this is the person who wants to be their own helper, and yet in this self-help thinks that they have a claim to God's help. In our pride we do not want to be helpless, because we believe that we know how to save ourselves. Although God gives us certain means and capacities as human beings, these are limited by our creaturely nature. Moving away from God into complete emptiness, we are deceived by the beautiful, noble and useful things through which we believe we will be able to help and save ourselves. Never being content, we long and grasp for things which in reality cannot help us, neither ensure our salvation. We believe that the idea of "progress" implies an extension of our knowledge, improvement of techniques, deepening our understanding and dissemination of instruction, or acquiring more goods – all these being futile. In the process, we still cling to God, or rather to some kind of "higher being", or "religion", which we believe will encourage, support and strengthen us in our quest to become our own helper, redeemer and saviour. Once more, the concealment of evil under good is clear, for is there anything evil in the fact that we take on an "if-I-don't-do-it-myself-then-who-will"-attitude? The concealment is sinful in itself, however, evident in three points that require consideration. First of all, we

²⁸ Mark 15:34.

misunderstand ourselves, thinking that we have the right and necessity to self-affirmation and an autonomous responsibility to God and others in fulfilment of our human task. We do not recognise that we are in need of God's grace, thereby losing our soul and our life by undertaking our own cause and saving ourselves. Furthermore, in committing to being our own helper, we place ourselves once again in the wrong and thereby bring ill and destruction to ourselves. The very things we flee from become our reality; our flight from helplessness before God brings us absolute helplessness, destruction and humiliation. Wanting to be our own best friend we become our own worst enemy. Without grace, we are left without help. All of this rests on the fact that in our pride we have a seriously flawed view of God. Deists see God as a supreme being, remote from the world, incapable of understanding and helping humans in their human needs. Idealists, on the other hand, perceive God as a divine power of life at work in all things, which needs to be feared because His over-ruling has no respect for human freedom and dignity. In either case, what is left for us but to resort to ourselves and be our own helper?

Barth's view on sin as pride could therefore be summarised as follows: Christ is the only mirror in which one could perceive and gain a true knowledge of human sin. He is the humble, reconciling God who enables us to distinguish in ourselves the sin of pride. As prideful humans – in contrast to Christ's humble character – we attempt to be God, instead of human; lord, instead of servant; our own judge; and our own helper and redeemer. Without knowledge of God's grace our sin as pride is always concealed.

2.2.2 Sin as greed (*concupiscentia*)

Greed may be defined as a state of continual discontent, particularly with regard to material wealth. This dissatisfaction is motivated by an undue longing for acquiring and possessing in excess. In addition, human greed is a fearful response to life; fear of scarcity, or fear of insufficiency, fear of losing out, or fear of being deprived of something (Copenhaver 2011:25). Greed also encompasses other related sins such as lust, selfishness and covetousness.

a) Developments in the Christian tradition

Although Christian theology is fairly consistent in regarding pride (self-love) as the most basic form of sin, it is primarily the Hellenistic and the rationalistic sides of the Christian tradition that are inclined to define sensuality (the love of pleasure/lust) as the primal sin and

tend to identify sexual license as the specific symbol representing this sin.²⁹ For the great Hellenistic theologian, Origen, original sin is defined as an inclination “to ignominy and wantonness”. As such, he considers all sexual activity as innately wrong and as the groundwork for all other sins. In the view of Clement of Alexandria, original sin is a fall “under the power of pleasure, for by the serpent pleasure creeping on its belly is in a figure signified”. Gregory of Nyssa goes one step further by not only defining the basic sin as the love of pleasure, but also deriving it from “our being made like unto irrational creation”, although admitting that something is added to animal passion in human life, for the love of pleasure “was increased by the transgression of man becoming the parent of so many varieties of sins arising from pleasure as we can not find in animals” (quoted in Niebuhr 1996:228-230).

The Pauline understanding of sin as greed to a large extent oriented the Christian doctrine of sin. Paul’s claim that the summing up of the Law in the one divine instruction, “Do not covet” in Romans 7:7 confirms the perverted nature of sin, being evil desire. Although it appears that hidden sin only becomes blatant sin in the desires that are contrary to the Law,³⁰ for Paul, desire (covetousness) itself is a manifest form of sin (Pannenberg 1994:239-240). Paul also sees covetousness as a disordered love for material wealth: “People who want to get rich fall into temptation ... and into many foolish and harmful desires ...”³¹ (Aquinas 1991:268). In addition, in Romans 1:21-31³², Paul describes lust – more specifically unnatural lust – as a consequence and punishment for the more basic sin of pride (Niebuhr 1996:230).

Augustine, in line with Pauline thinking, also maintains that the various forms of sensual desire are “not only sins in themselves but punishment for sins” (quoted in Niebuhr 1996:230-231), reaching its highest point in sexual desire (Durand 1978:145). In his analysis

²⁹ Brunner (1952:105) believes that the close association of concupiscence with sexual desire is a distortion of the idea of sin, as sin is essentially understood as the life of the senses, which is a radical departure from the Biblical view of sin as defiance and arrogance (pride).

³⁰ “But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire” (Romans 7:8).

³¹ I Timothy 6:9.

³² “... Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity ... They... worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator...Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts ...”

of pride, Augustine particularly focuses on the term “immoderate desire”, the emphasis being on immoderate. Thus, he specifically states that those who desire what is good are not chargeable. According to Augustine, immoderate cupidity is an expression of the corrupt will, which in prioritising, sets worldly (lesser) goods above God (the supreme good), and even uses God to attain these worldly goods. The ultimate goal of desiring becomes apparent in the fact that those who desire seek everything that they desire for their own benefit (Pannenberg 1994:242-243).

The Pauline-Augustinian interpretation significantly influenced later Christian thought. Aquinas holds that “to implement sin we start from what provides the opportunity to fulfil sinful desires, and that is riches” (quoted in Aquinas 1991:268). Although he regards greed (avarice) as the root of all sin in the sense that it promotes all of them, he insists that it is a consequence of self-love: “Every sin arises from disordered desire for some temporal good and that arises from disordered love of self” (Aquinas 1991:260). Aquinas therefore states that “avarice is commonly, but not always, at the root of all evils” (Aquinas 1991:268).

This Thomistic idea was also taken up by the Protestant Reformers. Likewise, Luther argued that sin is primarily lust (concupiscence/cupidity), although not in the sense of natural physical desires or impulses. For Luther, lust is the consequence of human pride, resulting in the corruption of the heart and will with evil desire. While Luther uses “lust” as the inclusive term for sin, he pursues the general tradition by referring to lust in the narrower sense of sinful pleasure, as a consequence of self-love, of turning away from God, of pride (Niebuhr 1996:232).

The idea of sin as greed also appealed to many Enlightenment and modern thinkers. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, believes that a person’s disposition toward God is impeded by their bodily nature’s involvement with the material world. As such, Schleiermacher refers to sin as “all arrestments of the disposition to the God-consciousness” which are always a result of “the independence of the sensuous functions” whereby “the spirit is obstructed in its action by the flesh” (quoted in Hick 2007:222). The idea of greed as a consequence of pride is encapsulated in a number of modern views. Gordon Kaufman (1968:369), for instance, also maintains that the movement into idolatry, whereby a person turns away from God to some finite reality, subsequently leads to enslavement by a “merciless master”; insatiable desire. Kaufman holds that all forms of self-indulgence, whether “drives for food or sex ... the lust for money and property ... [or] the desire for power and prestige”, reveals the fact that “[t]he more one seeks meaning through satisfaction of [desires] ... the more he becomes enslaved to

gluttony and lust". He adds:

Seeking gratification in the finite object only increases the craving, thus plunging one deeper in enslavement to the passion. Moreover, such meaning as he originally found ... begins to grow flat and cloy upon him as he becomes satiated but still unsatisfied. But this only makes him more desperate in the search for meaning and salvation, and so he plunges yet more blindly into deeper bondage.

Other modern writers who particular discuss the sin of greed are Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, whose interpretations are discussed in the following section.

b) Reinhold Niebuhr: "The relation of sensuality to self-love"

In the view of Reinhold Niebuhr (1996:228), the sin of sensuality – although it is more noticeable and discernible than the basic sin of self-love – is a secondary form and consequence of man's rebellion against God, i.e. pride. This is pretty much in line with the Pauline-Augustinian tradition of thinking. Niebuhr holds that the sin of sensuality is "the destruction of harmony within the self, by the self's undue identification with and devotion to particular impulses and desires within itself", which includes various forms of physical desires, including extravagance, gluttony, drunkenness, abandonment, and sexual desire. In his analysis of sensuality, he uses the latter at length to illustrate his arguments. Niebuhr (1996:228-233) believes that although Paul, Augustine and their followers identify sensuality as a derivative of self-love, they fail to elucidate the relationship between these two forms of sin. Their explanations do not prove to be satisfactory for Niebuhr, as he believes that they are too vague, partially contradictory and they do not provide an adequate account of how self-love results in sensuality. The following question leads Niebuhr (1996:233) to discover the essence of the sin of sensuality, and thus inevitably its relation to pride: "Is sensuality ... a form of idolatry which makes the self god; or is it an alternative idolatry in which the self, conscious of the inadequacy of its self-worship, seeks escape by finding some other god?" Niebuhr (1996:233-234) concludes that the sin of sensuality comprises a little of both, and employs an analysis of various forms of sensuality to justify his argument.

Luxurious and extravagant living is a form of self-love on the one hand, as occasionally its goal is to display power and enhance prestige. Sometimes it might also be a consequence of the freedom secured by power. Yet, more often than not it is a desperate attempt to escape from the self. Recognising its inadequacy as the centre of its existence, the self seeks to find another god in a person or process over which it presumably has control (Niebuhr 1996:234).

Likewise, drunkenness may on the one hand be an attempt to enhance the ego, but it may also be an attempt to escape from it on the other hand. In the first instance the purpose is to overcome the ego's sense of inferiority and insecurity, which is rooted in anxiety. In the latter instance the desire for intoxication is a product of guilt, or a state of bafflement in which guilt has been compounded by the previous sense of insecurity. Drunkenness is thereby an attempt to completely escape consciousness as the bafflement becomes too much to bear. The logic of sin is thus vividly revealed: The self is tempted by anxiety to sin; sin however intensifies the very insecurity it was supposed to alleviate to the point where an escape from the whole tension of life is sought (Niebuhr 1996:234-235).

Niebuhr (1996:235-239) further holds that in the Christian tradition, sexual passion is a particular striking form of sensuality. It is a powerful impulse that has been vigorously expressed throughout history. As such, an exploration of it could excellently portray the essence of the sin of sensuality. Like every other physical desire, sexual impulse is subject to and compounded with the freedom of the human spirit. Therefore, its dynamism stretches to the highest peaks of human spirituality, while humanity's insecurity in the heights of its freedom grasps down at the sex impulse, using it as a means of compensation as well as an opportunity to escape. Based on "pure nature" sexual impulse is a natural basis of "alter-egoism". Being a natural method, which insures the preservation of the human species, the natural instinct of sexual passion is also otherwise used to assert the ego and to escape from the ego into another. Consequently, the self's domination over another's desires, and the abnegation of the self in favour of another are in perplexed tension, which is further intensified with the creative discovery of the self in the process of giving it to the other. It is because of this that the climax of sexual union is also a climax of creativity and sinfulness, the latter not as a result of sex being sinful as such, but because of the presupposition of sin: When the original harmony is disturbed by the ego's self-love, sexual instincts can be effectively used for both the proclamation of the self and also the escape from the self. Sexual passion thus becomes both an instrument of the basic sin of pride, as well as an expression of an uneasy conscious which attempts to flee from the self through the deification of another. This conviction thus confirms the accuracy of the apparently ambiguous Pauline-Augustinian interpretation of relationship between sensuality and self-love, and it encloses both a further extension of self-love, as well as an attempt to escape from it, an attempt that leads to the futile worshipping of the creature instead of the Creator. To complete the analysis of sensuality, however, it is worth mentioning that sexual passion is subject to the development

of a further degree of sensuality. Sexual passion serves the exact purpose as drunkenness – it becomes an anodyne – by the very power it develops in the spiritual confusion of human sin. The ego, vainly worshipping the self and the other, uses sexual passion – without any reference to the self and the other – as an escape-mechanism to flee from the tension of life, a flight to nothingness. The sexual passion that makes this escape possible is therefore both a primary consequence of sin and a secondary consequence of an uneasy conscience because of sin. This conclusion therefore confirms Augustine’s conception of sensuality as a further sin, which is also a punishment for the primary sin of pride. Humans, in their fallen nature, sin in their sex life, not because sex is essentially sinful, but through having lost the true centre of their life in God they fall into sensuality, of which sexual passion is most obvious and vivid. Therefore, sex reveals sensuality as, firstly, another and final form of self-love, secondly, an attempt to escape self-love through the deification of another, and finally, as a flight from both forms of idolatry by plunging into unconsciousness.

Niebuhr (1996:239-240) believes that sexual passion thus clearly illustrates the problem of sensuality in general, whether love of luxury, an excessive devotion to a mutable good, gluttony or drunkenness: “sensuality is always: (1) an extension of self-love to the point where it defeats its own ends; (2) an effort to escape the prison house of self by finding a god in a process of person outside the self; and (3) finally an effort to escape from the confusion which sin has created into some form of subconscious existence”.

c) Paul Tillich: “Estrangement as concupiscence”

Paul Tillich (1957b:29-55), who bases his arguments on a philosophical-anthropological analysis of sin, describes the fall as the transition from essence (perfection) to existence (estrangement). Tillich believes that the state of estrangement – the situation in which human beings are estranged from God, themselves and other beings – contains both a tragic element (in the sense of universal destiny) and a moral element (in the sense of personal guilt). In this context concupiscence adjoins unbelief and *hubris*³³ as a third distinctive quality of the nature of sin (estrangement³⁴). Unbelief, whereby a person in the totality of their being remove

³³ Tillich (1957b:50) maintains that the Greek term *hubris* cannot be adequately translated. In his opinion, *hubris* implies the self-elevation of humans – in their greatness – into the divine sphere. Their greatness lies in their being infinite, a temptation of *hubris* into which they universally fall through destiny and freedom. As such, for Tillich *hubris* should not be translated as “pride”. He therefore prefers to retain the term’s original linguistic rendition.

³⁴ Tillich (1957b:44-47) chooses the term “estrangement” over “sin” to describe humanity’s existential

themselves from God, leads to *hubris*, whereby they make themselves the centre of their being. The question therefore arises: Why are we humans tempted to remove ourselves from the divine centre and position ourselves as our own centre?

In offering an answer to this question, Tillich (1957b:52) presents his account of estrangement as concupiscence. He contends that this is the temptation of us humans in our place between finitude and infinity, whereby we are lured into locating ourselves in the position of drawing our whole world into ourselves. Given that we are in a state of estrangement, we are separated from the whole and therefore desire reunion with the whole. Our “poverty” urges us to pursue the possibility of reaching unlimited abundance – the unrestrained desire to draw the whole of reality into ourselves. This is referred to concupiscence, which encompasses all physical hungers, whether for food, sex, knowledge, power, material wealth, as well as for spiritual values.

Tillich (1957b:52-53) proceeds to offer a few examples, drawn from existentialist literature, art, philosophy and psychology, which express the meaning of concupiscence. Kierkegaard, for instance, employs the figure of Emperor Nero for a psychology of concupiscence. Embodying the demonic implications of unlimited power, Nero is a representation of an individual who has succeeded in drawing the entire universe into himself by means of his use of power. The complete inner emptiness that Nero experiences leads to the determination to bring death to all he encounters, including himself. Tillich also makes reference to Kierkegaard’s interpretation of Mozart’s Don Juan, creating the additional figure of the seducer, Johannes. Kierkegaard emphasises the emptiness and the despair implicit in unlimited sexual striving, which hinders a creative union of love in sexual activity. Hereby the self-defying character of concupiscence is also revealed. In a third example, Tillich refers to the figure of Goethe’s Faust, who is filled with a drive for unlimited knowledge directed toward the subordination of both power and sex. Through the desire to “know everything”, Faust cognitively draws the universe into himself and his finite particularity. These examples clearly illustrate that knowledge, sex and power are not expressions of concupiscence in themselves. Rather, it is the *unlimited* character of these strivings that renders them symptoms of concupiscence.

situation. He believes that “sin” expresses what is not implied by “estrangement”, that is, the *personal* act of turning away from that to which one belongs, i.e. the moral element. “Sin” thus particularly emphasises the personal character of estrangement – personal freedom and guilt – over against the tragic character of estrangement – universal destiny. See 2.3 (b) for a more detailed discussion of “existential estrangement”.

Tillich (1957b:53) goes further to analyse the nature of concupiscence, making reference to two conceptual descriptions renowned for their noteworthy contribution toward the Christian understanding of this predicament, namely Freud's "libido" and Nietzsche's "will to power". According to Tillich both, however, interprets humanity solely in terms of existential concupiscence and neglect reference to essential concupiscence. Instead of also focusing on a human being's essential *eros*, which is associated with a definite object, it only highlights the human existential desire, which is associated with an infinite object. Analysing these descriptions, Tillich reveals the fundamental distinction between these two contrasting elements.

In making reference to Freud's account of concupiscence, Tillich (1957b:53-54) states that libido is here described as a person's unlimited desire to release their biological (particularly sexual) tensions and gain pleasure in doing so. In addition, Freud shows that even the highest spiritual experiences and activities contain libidinous elements. In describing the consequences of concupiscence, Freud explains how the libido is caught in a state of continuous unsatisfied striving. This is especially expressed in what he refers to as the "death instinct", the desire to escape the pain of the unsatisfied libido. Concupiscence therefore implies that the person is in a state of continual discontent with their creativity. Tillich argues, however, that Freud's description of the libido is insufficient for a theological analysis of concupiscence, as it only describes the human being's existential predicament and not their essential nature. Tillich thus maintains that the endlessness typical of the libido is a sign of our estrangement, which contradicts our essential (created) goodness. In the latter sense, libido is not concupiscence; it is not the infinite human desire to draw the universe into the self, but rather an element of love, in harmony with the other qualities of love – *eros* (sex out of love) *philia* (fondness) and *agape* (wholly selfless and spiritual love). Love does not exclude desire, but receives libido into itself, thus implying that the libido united with love is not infinite. Like all love, it is directed toward a definite subject, with whom it seeks to unite the bearer of love. On the other hand, concupiscence – the distorted libido – does not want the other being, but seeks its own pleasure through the other being. In this manner the distinction between libido as love and libido as concupiscence is illuminated.

Similarly, Tillich (1957b:55) uses Nietzsche's "will to power" to illustrate concupiscence in terms of the contrast between infinite desire (existential) and definite desire (essential). Nietzsche describes the will to power as an unlimited, never-satisfied driving power, stimulating in a person the desire to come to rest through the self-negation of the will. In

Nietzsche's view, the will to power is unlimited and has demonic-destructive qualities, making it yet another symbol of concupiscence. On the other hand, when the will to power is judged according to the norms and principles of a person's essential nature, embedded in the unconscious desire to affirm their own power of being, it becomes an ontological symbol of their natural self-affirmation. The will to power as an expression of love thus belongs to the sphere of created goodness, and is a powerful symbol of the dynamic self-realisation characterising life.

The above two examples thus prove that neither libido nor the will to power represent concupiscence in themselves. They only become expressions of concupiscence and estrangement, however, when they are not rooted in love and thus have no definite object (Tillich 1957b:55).

Important to note in Tillich's hamartology is the fact that although concupiscence is awarded third place in the distinctive qualities of sin (estrangement), it appears to be more fundamental than unbelief and *hubris*. One can conclude that as *motif* it precedes unbelief and *hubris*, thus paving the way for other sin.

2.2.3 Sin as moral failure (*hamartia*)

A third classic way in which the notion of sin has been understood in the Christian tradition is in terms of *hamartia*. This means to be "missing the mark", like an archer's arrow would miss its target. This Greek word for sin is similar to *adikia*, which means "injustice" or "unrighteousness", and *anomia*, which means "lawlessness" or being "without the law" (Peters 1994:7). In the Hebrew translation, *hatta't*, for example, suggesting "carelessness", is the closest to *hamartia* as missing the mark. In contrast to *hatta't*, *'awon* implies wilful and thus "culpable failure to hit the mark". The sinful act involving revolt against the norm itself, that is, the underlying authority, is expressed in the term *pasha'*, meaning "apostasy"³⁵ (Pannenberg 1994: 238-239). H. Wheeler Robinson (1911:42-43), on the other hand, is of the opinion that the term *hamartia* reveals nothing definite about sin; it is the failure to do some or other thing either in relation to God or to mankind. Moral failure also extends to include other related sins, for example, apostasy, a lack of holiness, inability to become all that one can be, and the denial of life's intrinsic meaning or purpose, thus taking responsibility for and attempting to shape one's own destiny.

³⁵ In an example to illustrate this sinful act, Pannenberg (1994:239) makes reference to Isaiah 1, which speaks about the state of apostasy that God's people find themselves in and their revolt against Him.

a) Developments in the Christian tradition

The notion of sin as moral failure is relatively modern. Yet, this idea has also been incorporated into the work of historical writers. The biblical view on moral failure is most clearly expressed by Apostle Paul, who argues that sin is everything that is not a result of faith, or of unity with God (Peters 1994:23-24). He uses the verb “hamartono” in Romans 3:23, stating that, “... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...” So also, the Apostle John states that, “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness”³⁶.

This idea was taken up in the patristic age by Augustine, who believes that any word, deed or desire that stands in opposition to God’s eternal law amounts to sin (Peters 1994:22). Sin is therefore a bad, voluntary act, either from exercising the will (willing, choosing), or commanded by will (external words or deeds). The will’s standards are twofold; human reason’s immediate standards and God’s reason’s ultimate standards. The badness inherent in sin arises as a result of falling short of either one of these categories of standards (Aquinas, Aquinas 1991:250-251). In addition, Augustine believes that the sin of moral failure is a betrayal of human transcendence. The person who does not open him/herself to God falls radically short of their own fundamental possibilities. The fact that their place is with God is no longer recognised. In addition, although he belongs to the reality that God has made possible, he refuses to be filled with it. Augustine thus insists that in essence by sinning – by turning away from God’s purpose – the person loses their self (Brinkman 2003:129, 130).

In the medieval period, the concept of moral failure was also furthered by Aquinas, stating that sin is a disorder that turns a person’s life away from its ultimate goal in God, to whom he is united by charity. Such sin is fatal – irreparable by nature – and brings with it eternal condemnation (Aquinas 1991:252).

The view of modern writer, Paul Tillich, who comprehensively interpreted and expounded the idea of sin as moral failure, will be discussed in the section that follows.

b) Paul Tillich: “From essence to existence”

As seen previously in his analysis of the nature of sin, it is apparent that the views of Paul Tillich are shaped within the framework of understanding the fall of man as the transition from the state of essence to the state of existence.³⁷ Tillich (1957b:33) holds that “the state of

³⁶ I John 3:4.

³⁷ See 2.2 (c).

essential being is not an actual stage of human development which can be known directly or indirectly. The essential nature of man is present in all stages of his development, although in existential distortion ... [It] has been projected into the past as a history before history, symbolized as a golden age or paradise. In psychological terms one can interpret this state as that of 'dreaming innocence' ... It has potentiality, not actuality. It has no place, it is *ou topos* (utopia)." Tillich (1957b:44) argues that on the other hand, "The state of existence is the state of estrangement. Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself." It is within the context of this continuum that constructs his views on the nature of sin as moral failure: "Man as he exists is not what he essentially is and ought to be. He is estranged from his true being"; from that to which he essentially belongs (Tillich 1957b:45).³⁸

Tillich (1957b:44-48) further holds that although "estrangement" is not a biblical term, it is implied in most biblical descriptions of humanity's existential predicament, for example in the expulsion from paradise, the hostile relation between man and nature, the deadly hostility between fellow brothers, the estrangement between fellow nations through language confusion and in the continuous turning of kings and people to false gods. In the New Testament, it is implied in the apostle Paul's reference to humans perverting the image of God into that of idols, his classical description of "man against himself" and in his vision of the hostility between fellow humans in their distorted desires. These examples evidently highlight the personal element of estrangement – our personal freedom and responsibility for our predicament. Turning to our finite selves as the centre of everything, in our sin we turn away from that to which we essentially belong, i.e. God, and thereby lose our essential unity with the ground of our being and our world. This loss of unity with the Creator is the innermost character of sin.

We continue to exist outside the divine centre to which we essentially belong, failing to become what we were destined for. All expressions of existential estrangement – whether unbelief, *hubris* or concupiscence – are therefore contradictions of our essential being and our potency for goodness. In addition, they contradict our created structure of ourselves, our world and their interdependence. This self-contradiction inevitably leads to self-destruction as the elements of essential being move against each other, tending to annihilate each other

³⁸ Although Tillich (1957b) continually emphasises the inseparability of the moral and tragic elements of estrangement, for the purpose of this discussion, being the nature of *sin*, we are more specifically focusing on the moral aspect of estrangement, i.e. man's individual freedom and guilt.

and the whole to which they essentially belong. The basic mark of self-destruction is self-loss – the loss of our determining centre. The centred self is disintegrated by disrupting forces which cannot be brought into unity. Moving against each other, they split the self, and as the disruption continues, the more we are threatened. In extreme situations, we feel the complete unreality of our world, with nothing left apart from the awareness of our own empty self. Thus, attempting to make the finite self the centre of everything ultimately implies that little by little the self ceases to be the centre of anything, threatening both the self and its world. Losing ourselves and our world, we become a limited self, depending on a limited environment, resulting in ever-increasing devastation (Tillich 1957b:59-62).

Tillich (1957b:62-66) further maintains that these destructive consequences include our interdependent loss of the polar elements of being. First to separate is our freedom and destiny. As our freedom is aroused, it separates itself from the destiny to which it belongs. With *hubris* and concupiscence in control, freedom ceases to relate itself to the objects of destiny and instead turns to other objects contingent upon the choosing subject, as we make ourselves the centre of the universe. The immediate results of this are restlessness, emptiness and meaninglessness. In the process we do not notice or intentionally disregard any signals coming from our destiny. Existentialism most accurately describes the dialectics of this situation. Following this is the existential disruption of our dynamics and form. In our essential nature, dynamics and form are in perfect unity. In the existential state, our dynamics are distorted into a formless drive for self-transcendence, however, and we are thereby driven in all directions, with no definite aim and content. In existential estrangement individualisation is also separated from participation. While in our essential nature we freely participate without any limits, in the existential state we are cut off from participation and are shut within ourselves. Concurrently, we find ourselves under the power of objects that seek to make us a mere object with no self.

Being estranged from the ultimate power of essential being, we are determined by our natural fate. In the essential state death is seen as finitude, but in the existential state it is regarded as evil, and we are driven by anxiety having to face death. As estranged beings we are thus given over to our finite nature of having to die. Filled with guilt, we feel responsible for the loss of our potential eternity, despite its universal tragic actuality. In the essential state time and space, like causality and substance are valid structures of creation. In the estranged state, however, we experience time without the “eternal now” and space without the “eternal here”. Unwilling to accept this temporality, we attempt to prolong the time given to us, filling it

with many transitory things and imagining a continuation of our life and endlessness without eternity. Furthermore, in our longing for a final “home” we attempt in an absolute sense to make a definite place our own, but fail in this task as we remain mere “pilgrims” on the earth. Similarly, suffering and aloneness are also elements of finitude. In the essential state suffering is not removed, but rather transformed into blessedness (meaningful suffering). Likewise, aloneness reveals our complete centeredness and is thus an expression of “solitude”, the condition for communion with others. In the existential state, however, suffering is no longer considered blessedness, but rather becomes a structure of destruction. In the same way, aloneness is no longer considered as solitude, as we are removed from the dimensions of the ultimate power and is left in loneliness. Two more aspects which necessitates reflection is doubt and meaningless. In the essential nature we experience doubt as yet another facet of finitude, because we understand that truth is only in the whole and that no finite being possesses the whole. Conversely, in existential estrangement insecurity and doubt become absolute and drive us toward despair – rejecting any finite truth and despairing about the possibility of being at all. In the process, we attempt to construct an absolute security and absolute certainty out of finite security and finite certainty, and are thereby thrown into restlessness, emptiness, cynicism and meaninglessness (Tillich 1957:66-74).

Most noteworthy in this regard, Tillich (1957b:74-75) argues, is the element of responsibility in the various forms of self-destruction, whether self-loss, world-loss, objectification, meaningless suffering, loneliness, emptiness, despair or meaningless. Just as these are considered consequences of sin (evil), they are also deemed the individual sinful acts of a person. Whether these structures of destruction are historically conditioned because of their universal, structural presence, one cannot disregard the fact that because of one’s own sin and guilt we fail to become what we are essentially destined to be.

c) Other contemporary views on sin as moral failure

The idea of sin as moral failure became especially strong in the modern era. Various scholars included this concept in their hamartologies, although their ideas were diverse and often very different to the post-Enlightenment idea of moral failure. Brunner (1952:90-93), for example, concentrates on sin as apostasy, which he believes is a contradiction of the Word. In a person’s “falling away from God”, they transgress the Law and defy what God has ordained. Similarly, Pannenberg (1994:239) holds that *hamartia* implies the “transgression of norms of conduct”. The human heart is always considered *in relation to God’s commands* – whether

the heart is directed toward evil and thus breaking His commands, or whether the heart is in harmony with God and thus keeping His commands. Simply stated, this transgression of norms can only be identified by making reference to God's holy commands. Buswell (1977:104-105), who founds his argument on the idea of God's holy character as the foundation of the law, therefore perceives sin as anything in the human nature that is not an expression, or which is a contradiction, of God's holy character. Peters (1994:8) also believes that, in short, sin is a lack of holiness in the sense of failing to live up to the two fundamental commandments of Jesus to love God and to love one's neighbour. By not trusting in and depending on God's grace, humans wander from the faith and cause destruction to other forms of life through uncaringness, insensitivity, injustice and cruelty. Likewise, Marguerite Shuster (2004:102) believes that "sin is that which ought not to be *before God*, with reference to the order God has established".³⁹ As such, Durand (1978:155-156) describes sin as "lawlessness" in the light of God's holy Law; "lovelessness" in the light of His love; "unrighteousness" in the light of His righteousness; and "unfaithfulness" in the light of God's faithfulness.

Regarding moral failure as "missing the mark", Heyns (1978:175-176, 178) states that this refers to human sin in the sense of missing one's God-ordained goal. As created beings, humans receive their destiny from God. Moral failure thus implies that what ought to have been achieved one did not achieve, not because of external circumstances, but because of one's own choices and acts. Sin in this sense is therefore a mis-deed, and *vice versa* – misdeed is sin whereby human beings fail to reach their destiny. Sin therefore turns a person into a transgressor, meaning someone that does things that miscues. As such, sin leads a person to their downfall, in fact, sin *is* the person in downfall. As a result of their own doings, humans find themselves outside of God's ordained decree, missing their life's path set by Him. On account of their own guilt they encounter misfortune, because they have lost the path of life – over and over again – thereby ending in death. The sin of moral failure is thus humanity's deliberate act of destiny-annihilation. In this regard, Jay B. McDaniel (1989:143) suggests that God's divine mystery is not outside or above the universe; instead it is the core of life itself. Divine transcendence is experienced when responding to the wellspring of potentialities within oneself, which is God. Sin is rejecting these possibilities and missing the

³⁹ Hereby, Shuster (2004:102) makes reference to Psalm 51:4, which is an illustration of the sinner being accused of transgressing the First Commandment. Also in the cases of Leviticus 20:1-3 and II Samuel 12:13, the sin against humans is deemed to be sin against God, and thus a transgression of His commands.

mark of responding to God within oneself. In line with this thinking, Peters (1994:31-32) refers to the pervasive sense that things are not the way they are supposed to be:

The world is not the way it ought to be. My family and professional lives are not the way they ought to be. Perhaps even my own soul, my psyche, my inner life are not the way they ought to be. Reality as we confront it from day to day misses the mark. It falls short. It is not all it can be, not all it should be.

Peters (1994:32) further states that in order to rationalise this irreconcilable difference, we envisage pictures of perfection and stories of paradise, for example the story of the Fall. Feeling estranged from the state of perfection from which we have so far tumbled, we now wander in a wilderness created by ourselves, with the choice of two options: Accepting the reality and staying in the wilderness for the indefinite future, or refusing to accept the reality of wilderness by sinning more audaciously and transforming the wilderness into an even more fierce place than it already is

Similar to Tillich, Kaufman (1968:371-374) argues that estrangement from God implies a lack of fulfilment in the various dimensions of existence, whether individually or socially. In terms of the former sense, the individual is unable to be honest with him/herself and others. Deceiving both themselves and others, they believe that their own finite values are what give meaning to life, and thereby attempt to rationalise their own actions and existence with the hope of proving them good, honest and true. The individual therefore continues to live in a state of self-contradiction. In terms of the latter sense, the community creates ideologies which they believe reflects the purpose of life. These include, for example, the elevation of the Germans as the “master race”, the subordination of people of colour by white people and the exploitation of “backward countries” by the developed countries. Here, the community also wants to rationalise its false beliefs and is thereby plunged into self-contradiction.

2.3 Sin as a “hydra”

Based on the previous section, it is clear that the Christian tradition encompasses different notions of the nature of sin.⁴⁰ J. J. F. Durand (1978:152) states that the destructive and catastrophic character of sin is in each case illustrated from another perspective. Ascribing to one exact description is therefore an almost impossible task. One could therefore rightly

⁴⁰ Durand (1978: 152-155) argues that what scholars illustrate as the “being” or “essence” of sin is nothing more than (what they believe to be) the most prominent shape in which sin manifests itself. He concludes that sin is inexplicable and its deepest essence cannot be localised. See 2.4.

remark that sin has many faces, and can mutate from one form to another. As Mary Potter Engel (1990:163) remarks, sin is a kind of “hydra”, a “monster that grows two new heads for every one that is severed”.⁴¹ In the medieval period, the three classic notions of sin – pride, greed and moral failure – were developed by, among others, theologians and moralists, towards a wide range of over a dozen Christian models of sin, used for the purpose of educating and instructing Christians on fallen humanity’s inclination to sin. The most popular one to date is the “Seven Deadly Sins”.

2.3.1 The Seven Deadly Sins⁴²

Based on the works of earlier writers, the “Seven Deadly Sins” were particularly developed by Gregory the Great in the sixth century. Also known as the “Capital Vices” or “Cardinal Sins”, the list of Seven Deadly Sins, which is also apparent in the Scriptures,⁴³ categorises seven evils, subdivided into three “spiritual” and four “corporal” or “bodily” sins. While all of these sins are evil and thus potential causes of damnation, the spiritual sins are considered more dangerous than the bodily sins. The Seven Deadly Sins includes pride, envy and wrath, which are spiritual sins, and sloth, greed, gluttony and lust, which are corporal sins. The use of the popular medieval mnemonic, “SALIGIA”, aided the ingrainedness of the Seven Deadly Sins in Catholic culture and consciousness throughout the world. “SALIGIA” is the acronym for the first letters of each of the deadly sins in Latin: *superbia* (pride), *avaritia* (greed), *luxuria* (lust), *invidia* (envy), *gula* (gluttony), *ira* (wrath) and *acedia* (sloth). These seven sins are labelled “capital vices” because of the fact that they propagate other vices, as Aquinas states: “Any vice from which other vices arise is called a leading (or capital) vice, especially if it acts as a goal for other vices and thus defines their viciousness in some way” (Aquinas 1991:268).

⁴¹ In Greek mythology, Hydra, a nine-headed monster, was killed by Heracles. When one head was cut off, another grew instantly in its place.

⁴² See also Ware (1982), Boyle (1997), Okholm (2000), Greeley, Neuder & Durkin (1999)

⁴³ Proverbs 6:16-19 states that: “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.” This biblical list differs substantially from the traditional list of Seven Deadly Sins, with only pride being discernible. However, in Galatians 5:19-21, the apostle Paul includes more of the traditional seven sins in his (longer than the customary) list: “sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like”.

Pride – regarded as the most serious and the source of all the other deadly sins – is identified as a perverted, excessive love for the self. The person, puffed up with pride, seeks to be more important than others and also fails to acknowledge others' good works. Pride reaches its peak in the arrogant attempt to replace God's position with the self. The story of the fallen angel, Lucifer, who endeavoured to be like God and was consequently cast from heaven, is possibly the most renowned example of pride.

In Aquinas' view, envy implies that a person resents the good qualities of another person because they lower the envier's self-esteem (Cumberlege 1955:135). Distinguished by an insatiable longing for something that they do not have, the envious person is usually filled with a desire to deprive another of the object that he/she wishes to possess. Envy is therefore directly related to the last commandment: "You shall not covet...anything that belongs to your neighbour" (Exodus 20:17). Envy is similar to greed, but whereas greed is predominantly concerned with material goods, envy may apply more generally. Also, the envious person, recognising their own lack, envies another for having what the envious person lacks, and wishes that person to be deprived of it.

Otherwise known as rage, wrath is an inordinate, unrestrained feeling of hatred and anger. In its most overt form, wrath presents with violence, hatred and self-destructiveness that may instigate feuds or grudges that can continue unresolved for many years, as the wrath of a victim may persist long after the perpetrator has passed away. Impatience, revenge and even vigilantism are but a few ways in which wrath is manifested. This is the only sin that is not necessarily associated with self-interest, although a person can obviously be wrathful for selfish reasons, such as jealousy, which is very closely related to envy.

Sloth is generally defined as laziness, indifference or the failure to use one's talents. Being a less wilful failure, for example to love God, sloth is often perceived as more a sin of omission than commission, and is thus regarded as being less serious than other sins. De Young (2009:84), however, after extensively studying the seven evils, believes that although the sin of sloth has been trivialised in modern culture, "busyness, workaholism, diversion, and frenetic activities can all be symptoms of sloth, just as much as laziness or inactivity can be".

Greed, also known as avarice or covetousness, is the desire to possess more than what is actually needed. This especially holds true with regard to material goods, social status and power. Similar to lust and gluttony, greed is a sin of excess. The term "avarice" more specifically encompasses other examples of greedy behaviour, for instance treachery, and

betrayal, primarily for personal benefit, for example in the form of bribery. Actions induced by greed may include theft, robbery and the scavenging and hoarding of materials by means of the misuse of authority, violence and fraud.

Gluttony is generally regarded as the over-indulgence or over-consumption of anything to the point of waste. Christianity considers it a sin because of the excessive desire for food causes it to be withheld from those who are genuinely in need of it where food is relatively scarce. Aquinas notably expanded the view of gluttony, to the extent of preparing a list of six ways in which this sin can be committed, including eating too much; eating too soon; eating too daintily; eating too eagerly; eating too wildly; or eating too expensively.

Excessive thoughts or desires of a sexual nature are considered to be lust. Feelings of lust, which are not necessarily associated with love or affection, are embraced for the energy and excitement that they ignite. Consequently, it more than often leads to the lustful person acting on such desires and thereby dishonouring his/her body because of a lack of self-control.

Throughout the years, the Seven Deadly Sins were continually subject to expanded views based on various perspectives. For example, Peter Binsfeld's classification of demons in 1589 matched each of the deadly sins with a demon, whom he believed tempted humans by means of the related sin. The classification was done as follows: Lucifer/Satan was paired with pride; Leviathan with envy; Amon/Behemoth with wrath; Belphegor with sloth; Mammon with greed; Beelzebub with gluttony; and Asmodeus with lust (Bloomfield 1952:214-215). Another example is the psychiatrist Karl Menninger's book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (1973), in which he argues that the traditional model of the deadly sins are incomplete. In his opinion, modern ethicists would add dishonesty and cruelty as deadly vices, as these are considered more serious than some of the customary deadly sins, for example gluttony.

The model of Seven Virtues, which is also subdivided, includes faith, hope and charity (*caritas*), classified as spiritual or theological virtues, and prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, which are deemed to be cardinal or pagan virtues. Any person, regardless of religion, could possess the pagan virtues; however, in medieval belief only a Christian possesses faith in God, hope for an afterlife, and *caritas* – the type of charity that enables one to do good deeds solely out of love for God. The medieval church, carrying forth the numerological mysticism of seven, compiled a list of seven good works in its catechism as cures to the seven deadly sins, which includes sheltering strangers, feeding the hungry, giving drink to those thirsting, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, ministering to the imprisoned

and burying the dead. The following list of corresponding sins and virtues is recognised in the modern Catholic catechism: Humility overcomes pride; kindness overcomes envy; patience overcomes wrath; diligence overcomes sloth; charity overcomes greed; temperance overcomes gluttony; and chastity overcomes lust.⁴⁴

2.3.2 Ted Peters: “Seven steps down the path to radical evil”

Ted Peters (1994), in attempting to construct an integrated yet differentiated understanding of the nature of sin, describe what he refers to as “seven steps down the path to radical evil”, and thereby exemplifies the conception that sin is multi-faceted. By situating the phenomenon of Satanism within the broader context of a theological and psychological understanding of sin and evil, and thus within the larger perspective of human experience, Peters successfully “parses” sin into its various constitutive elements and in doing so illustrates the notion of sin in a form of progression – from the least to the most profane. Believing in “various levels” of evil, Peters presents how these are experienced in our daily experiences.⁴⁵

The first step is *anxiety*. Though not sinful in itself, it opens the door for sin. Anxiety has its roots in the fear of loss, principally the fear of losing oneself to death. Confronting frustration – particularly humiliation that impairs one’s sense of being and renders one helpless – kindles the flames of anxiety. In the attempt to combat anxiety, an illusion of immortality is created out of two elements, namely lying to oneself and pilfering the strengths of others. This results in the raging urge to pre-emptively strike out in aggression, and steal other’s power, glory or money (Peters 1994:11-12).

When a person becomes engulfed by anxiety, he falls into the temptation to strike out in violence if he lacks faith or trust – in his neighbour or in God – living in *unfaith*. Mistrust and fear become the determinants of behaviour. This may begin with petty sins like complaining or gossiping, but if unrestrained, sin will manifest in more forceful ways, for example in an institutionalised means of harassment, or in an illegal means like embezzlement and even murder (Peters 1994:12).

⁴⁴ Note how these lists are constructed differently based on the time and context.

⁴⁵ While some might challenge the idea that some forms of sin are worse than others – based on the idea that all human sin is equal because all human sin is infinite – Peters (1994:11) maintains that “[a]t the mundane level there are degrees in the kind and amount of evil that is produced”, wittingly stating that “I would much prefer my neighbor to sin by gossiping behind my back than to sin by murdering me on my way home from the office.”

As soon as unfaith takes control, leaving one to trust neither God nor neighbour, it gives way to *pride*. The ego attempts to make itself the source of life and a person tries to treat themselves as if they were God. In the process, anxiety is hidden under a veil of self-control and by exerting power over others, resulting in a lack of empathy, insensitivity and a lack of expressing remorse. Pride hinders one from sharing in the pain and strife of other persons and creatures, instilling the mentality that the world consists only of winners and losers and that one always has to be a winner. The antithesis of pride is prejudice and discrimination against “outsiders” (Peters 1994:12-13).

When pride entices one to steal from “outsiders”, it has produced *concupiscence*, which includes sensuality, desire, lust, envy, greed and coveting. Having a hunger to possess, especially what others have, starts an inextinguishable fire of continuous wanting. This hunger to possess more and more presents the motive for stealing, although more frequently the impulse to buy. In order to guard against anxiety, the concupiscent soul constructs a safe haven out of material possessions. Being devoured, it becomes possessed by possessions. Individually, this is manifested in seeking profit from the losses of others or stealing their livelihood. Corporately, it finds expression in the composition and maintenance of socially unjust economic systems. This unbridled consumption may well be equated to sexual lust, whereby the bodily desires of passion and excitement entirely overpower a person’s mind and will. Yet, in the process the consumer is “extinguished”, rendering the belief that material possessions ensure immortality but an illusion (Peters 1994:13-14).

Pride and concupiscence together lead to desiring what only God possess – divine goodness – and applying it to oneself. *Self-justification* thus arises, in which attempts are made to make oneself righteous by relating to what is good, even if it implies lying or scapegoating. The most common form is gossip and the most dramatic form is ideology that leads to genocide. Self-justification is the denial of one’s own sinfulness, generally accompanied by attributing badness to one’s alleged enemies and correspondingly attributing goodness to oneself. What is good is used to justify one’s own perpetration of evil. In self-justification, any possibility of external goodness and forgiveness – from other people or from God – is rejected. Also rejecting grace, self-justification is a direct expression of unfaith (Peters 1994:14-15).

One of the fruits of self-justification is *cruelty*. This involves the conscious, self-righteous infliction of suffering and pain on others, which may arise from the illusion that one can erase the anxiety of one’s own extinction by torturing and destroying others. Physical or emotional pain is inflicted on another person or creature in order to generate anguish or fear, their

suffering being the evil effect of the sin of cruelty. The torturing of others is considered a desirable and tolerable policy, believing that one can gain immortality by stealing life from others. The joy brought about through this torturing or even murdering is as irrational as it is sinful (Peters 1994:15-16).

The most deadly sin on the list of evils is *blasphemy*. Traditionally understood as using God's name in a profane manner, blasphemy in this sense more specifically implies the misuse of divine symbols to prevent the communication of God's grace. In its concealed form, where it hides under the name of something good, it is a means for self-justification concerning the use of religious symbols to enhance human positions of power. Examples are appealing to the divine royal rights of kings to justify exploitation of peasants, or using Scripture to justify slavery. The symbols of God's salvation become symbols of injustice. Consequently, God becomes identified with evil. In its unconcealed form, blasphemy is the conscious use of divine symbols in the worship of radical evil which finds expression in Satanism – evil in the name of evil. God is replaced by the devil. God's symbols of grace are utilised in reverse: baptism is relinquished in loyalty to Satan; the Lord's Supper becomes a human sacrifice to Satan, instead of Christ's sacrifice on our part; love for one's neighbour and enemies becomes self-love and revenge. Selfishness, intemperance as well as concupiscence in all their expressions entirely take control. The relationship between death and life becomes distorted to the extent that killing is confused with living. God's symbols of forgiveness and resurrection become objects of violence and destruction, and are used to inflict physical suffering and spiritual death. Blasphemy is thus God's ultimate enemy (Peters 1994:16-17).

It is important to note that what Peters (1994:17) is attempting to illustrate through the “seven steps” is a logical pattern of linking the various aspects of the nature of sin and not necessarily a chronological order. The “seven steps” do not imply that evil is simply progressive or that entering the one means leaving the others behind. Nearly every step is present throughout the entire process.

2.4. Sin as deprivation of the good (*privatio boni*)

While some are satisfied by the idea that sin may manifest itself in various forms, others still feel the need to come to terms with the essence of sin. The question therefore arises: Can sin be reduced to one common denominator? Williams (1985:215), for example, maintains that the seven deadly sins are just different manifestations of one fundamental structure of human evil. Yet, another long line of thinking holds that sin is *not* something, but rather the

deprivation of something, more specifically expressed by the notion of a broken relationship. As such, sin has no ontological status and can only be described in negative terms.

After meticulously exploring the nature of sin, originally as pride and subsequently as desire, Augustine eventually resorted to a negative or privative view of sin – the negation or deprivation of the good (*privatio boni*). For Augustine, sin is not a substance, and as such it has no ontological status. Accordingly, there exists no ontological basis for, or explanation of sin. It may be described (yet not explained), however, as a deliberate defection of humanity from the natural order of creation (Williams 1985:198). Augustine’s notion of sin as deprivation of the good was a product of his challenge against Manichaeism, which fundamentally claims an ontological dualism of good and evil, and therefore substantialises evil (Brinkman 2003:129). Resorting to a negative (privative) view of sin, Augustine makes the following statement in his *Confessions*:

That evil, whose origin I was seeking, is not a substance; because if it were a substance, it would be good. For either it would be an incorruptible substance, which could not be corrupted unless it were good. And so I saw, and saw clearly, that all that Thou hast made is good; and there are no substances at all which Thou didst not make (quoted in Robinson 1911:175).

Pelagius, on the other hand, maintained that sin is not a force that naturally belongs to human existence, but rather an “extra” force. As such, it can only reign *quasi natural* as an intruder or an unwelcome guest in the lives of humans (Brinkman 2003:119).

The Reformers, especially Luther and Calvin, argued that sin was much more than a mere defect or deprivation of the good. In fact, sin is a depravity or corruption of the whole human race. To this idea they applied the term “total depravity”, implying the sinful permeation of every single aspect of human existence (Williams 1985:204).

The notion of sin as deprivation of the good has also been furthered in modern writings. In many instances it is described as a broken relationship with God. Brunner (1952:92-93), for example, emphasises this “break in communion with God, due to distrust and defiance” whereby “the whole man shakes off all the bonds which tie him to God”. Berkouwer (1971: 63-65) agrees that the Christian tradition has made constant affirmation that sin is not a “substance” or a “part” of creaturely reality. Many theologians therefore describe sin through the negative concept of a deprivation of the good. God’s creates a perfect world with harmonious relationships. Sin, such as unbelief, disobedience, rebellion and lovelessness

negate these good relationships. Likewise, Tillich (1957b:46-47) states that sin is the condition in which humanity finds itself estranged from God. Because the vital humanity-God relationship is broken, this vital break also results in other breaks, for example estrangement from fellow humans and even internal estrangement (from oneself). Durand (1978:153-155) argues along the same line, and states that sin – whether against God or against one’s neighbour – can only be known from the perspective of a broken relationship with God. In the view of Adrio König (1985:102-111) sin, with its irrational, inexplicable and chaotic character, is the negation of good, loving relationships – with God, fellow humans and nature – thereby leading to alienation, meaninglessness and judgment. Also in line with this thinking, Daniel L. Migliore (2004:150-151) states that “sin can be described as the denial of our relatedness to God ... sin is [therefore] the disruption of our relationship with God”. Birch (1991:93) sums up this idea, stating that sin has harmed humanity’s relationship with God, other humans and the rest of God’s creation. Sin is therefore the prime factor destructing the innate harmony of God’s creation.

Others, such as Barth (1958:102) labels sin as the “ontological impossibility”. He states that sin is:

... chaos, the world fashioned otherwise than according to the divine purpose, and [is] therefore formless and intrinsically impossible ... and ... can have reality only as ... a frontier of that which is and will be according to God’s decision and action.

This “impossibility” does not imply that sin is not a reality, but indicates that sin can only exist in relation to the good. In addition, Barth (1960:349-355) refers to sin as “Nothingness” that exists alongside God and in opposition to His will, continually leaving its devastating effects. In the view of Heyns (1978:174-175), sin does not have its own independent existence, implying that it is not a substance and thus not a natural part of creaturely reality. Sin “is” not, or at least not like creation “is”, yet again sin is not nothing. Therefore, the “is” of sin is not the “is” of creation, but it is also not the “is” of nothing. Instead, sin is a form of “reality” that came into being after the good creaturely reality, and which also feeds on the good creaturely reality for its continued existence. As such, sin is a parasite – not having its own life root, but consuming the good to ensure its own survival. One could thus argue that sin as a parasite is a devouring and destructive force indicating an active devastation and

elimination of the good. Arnold A. Van Ruler also believes that sin is not a natural part of creation but secondary and accidental – it is a disturbance, a faulty direction of the will. Sin is therefore guilt, and guilt is the mystery of human existence⁴⁶ (stated in Van der Reest 2012:39-41). Durand (1978:154) emphasises the mysterious character of sin, and maintains that the description of sin as a broken relationship with God does not explain sin, but rather highlight its *inexplicability* and the fact that its deepest nature cannot be localised. The theology of Herman Bavinck also maintains that sin is a *nihil* with no substantial being:

We do not know from where it is or what it is. It is here and has no right to be. It exists and no one can possibly explain its origin. It has come into our world and is nevertheless the motive for all men's thinking and doing (Berkouwer 1971:64-65).

Likewise, Peters (1994:9-10) believes that sin is inexplicable because it is innately the denial of truth, and it is inherently irrational. Furthermore, it is “the absence of being, because it seeks to dissolve or destroy what is”.

2.5 Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the Christian understanding of sin is diverse and fragmented. This is proven in the various ways in it has been defined in this tradition. Although it was impossible to offer a comprehensive overview here, this chapter is plausible in the sense that it offers four different ways in which the nature of sin is understood in the Christian tradition.

In recent debates, all these ways of thinking, whether classic or other, reverberate into the sphere of ecological theology. The views outlined in this chapter are therefore essential for reinterpreting and redefining sin in the light of our contemporary ecological crisis.

⁴⁶ See also Van Ruler (1989).

Chapter 3

Christian hamartology in ecological discourse

3.1 Introduction

It was previously ascertained that if Christian theology hopes to address the ecological crisis at hand, it would require a thorough understanding of the doctrine of sin – especially the nature of sin – in order to examine the root of the problem. This essential prerequisite was fulfilled in the foregoing chapter. In this chapter, such narratives on the nature of sin will be reinterpreted and re-defined in the light of ecological threats, here described as “ecological sin”, which include “human failings ... to relate to non-human creation in ways informed by justice and peace” (Horrell 2010:134), causing damage to the entire earth as an ecological system.

Ecological sins may be classified into various categories, which in many cases overlap. For the purpose of this task, the notion of sin finds expression in the concepts of anthropocentrism, domination in the name of difference, consumerist greed and the alienation of human beings from the earth community. A comprehensive survey and classification of available literature on these ecological sins will thereby be offered in this chapter – each category highlighting among other things, its respective contributing factors, with special emphasis on the role of Christianity in rendering religious support,⁴⁷ the corrupt principles on which these ecological sins are built, as well as a few practical alternatives. The chapter is wrapped up with some concluding remarks.

⁴⁷ Christianity’s contribution to promoting ecological destruction remains a contentious issue. A large number of scholars subscribe to the idea however, that the Christian tradition is, in one way or another, responsible for humanity’s anti-ecological behaviour. Their views are discussed in what follows. On the question as to why I choose to discuss specifically the role of Christianity in the ecological crisis – apart from the Christian context of this study – I believe that the words of Rosemary Ruether (1994:10) are appropriate in this regard: “First, because this is my tradition and therefore it is the culture for which I must be accountable. Second, it is a culture that has shaped and continues to shape ... the rest of the world ... This does not mean that other cultures, such as diverse Asian cultures, are simply innocent and good. They also have classic patriarchal, hierarchal and militarist patterns.”

3.2 Re-describing sin in an ecological context

3.2.1 Anthropocentrism

a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support

Although the whole human race, people of every nation, culture and religion, must be held accountable for the ecological damage they have caused, the distinct role played by the Judaeo-Christian tradition should not be underrated (Conradie 2011:5). With reference to the doctrine of creation, humanity is placed at the pinnacle of the creative process. The book of Genesis gives dominion to human beings. In addition, the great biblical covenants, with the exception of the covenant after the flood in Genesis 9, where God enters into relationship with Noah and his family and also independently with nature, are between God and humanity. God's chosen people, not nature, made history. The rest of creation thereby only became the background against which the God-human drama plays off (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:18). The course of history proves this in prominent statements, like that of Kant in his *Letters on Ethics*: "Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end, and the end is man", and John Paul II's 1995 papal encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*: "Everything in creation is ordered to man and everything is made subject to him ... [A]nimals and plants ... receive only the 'faintest glimmer of life' compared with 'the sublime dignity' of 'the crown of creation' (us)" (quoted in Rasmussen 1999:18).

It is therefore not surprising that many scholars would agree that Christianity has to a great extent contributed to an anthropocentric attitude; to the extent that White (1967:1205) affirms that it must be the most anthropocentric religion of all. Much emphasis is placed on humanity's well-being, while little attention is paid to rest of creation. In this regard McDaniel (1989:53) states that it is thus not uncommon to find Christian thinkers accentuating peace and justice without a focus on the integrity of the entire creation. Christian ethics has largely been practiced with a lack of consideration for the innate value of *non-human* creatures. In this instance one may look at how the Catholic Church (which constitutes a significant part of the Christian tradition) has addressed environmental concerns as an example. Hart (2004:2, 7-8) states that Catholic social teaching on ecology showed a significant shift in perceptions about nature since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) up to the twenty-first century. At the onset of the Council's first consideration of environmental issues, terms like "environmental crisis" and "respect for the integrity of creation" were not part of their ecological consciousness. The Council proceeded from the then-prevailing

Christian attitude toward creation: Creation is a hierarchically structured pyramid with humanity at the top as its ruler in God's image, having dominion over the earth and being the ultimate beneficiary of the earth's resources, provided by the creator to serve humanity. Catholic environmental teaching at the time was accordingly built on the union of social concern and anthropocentrism. The *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*) document expressed, among other things, then-current attitudes about humanity's relations with the rest of creation, as Hart (2004:8-9) cites:

[H]umanity "can and should increasingly consolidate its control over creation" (GS §9); that "all things on earth should be related to man as their centre and crown" (GS §12); and that "man created in God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all that it contains" (GS §34). In this anthropocentric view, "man" at the pinnacle of creation has the right to dominate – the right to "subject to himself" or to "subdue" (GS §12) – all other creatures. Subjection of creatures is limited; it does not allow subjection of humans; in fact, people should not neglect the welfare of members of the human community (GS §34). The right to "subdue," then, is qualified: "man" has the mandate to subject the Earth and all in it, but also to use the mandate to build up the world, in part to care for other people. The focus remains anthropocentric, but it is an extended anthropocentrism: "man" should be concerned about the well-being of all humans (Hart 2004:8-9).

Catholic teaching may have changed over the years from an anthropocentric, individualistic perspective to a biblically based biocentric and egalitarian outlook, as Hart (2004:2) affirms, but it leaves us with the question as to how many Christians were indoctrinated in the process, causing the earth irreparable damage. Bookless (2008:149) therefore correctly maintains that any worldview that elevates humanity above other the rest of creation and disregards the interdependence between human beings and creation is bound to lead to environmental disaster.

b) Anthropocentrism as ecological sin

Although humans have a unique role in creation, it does not imply that they should be anthropocentric. The human is "that being in whom the universe celebrates itself and its numinous origins in a special mode of conscious self-awareness" (Berry 1999:19). Furthermore, humans are an integral part of the created order and are not intended to be

elevated above the rest of creation. Any separation between humans and the rest of earth community is drawn for the purpose of greater clarity, rather than implying a radical disjuncture between the two. A separation that is taken too far may persuade human domination of nature, yet, if there is no separation whatsoever, humans merely become passive observers in the natural world (Deane-Drummond 2000:143). David Clough proposes a distinction between *instrumental* anthropocentrism and *teleological* anthropocentrism. The former, which is certainly evident in the Scriptures, holds that humanity has a central place in the process by which the *entire* creation is redeemed by God.⁴⁸ The latter, however, holds that humanity has central prominence in the redeemed creation. This view is problematic and sinful, and should be rejected (stated in Horrell 2010:131).

Nevertheless, in reality the division referred to above has been drawn fairly sharply, evident in humans' "superior" position in the "hierarchy" of creation, their "uniqueness" and "special value", distinct from all other created beings (Hall 1986:53). This is because, as Conradie (2005b:100) suggests, it is relatively easy to move from affirmations of human uniqueness and dignity to believing that it implies a mandate of power over the entire creation. In this regard, humanity's uniqueness easily creates a platform to advocate positions of privilege. Cafaro (2004:144) holds that the same prideful attitude whereby humans wish to free themselves from the inherent limitations of their creatureliness, assert superiority and prioritise their own selfish interests high above that of others is perceived in humanity's treatment of nature. Humanity is regarded as the universe's superior entity, and everything is judged according to human perceptions, values, and experiences. Excessive value is attached and undue respect is paid to the human species, while the opposite holds true for the rest of creation (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:18). It is precisely this anthropocentric view that David Clough calls to be rejected (cited in Horrell 2010:131) that has caused great devastation to the earth. Delio (2008:78) states as follows: "At its deepest root, our ecological crises derive from our belief that humans are somehow above or fundamentally distinct from – indeed, absolutely superior to, the rest of creation." It is true that without attentiveness to the needs of nature, the centrality of humans is accepted without question – it is simply deemed to be a fact, a fortunate privilege and honour (Welker 1999:60). Anthropocentrism holds that God's primary acts are evident in human history alone, and not in nature, which is merely the "theatre" in which the "real drama of God and God's people" plays off. Human

⁴⁸ Deane-Drummond (2008:18) also argues in favour of the redemption of both the human and nonhuman facets of creation.

history, however, “is the arena of revelation and response” (King & Woodyard 1999:13, 18-19). Furthermore, anthropocentrism “places humanity at the pinnacle of creation, endowed with a divine blessing to dominate the earth” (Horrell 2010:61). Believing they are of “central and defining importance”, the human race becomes “the creator and arbiter of values and is free to interpret and manipulate nature as it pleases ... We [have no] ideas or values forced upon us by others. Making the rules is to be seen as the ultimate expression of human freedom” (McGrath 2002:54-55). Ruether (1994:5) challenges anthropocentric attitudes toward nature, stating that: “We are latecomers to the earth, a very recent product of its revolutionary life. Yet we, particularly in the West, have constructed our concept of ourselves as humans over against all that is nonhuman.” It is therefore undeniable that human beings see themselves as the supreme rulers of the universe, sustained by the idea of human-centeredness (Horrell 2010:8, 13). Undue emphasis is placed on the survival, reproduction and well-being of humankind. Other species only hold value to the extent that they serve human interests. Such anthropocentric attitudes consequently leads to the devaluing of nature and thus, to exploitation (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:18).

Berry (1988:202) maintains that humanity’s anthropocentric attitude defies the integrity of creation. He observes:

[This] radically anthropocentric society [has] broken the primary law of the universe, the law of the integrity of the universe, the law that every component member of the universe should be integral with every other member of the universe and that the primary form of reality and of value is the universe community itself in its various forms of expression.

In the process, we humans place an exaggerated emphasis on ourselves, thereby depriving the rest of creation of its own intrinsic value (Haught 1993:41). Berry (1999:18) believes that anthropocentrism pervades human perceptions of material and spiritual realities. Everything is made relative

to humans as the absolute source of meaning and value, even if the spirit world is recognised beyond humans. An anthropocentric view of the world almost focuses exclusively on the *instrumental* value of nature instead of its *intrinsic* value (Haught 1993:41; King & Woodyard 1999:6). The nonhuman world only carries worth to the extent that it profits human needs and desires. Even in environmental analysis, nature is seen as “something to be analyzed” rather than “a category of analysis”. To illustrate, the investigation of rainforests is

anthropocentric if it is carried out to determine how they might benefit humans instead of investigating them because of their intrinsic worth. Whereas the latter approach looks at how nature itself is affected, the former examines how humans are affected by their use of nature (King & Woodyard 1999:6). Gebara (1999:28) also laments the fact that the interdependence of all life systems is not recognised. Instead, humans are exalted above the rest of creation. For example, after a war the number of dead *people* is usually counted – the destruction of the environment is forgotten. The animals that died, water that was poisoned, forests that were burned, flower fields that were trampled, starry skies obscured by poisonous clouds and the air that was made unbreathable go unremembered or is rarely mentioned. This anthropocentric attitude defies all creaturely limitations on the basis of human ingenuity and technology and disrespects the interdependent bonds between all creatures and their environments (Nash 1991:119; Primavesi 2009:11). Rasmussen (1999:19) believes that there may be a growing recognition of a globally interconnected world, but the very same species responsible for this social and technological cohesion is guilty of endangering the global metabolism sustained by both biotic and abiotic beings.

Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:18) maintain that the central problem in anthropocentric attitudes toward the rest of creation is human sin. Furthermore, they argue that such attitudes are spiritually numbing because it is likely to reduce human interaction with nature and to diminish human appreciation of nature. Similarly, Hart (2004:16) affirms the connection between human sin and anthropocentrism. Speaking out against the anthropocentric statements made by Pope John Paul II, Hart remarkably asserts:

The “humans benefit, creation benefits” idea is also an implied appeal to human self-interest: humans should safeguard creation not because it is God’s or because it has an intrinsic value in itself, but because doing so will benefit humankind. Finally, it is an appeal to pride, that humans should benefit first, and that individuals seeing human well-being as the center of the natural world would be more responsible.

Larry Rasmussen (1999:18) therefore rightly states: “We consider ourselves the creators of a world that is our own. Moral autonomy soon becomes moral sovereignty, and the Sovereign Human Self dominates both in deep theory and everyday practice”. Hall (1986:56) adds that “*pride* ... incites us to attempt a status above our creaturely condition, that is our solidarity with all the other created beings; and *sloth* ... prompts us to slink from underneath our particular creaturely vocation, that is our responsibility for the other creatures”. A most

noteworthy point made by Haught (1993:42) in this regard concerns humanity's anthropocentric attitude as a product of alienation. Anthropocentrism, in his opinion, is a way of responding to a feeling of not truly belonging to the created cosmos. In addition, it is humans rebelling against the perceived forgiveness of their situation. The shamefulness caused by feeling "abandoned in a foreign world" is countered with unwarranted self-inflation and undue amplification of their own worth. Elevating themselves above the natural world – which they regard as holding them in captivity – human beings begin to see the rest of creation as their possession, being beneath them, undeserving of their care. As McGrath (2002:56) remarks, however, this attitude stems from a more profound trouble: "A deliberate and principled rejection of the authority of anything and anyone other than individual human reason", which philosopher Jeffrey Stout dubs the 'flight from authority' – "[a] revolt against God". McGrath (2002:61-62) adds that when the notion of God is eliminated, humans can do as they please "and all things become possible ... The conquest of nature [can] proceed without any credible religious barriers being placed in its way".⁴⁹

It is therefore no surprise that anthropocentrism has taken over every aspect of the human being, even its so-called "care" of nature. King and Woodyard (1999:7) explore the concept of sustainability – the belief that future generations should have access to the same resources, of the same quality, as the current generation. They argue, however, that this belief is human-centered as the users that it is concerned with are humans. It only focuses on how its impact on nature affects humans, instead of how it affects nature as such: "It addresses only our

⁴⁹ McGrath (2002:62-64) discusses the 'elimination' of God in detail. He believes that this idea was exploited to its full potential by Enlightenment schools of thought. The atheist German philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, for example, contended that 'God' was only the product of "a sad and lonely mind". This is because people feared death and longed for meaning in life. It is thus natural that they would 'invent' the existence of God to console them. Feuerbach concluded that "God was the 'objectification' or 'projection' of human desires and longings on to some kind of imaginary heavenly screen". Karl Marx, building on this argument, attempted to eradicate the notion of God altogether, holding that humanity's bogus belief in God originated from their "socioeconomic alienation" – the injustices and iniquities inflicted by systems of capitalism. If this human alienation were to be eliminated, presumably through a communist revolution, the factors that predispose humans to believe in God and, ultimately, faith in God would also be eliminated. Another approach is taken by the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. For Freud, God is merely a "coping mechanism", used by people to acclimatise "themselves to the harshness of an essentially meaningless world". McGrath notes that these intellectual assaults on the idea of God "point inescapably to the conclusion that, since humanity created God, humanity *was* God [...] Having dethroned God ... humanity ... [is] in a position to ascend to the throne of nature ... No obstacles now remained to the mastery of nature".

future in nature, not the future of nature itself". In addition, it also evades the issue as to which humans are "most" important. "Who suffers the consequences of today's reduced resource use? How are the future benefits distributed? There is a real danger here of creating a royal 'we', one human and elitist." Such attitudes, argues Borrong (2005:74-75), evidently sees nature only in terms of the framework of human interests, especially material and economic concerns. Borrong makes reference to the views of such anthropocentric environmental ethicists and conservationists. John Passmore, for example, states that instead of environmental ethics, there should be a firm commitment to what is good for humankind. In his opinion, the degradation of the environment is felt by humans and not by nature itself. Correspondingly, Eugene Hargrove and Mark Sagoff believe that environmental ethics should be based on human interests, particularly aesthetic interests. Derived from humanity's perception and outlook, the aesthetical value, rather than the intrinsic value of nature serves of greater importance. Such viewpoints, Borrong argues, are adherents of shallow ecology, based on the following anthropocentric principles, among others, human images separated from that of nature; the rights of humans being prioritised over nature, without any emphasis on human responsibilities; the feelings of humans being classified the centre of their apprehensiveness; and natural resource policies and management designed to serve human interests. On the same topic, Rasmussen (1996:16-17) recalls the views of Vaclav Havel, who assumes the earth to be a community and attempts to comprehend humanity's present failures to live out that community:

To put the matter as bluntly as Havel does: the world of "modern anthropocentrism" is deeply, even fatally, flawed. The notions and institutions that issue from its ethics and spirituality, and depend upon them, must be set aside. A moral universe limited to the human universe will not, under present circumstances, even understand life, much less serve it.

It is indisputable that human anthropocentric attitudes have played a significant role in the demise of nature. Moreover, humans cause ecological devastation that not only harms their present historical moment, but also God's creative envisagement of the future (Hart 2004:82).

c) A biblical example of anthropocentrism: The man from the land of Uz

While humankind's anthropocentric ethic is (superficially) justified by the Scriptures, it only represents one side of the biblical view of nature. This is palpable in the story of Job, the man from the land of Uz. Scripture holds that there was "no one on earth like him; he [was]

blameless and upright, a man who fear[ed] God and shun[ned] evil” (Job 1:8). The prosperous and affluent Job “had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants” (Job 1:2-3). In a wink of an eye Job loses all of these possessions, as well as his servants and children, and to crown it all he is struck with an unbearable disease. Job earnestly questions God as to his quandary, yet through it all this man does “not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (Job 1:22). After God eventually answers him, however, Job’s reply is: “I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). This statement is clearly a confession of guilt, which proves that Job was admitting to sin on his part. But which kind of sin exactly?

A number of authors writing on the sublimity of creation in the story of Job,⁵⁰ in one way or another affirm this man’s ultimate sin – anthropocentrism. In support of this judgement, Wallace (1996:159-160) states that in Job’s rightful cry for justice he expects a logical, justifiable explanation for his plight. Instead of providing Job with a straightforward answer, however, God’s response is atypical – He situates Job within the diverse, full-of-life-forms setting of creation, starting with a counter-inquiry: “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? ... Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” (Job 38:2, 4). Hayden (1996:78-81) makes a similar deduction. He affirms that Job is guilty of assuming that his horrendous situation is the centre of God’s concern. After much lamenting with no consolation Job’s words are: “I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me” (Job 30:20). Job pauses, however, to listen to the voice of God in the storm, whose words encompass the co-dependent elements of creation: the winds, clouds, thunder, lightning, lions, antelopes, oxen, ostriches, horses, hawks, vultures, bulls and serpents. The voice accuses Job of not understanding and appreciating the complex functioning of the cosmos. God tells him to bow down and submit to the divine synergy of creation. Job does so in humility and obedience, surrenders to the power of the universe and is converted from an ego-centred to an eco-centred consciousness.

The lesson that God teaches Job here is powerful. Job is prompted to recapitulate his own membership of the wider biotic community, and is thereby reminded of his place in the great creation: Like the rest of humankind in their mortality, he is not superior to other forms of life

50 See, for example, Habel (2004); Rolston (1992); McKibben (1994); Brown (1999:317-380) and Wirzba (2003:41-47).

and neither the measure of all things. Job's agony, like that of other human beings, is not God's only concern – the whole creation in all its diversity is! Other creatures' needs and suffering equally deserve their Creator's attention. Moreover, God brings to mind the fact that the heavens, the lands and the seas, the plants and the animals are the first of His works. Even the meek hippopotamus that is often killed for blood sport precedes humankind in the hierarchy of the animal creation, and considering strength and fitness for the wild, Job, like the rest of humanity, are lower than the gangly hippo. God reminds Job that he is but *one of many* earthlings, having the same creaturely essence as other forms of life (Wallace 1996:160-161). Janson (1967:52-53) believes that the good creation is twisted by humanity's egocentric assumption that they are the centre of the universe and that everything in it only exists for their own purpose, and Job is no less guilty of this supposition. They are disgruntled with anything that is deemed to have no human advantage: "Useless" plants are termed "weeds" and are rooted out; "useless" animals are dubbed "beasts" and are killed only for their heads to be used as adornments or their skins as rugs. Owing to this, God lets creation's loveliest flowers bloom on the highest mountain peaks; he makes the most vibrant birds inhabit jungles and forests; God builds the most enchanting wonderlands in the depth of the oceans ... where no human eye discerns. In Chapter 39-40 God enlightens Job as to a number of animals that cannot be exploited for human benefit, and yet they also exist. In addition to these life-forms, there is also the matter of God's care for uninhabited landscapes, as McKibben (1989:76) asserts. Job does not understand why would someone cut "a channel for the torrents of the rain, and a path for the thunderstorms, to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass" (Job 38:25-27). Why would the Creator care for landscapes if they are of no use for humankind? Yet, as Celia Deane-Drummond (2008:27) states: "[T]he love of God for creation goes beyond simple usefulness for humankind". He is adamant in proclaiming that humans are not the focal point of His creation; He is pleased and content with empty places, even though there are no people. Such an awareness of nature is "a radical departure from [humanity's] most ingrained notions". Crenshaw (1992:70, 80-81) affirms this by stating that the Creator's voice, addressing Job, "shatter[s] ... every human illusion of occupying a special place in God's sight ... the anthropocentric presupposition of ancient sages. Human hubris bursts before this rapturous celebration of a universe in which [humans] play no role other than that of awestruck witness to grandeur and terror". The image of the wider earth community that God reveals before Job is thus a demolition of human pride. Similarly, Patrick (2001:110-111) states that God's first address (Job 38:1-40:2) "put[s] Job – and all of

humans – in their place”. In addition, it “envisages a created order independent of humans ... a world that has intrinsic worth apart from any human valuation”. God’s second address (Job 40:6-41:34) “warn[s] humans to recognize limits on their power to dominate and to control their destiny”. Hereby, “God disillusion[s] the human will-to-power” (Patrick 2001:114-115).

Wallace (1996:161) maintains that not only in the story of Job, but as early as in the first chapter of Genesis is the assignment of equal priority to all of creation apparent. Only after God formed everything else does he create mankind. Hereby, he refers to Paul Ricoeur’s exegesis of the creation story.⁵¹ Ricoeur views the Genesis story as a polyphonal “creation song”, encompassing a rich variation of themes and nuances that contributes to its *cosmological* orientation, which is never displaced by its *anthropological* counterpoint. Such an interpretation of Genesis conflicts with the historical approach of the neo-orthodox biblical theology, which holds that the creation of humankind is the apex of the creation story. Wallace (1996:162) further argues that while the order of creation is rearranged in the second chapter of the creation account, the designation of humans as biological creatures remains steady with the first chapter. Humans are earthlings formed from the dust of the ground who, like other creaturely beings, only receive life through the invigoration of the Spirit:

As with the inaugural creation hymn, the second creation narrative suspends humankind within a biological web of interconnected plants and animals – all of which is brought to life by the quickening breath of the Spirit.

d) Conclusion: Alternatives to anthropocentrism

Considering the previous exploration, Cafaro (2004:156) rightly maintains that anthropocentrism is not merely a faulty value system. It is a faulty way of understanding the world, a defect which “virtually demands reflection on human sinfulness” (Rasmussen 1999:19). Bookless (2008:17) believes that human beings need a change of worldview. He argues that people are not the only focus of God’s creative and saving love. Instead, God cares about His whole creation. Therefore, humans urgently need to acknowledge the profound truth that the earth and all its creatures are not merely the stage on which the human-God relationship is acted out – they are characters in the story themselves! Alternatives, perhaps a shift towards a more theocentric or even biocentric approach, are required, in which humanity demonstrates profound respect and appreciation for nature as an equal partner in God’s creation. McDaniel

⁵¹ In doing so, Wallace consults Paul Ricoeur’s exegesis of the creation narrative entitled, *Sur l’exégèse de Genèse 1,1-2,4a*, (1971).

(1989:52) argues that while some prefer a post-anthropocentric ethic to be theocentric rather than biocentric (life-centred), he would prefer the latter term. He does so not to deny God's importance, but to highlight the fact that God is on the side of life and ultimately concerned with the well-being of life. He believes that being life-centred implies respect for both life and the environment. Furthermore, biocentrism is an antidote for human-centeredness, which sees humans as the measure of everything and falsely believes that humans alone are worthy of moral concern. Nash (1991:186-189) proposes a "bill of biotic rights" in which he articulates the rights of "wild" otherkind, and in effect, human responsibilities to respect them. He claims that they have the right to take part in the natural competition for existence; satisfy their basic needs and perform their individual and/or ecosystemic functions; have healthy and whole habitats; reproduce their own kind; freely fulfil their evolutionary potential without human-induced extinctions; be free from human cruelty, abuse and frivolous use; through human intervention, restore a semblance of the natural conditions disordered by humans; and have their fair share of goods necessary for their sustainability. As Conradie (2006:58) suggests, such an ethic emphasises humanity's creaturehood and specific place within God's household, rather than a further elevation of humankind.

3.2.2 Domination in the name of differences of species

a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support

A second way in which the notion of sin may be redefined in ecological terms is as domination in the name of differences of species. Over the years, Christianity has been on the forefront of religiously supporting the idea that the world has been primarily created for the benefit of human beings (Conradie 2011:5). Much of this dominating attitude originates from the concepts of "subdue", "have dominion" and "image of God" expressed in Genesis 1:26-28. These scriptures are misinterpreted or used wrongly to exalt humanity above the rest of creation. As a result, Christianity has played a huge part in tolerating and even promoting the misuse of creation, thereby laying the foundation on which aggressive exploitation and unsustainable living is built (Bookless 2008:149).

The concept of dominion as referred to in the creation narrative has widely been interpreted as domination (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:21). Such a sense of dominion has, according to Nash (1991:79), "become isolated from the moderating and controlling influences of the whole corpus of Christian thought, and served as a license with extreme prejudice. The practices under the rubric of dominion [are] alien to the biblical and most

traditional understandings of the concept. Instead of trusteeship and benevolence ... dominion became a rationale for exploitation. Whatever else this dynamic might illustrate, it shows clearly the ... distortion of religious values for social goals". McHarg (1969:26) therefore rightfully believes that "if one seeks license for those who would increase radioactivity, create canals and harbours with atomic bombs, employ poisons without constraint, or give consent to the bulldozer mentality, there could be no better injunction than" the creation story's proclamation of human dominion and subjugation of nature.

Wilkinson (1991:289-90) offers a list of examples of how the entire biblical and even church history has been interpreted as an extensive lesson in how human beings ought to use their ability to manipulate, dominate and rule over the earth. In a striking example, he refers to Genesis 3:17-19, the "curse on nature". Wilkinson argues that this text has often been appealed to as a validation of the exploitative measures taken by humans toward the natural environment. It is usually read in a way suggesting that "thorns and thistles" – weeds or plants which "get in the way" – are not a part of the good creation, but a consequence of human sin. The very ruggedness of the earth, a burden to humans who try to move about, is seen as a result of the fall. In actual fact, however, there exist only a few plants that are not regarded as weeds. The same hold true for animals, hills and even valleys, in reality, most things in creation! Wilkinson asserts that the curse does not describe a quality of the earth itself, but human misuse of dominion. The ground is cursed because humans are set against it. *Adamah*, translated as ground, suggests that the curse pronounced on *Adam* actually describes a division within himself – his inability to be at harmony with the earth. "Cursed is the ground *to you*" would therefore be a more accurate reading of the Hebrew text.

Cooper (1990:41) believes that the Christian tradition almost solely emphasises the well-being of humanity, thereby creating the idea that the rest of creation has no other purpose but to serve humankind. Thereby, it is believed that the earth and everything in it simply exist for human enjoyment (Bookless 2008:149, 147). Because of the Christian thinking that humanity is nature's supreme master, people tend to think that they can do whatever they wish to other creatures and the earth's resources (Conradie 2011:6). Although there is very often a focus on the liberation of human beings from oppression by other human beings, there is no attention given to the liberation of nature's other beings from human exploitation. An example of this is some contemporary liberation theologies (McDaniel 1989:53; King & Woodyard 1999:11). "It is [therefore] not hard to find quotations from preachers saying that the world is there for us to use and enjoy as we like. Too often churches have remained silent when the forces of

destruction have been at work” (Boookless 2008:34).

b) The impact of major world developments

Over the years, the relationship of humanity with the rest of creation has changed in relation to the various stages of civilisation of the former. Toffler (1980) holds that these changes are based on the evolution of technical skills, which he believes comprises three distinct movements: The agricultural-, industrial- and technological age. On the other hand, Miller (1987:62-65) is of the opinion that the humanity-nature relationship developed according to people’s economy and culture patterns during certain periods, economy implying rules in place to achieve the set goals. Rasmussen (1996) makes a similar deduction and thereby observes four world revolutions: Agricultural, industrial, informational and ecological⁵². Whichever basis is used, it is clear that these major world developments significantly influenced humankind’s attitude towards the rest of creation. It is widely agreed that agriculture and science and technology mostly contributed to human domination, manipulation and exploitation of the earth, which will be discussed in the following section.⁵³

(i) Agricultural civilisations

The development of agriculture might be considerably beneficial to human beings, yet it has detrimental effects on the rest of creation. Hunter-gatherer societies are somehow responsible for hunting a number of species to extinction, and at times their fires led to the degradation of landscapes, but on the whole they functioned less as degraders of the biosphere and more as an integral part of it (Cobb 1994:1). Their way of life was typified by stability instead of constant change in culture and technology (Leakey 1981:200). In addition, their ways encompassed a certain innocence that modernity lacks (McDaniel 1995:123), as they were living proof that at one time it was possible for humans too to function harmoniously in an ecosystem without deliberate manipulation. “But that is no longer an alternative for most of us” (Wilkinson 1991:25).

Agriculture, a revolutionary human discovery, occurred approximately fifteen thousand years

⁵² The ecological revolution is what we have now entered – becoming ecologically conscious and recognising that we need to prioritise the welfare of the whole earth community, not only that of humans.

⁵³ Although industrialisation is production by machines by means of technology – and therefore also a contributing factor to the domination and exploitation of the earth – in my opinion, the principles of industrialisation are most profit-orientated and thus have enormous potential to arouse human greed. As such, it will be discussed as a determinant of consumerist greed.

ago. By 2000 B.C.E., all major crops and animals belonging to the present agricultural system had been domesticated (Ponting 1991:52). Cobb (1994:1) believes that this is where systematic degradation of creation began. Along with this development, humans started to expand their knowledge about the secrets of nature and increasingly tried to control and subjugate nature. McDaniel (1995:123) makes a very interesting remark in this regard. Because of its heightened ecological domination as distinguishing feature, he refers to the emergence of agriculture-based civilisations as a “Fall” – not a singular event, but something which occurred over many years, all over the world.⁵⁴ As these civilisations emerged, human beings started to modify animal and plant species, breeding and cultivating them for human purposes; manage soil, land, water and mineral supplies; use animal energy in supplementing human energy: in simple terms, they “became lords of the planet ... gain[ing] increased dominion over other animals and [their] bioregions”. The relation between humanity and the rest of creation became a distorted relation. In utilising nature for their own welfare, humans altered the previous harmonious relationship into a subject-object relationship – humans being the subject and nature the object. They no longer acknowledged the importance of balance with nature, but rather looked down upon the latter as a “facility” and not as their equal (Borrong 2005:47).

For thousands of years, humans have been living in tension with their supporting ecosystems. They have been able to manipulate the natural environment to an extent that no other animal has. In replacing natural systems with agricultural systems, humans have shown little concern for stability, longevity and sustainability. Well-functioning ecosystems were converted into dust bowls and cesspools (Wilkinson 1991:25, 27). Animals are now bred for attributes useful and convenient to human beings, yet contrary to intelligence and adaptability. Unlike wild animals, domesticated animals graze in ways that are harmful to the landscape. Some of the world’s greatest deserts are evidence of their ability – obviously under human control and support – to destroy the biosphere (Cobb 1994:1-2).

McGrath (2002:80-81) maintains that humanity refuse to accept the divine limits relating to the natural environment as ordained by God, requiring to leave the land fallow as a period of sabbatical rest.⁵⁵ Instead, through using aggressive agricultural practices, humankind has

⁵⁴ He bases this contention on arguments drawn from Wes Jackson (1987), John Cobb, Jr (1991) and J. Baird Callicott (1991).

⁵⁵ In both Exodus 23:10-11 and Leviticus 25:1-7, the divine instruction to sow and reap for six years, and to let the land rest and lie fallow every seventh year is found.

continuously endeavoured to change and dominate nature through exploration and exploitation (Borrong 2005:47). Cobb (1994:2) and McDaniel (1995:124) highlight but a few of the destructive effects this had on the created order. The domestication of plants led to the loss of once-fertile lands; the breaking up of soil for planting resulted in erosion; where trees were cleared to make room for agriculture the soil often turned to rock; deforestation, which also caused river pollution, is evidence of just how heavy demands on forests were; farming, fields and settlements brought about displacement of animal habitats at alarming rates; and food stability generated a dramatic increase in human populations.

McDaniel (1995:123) states that although agricultural civilisations ensure endless goods that humans rightly cherish, it also created many evils, including a loss of ecological innocence. He further holds that history books do not express the emergence of agricultural civilisations as a Fall, but instead refer to it as an advance of humankind, “celebrat[ing] the tremendous creativity involved in spinning and weaving, brick-making and mortaring, mining and smelting, law and religion, in urban life itself”. Modern human beings believe that they have transcended the hunters and gatherers, whom are now imagined as “primitives”. Wilkinson (1991:25) asserts that while human beings may once have been simply a part of the biosphere, and although they still depend on it, they are capable of modifying it drastically, to their own benefit. Cobb (1994:2) believes that in the past, most of these changes were gradual and largely unplanned; now they are rapid, in many cases under human control. In recent years, sustainable agriculture emerged as a means of combating deteriorating ecosystems. Yet, for the most part, agriculture continues to operate, to a large extent, on principles different from those of the rest of the biosphere, and as such, remains a non-sustainable practice (Wilkinson 1991:32).

(ii) Science and technology

There is no uncertainty as to the magnitude of benefits implicit in modern science and technology, developments which continue to shape all forms of existence. Snyder (1995:29-35) raises the question of what the world will be like by 2030. In response, he offers a number of possibilities, including on science and technology – most of which have already materialised at present. This just about proves how powerful the development of science and technology had been over the last two decades. Snyder (1995:30) argues however: “Will these developments really advance our health, happiness, and sense of purpose, or the welfare of the Earth? Not necessarily ... But they gradually will change our perceptions of life and

meaning”. Indeed it has. Regardless of its immense advantages, science and technology have played a substantial role in the ecological crisis at hand. Yet, environmental damage is not the product of science and technology *per se*, but rather the result of human beings who have created and manipulated these innovations to exploit the earth and its resources (Borrong 2005:17). Modern science is an extrapolation of medieval natural theology, and industrial science is a manifestation of the Christian notion of human mastery of nature (Conradie 2011:5).

McGrath (2002:78-79, 83-84 & 95) holds that the rise of technology is seen as a tool, allowing human beings to control and shape their environment, without respecting natural limits. In addition, the development of natural sciences creates an increasing understanding of nature, directly leading to new ways of ways of mastering and exploiting nature. As a result of this, many Enlightenment thinkers were captivated by the theme of the “limitless power” of the natural sciences. McGrath ponders whether science and technology enabled humanity to break free from their ordained place in nature and become like God, having the ability to change the face of the earth by imposing their own authority upon nature and redirecting it for human ends. On this issue, Conradie (2005b:88) comments that while other animals interact with the world as it is, human beings are constantly driven to adjust to create their world, using technology as a tool to accomplish this. Humans perceive nature as a “flawed starting point”, something in need of development and modification through technological innovation (McGrath 2002:76). It is therefore clear that the scientific and technological realm is permeated with human sinfulness. Snyder (1995:35) maintains that the fundamental principle of the technological society is: “Whatever is technically possible should be done”. Some of its slogans include, “You can’t hold back science”, or “You can’t stop progress”. Snyder further states that technology can build its own worldview. It gives birth to its own values – a “technological morality” – bringing human behaviour into harmony with the technological world in order to set up new values and virtues in terms of technology. Such a morality is dubious, however, because it is concerned with means, not with ends; with technological necessity, not personal relationships, in the least not with personal relationships with the *earth*. John Mustol (2012:6) states that: “We live almost all our lives within our constructed human environments of electronics, plastic, steel, glass and concrete, isolating ourselves from God’s natural world. We have used our wealth and technology to exclude nature from our lives and from our consciousness and so have lost touch with it.”

Having said all this, humans could not continue to dominate and exploit nature without a

cost. Over the years, nature started to illustrate its relentless power over humanity more and more. With reference to this, Duchrow and Liedke (1987:66) testify that for as long as human beings existed, nature has been both threatening and frightening. Santmire (1985:77) cites an interesting passage by the ninth-century writer, Sedilius Scotus, who paints this picture of an untamed nature:

White squalls from the north, amazing to behold
Scare us with sudden gusts and threats of cold.
Earth itself shakes, fearing to be so blown,
Old ocean mutters, and the hard rocks groan.
The unruly north wind hollows the vast air,
Its hoarse voice whines here, now bellows there,
Stray milk white fleeces thicken into cloud,
The faded earth puts on a snow shroud.

Even to this very day, humans have reason to defend themselves against nature for the sake of maintaining human life. Human beings now endeavour to subdue and rule, not only because of their drive to possess, but also because they are worried and afraid of nature, and ultimately uncertain about their future. To overcome these limitations and to retain their ambition to rule, humanity persistently put into service “forces of disintegration into the body of creation” through science and technology (Limouris 1990:5). Moltmann (1988:91) makes the following statement in this regard: “The modern science provides the knowledge that enables us to subject nature. The basic value of modern society which has produced this science and technology is the will to power, progress in accumulating power and the safe guarding of power. Science and technology may therefore be justifiably seen as the deepest core of ecological oppression and exploitation”. In the process, we humans have become, as Heidegger (1969:3) affirms, unaware of the things that condition our sense of being and sense of self.

Duchrow and Liedke (1987:65-67) conclude that the scientific and technological basis of modernity’s lifestyle rests on the basic premise of violence against nature, driven by the desire for power over nature. Power – the ability to do what one wants to do – is the precondition for violence – the manifestation of power. In addition, violence is often only achieved by using force. They are confident that the founders of modern science and technology, for example René Descartes and Francis Bacon, were from the beginning reasonably aware of the power and violence involved in these developments. To illustrate this

argument, they refer to Francis Bacon's *Novum organum* (1620), in which he distinguishes three levels in the human pursuit of power and violence: The first level is the advance of power domestically; the second level is to extend prestige and power among other nations; and the highest level is power and dominion of the human race over the entire world of nature. Science and technology have therefore made human seizure of power over nature possible. Yet, through modern division of labour humans have distanced themselves from the idea of violence against nature:

Who thinks of the violence of the abattoir when there is a schnitzel in his plate?
Who can judge how much power pushing a button can release when in the clean white room of a power station? Who understands clearly that the pressure on a car accelerator is an example of violence against nature? (Duuchrow & Liedke 1987:66).

In recent times, as ecological consciousness started to increase, the adverse effects of science and technology on the environment have come under the spotlight, which humans now attempt to “combat” and “mitigate” through scientific management⁵⁶. Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:19), however, argue that scientific management is but a veil for hierarchical attitudes – an ideology that disguises and validates domination. At worst, it sees nature in an anthropocentric way as a resource that may rightly be exploited by superior human beings, with devastating effects: Climate change, extinguished species, pollution, soil erosion, ozone depletion and deforestation. Being human products, science and technology seem to have become humanity's masters. Yet, it “did not just ‘happen’”. For many ... [it] represents the outcome of a purposeful and sustained human quest, fuelled by a self-centred ethic, for the means necessary to achieve the goal of the domination of nature” (McGrath 2002:54).

c) Domination in the name of differences of species as ecological sin

Human domination of the earth and its creatures is based on the misconception of humans as the “crown of creation” (Daneel 1998:262), the highest form of life. “The problem is that the integratedness of ... ‘higher’ forms of life within the ecological ... systems from within which they emerged, is obscured” (Conradie 2005b:117). In the modern scientific worldview for example – as René Descartes puts it – humans render themselves the masters and possessors

⁵⁶ “Scientific management” is an attractive perspective critical to science and technology that encourages the use of natural resources whereby it is managed in way that also ensures its conservation for future generations (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:19).

of nature, while Francis Bacon asserts that science makes humanity's power and dominion over the universe possible (Northcott 1996:65). Ever since the birth of hunting and agriculture, humans have continually been on a mission to change the earth's natural systems, reshaping soil, water, air, plants and animals according to their preferences (Ruether 1994:5), as Deane-Drummond (2000:219) suggests, nature is seen "as a vast store of energy, a 'Standing Reserve' to be tapped at our own convenience".⁵⁷ Humans are reluctant to serve, but use everything to be served (Borrong 2005:154). Wirzba (2003:136) believes that the turning away from or rejection of God, like when the gifts of creation are organised primarily to serve human ends, is a turning away from or rejection of life itself. According to Rasmussen (1996:276), humans "abuse power in hubris ... fail[ing] to be the kind of earth creatures [they] ought to be". While the advantages for humanity's well-being, for example improved disease control, better nutrition and greater mobility, have been significant over the last few centuries, these human benefits legitimated manipulation as long as the supposed side-effects were ignored. Yet, in the present context the side-effects have become main-effects. Stronger term such as "domination" and "exploitation" substituted more neutral words like "control" and "manipulation", accentuating what was previously ignored (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:21). McGrath (2002:53) suggests that the Western culture is notorious for its pervasive tendency that "explicitly sees its mission as to 'go forth and dominate nature!'... [and a belief holding] that human liberation and fulfilment come about through the domination of the natural world".

Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:21) suggest that while anthropocentric, hierarchical and dualistic attitudes toward nature are primary sources of human domination of the earth and its resources, the desire to dominate also stems from uncertainties and anxieties about scarce resources and death. In the process, constructions of evil are falsely renamed in ways that reinforce dominating relations with and the negation of the earth, for example as "physical and social otherness" (Ruether 1994:116). Conradie (2005b:117) likewise states that: "Such domination becomes possible on the basis of the kind of relationships which develop between that which has been differentiated from one another". Subsequently, "[e]cological devastation is the product of [such] domination and exploitation in the name of difference". McGrath (2002:79-80, 82) also comments on such distorted relationships, which he believes develops between fellow humans, between humans and God and between humans and the rest of creation. In terms of the last-mentioned, humans develop a "longing for empowerment",

⁵⁷ With reference to the view of Heidegger (1969).

which includes the desire to dominate nature.⁵⁸ This longing, according to McGrath, is about human sin in the sense of refusing to accept divinely established limits, something not sanctioned by God. The repercussions of this human sinfulness are manifested in every aspect of human existence, including the vitally important relation to the rest of creation. “[H]umanity [longs] to break free from its ordained place in nature and become like God, able to change the face of nature ... Sin represent[s] a refusal on the part of humanity to accept that there [is] a natural order of things which [limit] their freedom.”⁵⁹ Northcott (1996:50) notes a similar deduction, holding that the harmonious bond between humanity and nature is broken by natural resource demands not balanced by an awareness of the limitations of lands, rivers and climate, or respect for other species. As such, the consequent disunion of human social structures from the needs and limits of creation, as well as a loss of awareness of the relationality between humans and nature, are central features of modern abuses of nature, which may be connected to a more general demise of virtue in human-nature relations in modern urbanised societies.

The notion that the world has been created primarily for human purposes thus legitimised the “remaking of nature”. Out of fear, humans endeavour to order, domesticate and redesign “wild and untamed nature” for their own benefit (Northcott 1996:47). Rasmussen (1996:101) notes that the primary law of nature is to accept its divinely ordained limits, something that humans have always transgressed. In modern times, however, the transgression and consequences have dramatically escalated as nature has been altered in dangerous and startling ways. Conradie (2005b:203) states that because human beings are created in God’s image, they assume it is their calling to control the forces of nature, using and “developing” the earth’s resources as they deem fit, evident in humanity’s mastery and control of nature. Although humans have been able to control nature, for example through nuclear power, they

⁵⁸ At this instance, McGrath (2002:82-83) makes reference to the Faustian myth, which resonates with humans who long for power over nature. Legend holds that Faust yearned to dominate both his fellow human beings and nature. The question is, how did he gain access to the power that allowed this to happen? Faust finds that the only solution is to enter into a pact with the devil. He is thereby given the key to unlock the door to forbidden powers and knowledge never intended for humans to possess. Given the technological advances of the last century, McGrath states that there can be “found no shortage of individuals, corporations and governments who were more than willing to sign up to this Faustian pact”.

⁵⁹ McGrath (2002:79) believes that the building of the Tower of Babel represents such an act of human defiance of God’s authority and the longing to share God’s power and privileges. “It is in the birth of this mind-set that the true roots of our ecological crisis lie.”

have been unable to control themselves.⁶⁰ McGrath (2002:58) cites an excerpt from Winwood Reade's influential thesis, *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872), which emphasises the power that humankind can hold by ascertaining "nature's laws":

When we have ascertained, by means of science, the methods of Nature's operation, we shall be able to take her place to perform them ourselves ... men will master the forces of Nature; they will become themselves architects of systems, manufacturers of worlds. Man will then be perfect; he will then be a creator; he will therefore be what the vulgar worship as a god.

Northcott (1996:57) states that humanity's hunger for power as manifested in the beliefs of the "rational ordering" of creation and the predictability of nature's laws inspired the investigation into the natural order's regularities and fundamental causative and motive structures. This "experimental method", however, rests on the idea that creation "is governed by accident and contingency rather than divine reason and purposiveness", and is therefore not in conformity with a view of creation as rationally ordered by God.⁶¹ The order of the material world is then best explained in terms of "accidents and movements of atoms", and God becomes superfluous to the material world's order. Ultimately, the world "becomes 'open' to investigation by the alchemist and the scientist whose vocation is to transform this accidental world into a world more truly at the service of human need and human desire". An example of this is the reality that modern scientists merely regard the moon as a physical object exercising gravity on the tides, winds and motion of the earth, as opposed to a heavenly body affecting the destiny of earthly life or the emotional cycles of the human psyche. If the moon were to be blown up, an American mathematician suggests, humans could alter season patterns and enrich the planet's fertility (Northcott 1996:57, 59). King and Woodyard (1999:17) believe that humanity's willpower to discover the "laws of nature" is malignant, as it is a precondition for the domination of nature. The notion that "knowledge is power" drives humans toward the goal of making nature work for them. Nature is perceived as merely an object over which human subjects seek and exercise control, and thereby the former's "rights" are not place on par with the "rights" of the latter. Steven Vogel articulates this as follows:

Disenchanted and objectified nature, appearing now in the guise of meaningless

⁶⁰ With reference to the view of Berkhof (1963:8).

⁶¹ With reference to the views of Blumenberg (1983).

matter, is seen ... as something to be overcome and mastered for human purposes, and not to be imitated, propitiated, or religiously celebrated (quoted in McGrath 2002:54).⁶²

When a species maximises itself at the cost of exploiting other beings, the creative life force has become evil (Hart 2004:72), and subsequently, when other species are driven to extinction, “[m]any pages of the book of life are being ripped out before we have even a chance to read them” (Ruether 1994:101). Deane-Drummond (2008:17) defines such suffering experienced in the nonhuman world as a result of human deeds as “anthropogenic evils”. Delio (2008:78) poses three questions that illuminate the sinfulness of these anthropogenic evils: “What does the biodiversity crisis say about us as humans and our understanding of God as Creator? How can we humans, as one kind of creature, push so many creatures of God to extinction? Why are we as species unravelling the integrity of creation?” Ruether (1994:141-142) believes that the central core of sin is the misuse of freedom to exploit, among others, the earth, and consequently to violate the fundamental life-sustaining relations. The life of the exploited is diminished when one part of the life community exalts itself at the expense of other life-forms. Ruether further explicitly identifies the link between sin and human domination of the earth. In her opinion, sin “lies in the insistent perseverance in the resultant cycle of violence, the refusal to empathize with the victimized underside of such power, and the erection of systems of control and cultures of deceit to maintain and justify such unjust power”. The domination and exploitation of the earth have thus become a spiritual disease. Wallace (2005:30) makes reference to the term “ecocide”, “a habit of life and thought that makes war against earth community”. Ecocide, he notes, is deeply embedded – similar to alcoholism – in addictive behaviours and attitudes that weaken the health and well-being of human beings, making them unable to break free. Wallace believes that ecocide’s spiritual roots are evident in humanity’s inclined rush to be destructive in their attitudes toward nature:

[O]ur predisposition toward environmental abuse is an instance of the “bondage of the will”, in which we find ourselves unable to stop behaviour that we know to be self-destructive. Why else would the human community push itself further and further toward certain environmental catastrophe – global warming, irreversible ozone depletion, massive deforestation, chronic loss of arable land, daily

⁶² See Vogel (1996) for a detailed discussion on the Enlightenment’s “disenchantment” of nature.

extinction of numerous species – unless it were addicted to toxic attitudes and habits from which it can no longer escape?

Human domination and exploitation of the earth and its creatures proves that “humans ... can commit not only homicide and ethnocide, but biocide and geocide as well (Boff 1997:xi).

Winwood Reade sums it up as follows:

[A]s time passed on, [Man] ventured to rebel; he made stone his servant; he discovered fire and vegetable poison; he domesticated iron; he slew the wild beasts or subdued them ... The river which once he had worshipped as a god ... he now conquered to his will (quoted in McGrath 2002:58).

According to McDaniel (1995:38), humanity’s disregard for nature’s constraints and possibilities amounts to “the murder of Creation”. Becker (1992:161) adds that millions of our fellow creatures and species which are also, like us, creatures of God and spiritual beings, have suffered and have been extinguished because of our anti-ecological behaviour. “We wear an ecological mark of Cain. The death and loss we have caused staggers the imagination”. Humanity is therefore heavily burdened with responsibility and guilt. Becker notes that humans will have to suffer the “spiritual nausea” of grief, sorrow and repentance, as expressed in this adapted version of Psalm 23 by a Vietnam veteran:

Yea as I walk through the valley of death
I shall fear no evil
For the valleys are gone
And only death awaits
And I am the evil.

Harlow (1985) is therefore justified in saying: “There is no music, no worship, no love, when we take the world’s wonders for granted.”

d) Double domination: An ecofeminist perspective

A special point of interest deserving consideration under the subject of human exploitation of the earth is an ecofeminist perspective on domination in the name of differences of species.⁶³ Ecofeminism, a distinct approach to ecological discourse, stems from an awareness of “women’s potential for bringing about an ecological revolution”, seeking to expose “the logic

⁶³ For additional reading on ecofeminism see, for example, Deane-Drummond (2000); Diamond and Orenstein (1990); Plant (1989); Eaton and Lorentzen (2003) and Gray (1981).

of domination” and undoing the damage caused by “the twin dominations of women and nature” (Karen Warren, quoted in Smith 1997:19). It thereby reveals the close connections between patriarchy in gender relations and anthropocentric instrumentalism in ecological relations – between the devaluation of women and the devaluation of nature (Nash 1991:219) – and aims to reveal the interlocking dualisms⁶⁴ associated with patriarchal Western cultures and knowledge systems.⁶⁵ These dualisms, which have been used for the sake of domination and exploitation of both women and nature, are personified by means of nature being associated with female connotation, such as “mother earth” or “virgin forests”. Elizabeth Gray (1981) refers to this as the “feminizing of nature”. In general, ecofeminism suggests that domination in the name of gender and domination in the name of species mutually reinforce one another (Conradie 2011:54 & 56).

As systems of patriarchy legitimate the domination of women by men, so an environmentally destructive culture sanctions human supremacy in the earth community (Conradie 2011:56). Thus, in general, ecofeminists understand the source of ecological destruction not merely as anthropocentrism, but rather as androcentrism, “the predominance of the masculine and macho, in societal construction and norm-making” (Smith 1997:20). Ruether (1994:3) states that the classic Western cultures, of which Christianity is a major expression, have validated and sacralised this double domination. The domination of women has presented a crucial link to the domination of the earth, for this reason the inclination in patriarchal cultures to link women with earth, matter and nature, and males with sky, intellect and transcendent spirit, the former commonly seen as “inferior”. Yet, from a feminist perspective, women’s oneness with the earth is seen quite differently, as Ivone Gebara (1994:208-209) exclaims: “I feel such a great passion for the world! ... [I]t strengthens me to see myself as a part of this earth, neither more nor less, but part of it. I am seed, daughter, fruit, earth. This earth is my soul and my body”. Nevertheless, it is alleged that in these Western male-dominated cultures, males fear the dark, fertile intuitive powers of the cosmos and hence, the fear is manifested in patriarchal attempts to control both women and nature (Daneel 1999:141).

⁶⁴ For example, heaven and earth, spirit and matter, sacred and secular, soul and body, humanity and nature, male and female, and culture and nature. These dualisms are dealt with in greater detail in what follows, in considering its impact on the alienation of humans from the earth community.

⁶⁵ Bouma-Prediger (1995:25) notes that Rosemary Radford Ruether was one of the first contemporary thinkers to articulate this double domination connection – androcentrism (domination of women) and anthropocentrism (domination of nature) – the earliest reference in her work on this subject being 1971.

Gebara (1999:27-28) also observes the link between the domination of women and the domination of nature. She believes that the same way in which women's bodies are used as a means of sowing terror, in the same way that they are brutally raped and beaten and left forgotten, so nature is also conquered, forced into subordination and destroyed. The reason for this, Gebara adds, is because the interdependence of all life systems is not acknowledged, although it is present everywhere. Feminist Anne Primavesi (1991:48) makes the following statement in this regard: "Patterns of domination have become 'natural' to the human male, and are now certainly part of our common culture. Since they have been allied with advanced technologies, they may well contribute to the extinction of our species. That fact too would be 'natural'". Primavesi (1991:61-62) adds that the development of Western culture has attributed two distinct images to nature. Both, identified with femininity, are projections of male perceptions on to the external world. In the first instance, the earth is identified with a nurturing mother, a kind, benevolent woman who provides for the needs of humankind in an ordered, planned universe. It carries with it a value system of subtle ethical controls and restraints, operating as restrictions, for instance against the contamination of rivers – the mother's veins. Primavesi makes reference to a poem contained in one of Carolyn Merchant's works⁶⁶, entitled *The Faerie Queen*, in which mining is described as an act of human lust, "the basest of all sins for it treats its mother, earth, as a passive receptor of human rape in the rush to mine gold from her womb". In the second, opposing image, nature is seen as wild and uncontrollable, having the ability to bring about chaos through violence, storms, droughts, etc. Nature as disorder thereby evokes power over and control over it. She states that Merchant shows how the scientific revolution has made this the focal point of modernity. A participating view based on female principles in the earth, honouring its nurturing power, was reduced to a mechanically oriented approach that either abolished or used female principles in an exploitative manner. In simple terms, the "female earth and virgin earth spirit were to be subdued by the machine" – such attitudes of control culturally sanctioning the devaluation of nature.

Ecofeminists, apart from identifying the connection between the earth and women, hold that the earth is also associated with other forms of the oppressed, such as "blacks" and the poor. These are characterised by terms such as "environmental racism" and "environmental classism". American feminist Alice Walker writes: "Some of us have become used to thinking that a woman is the nigger of the world, that a person of colour is the nigger of the

⁶⁶ See Merchant (1982).

world, that a poor person is the nigger of the world ... but, in truth, Earth itself has become the nigger of the world” (1988:147). In the same way, Sallie McFague (1993:165) maintains that the “new poor” is nature itself. Ecofeminists subsequently contend that notions related to justice such as “solidarity with the victims” and “liberation for the poor, oppressed, and marginalised” must embrace concern for the most vulnerable and endangered constituent of creation – animals, plants, insects, the soil and micro-organisms (Conradie 2011:57).

e) Conclusion: Alternatives to domination in the name of differences of species

Human beings do not own creation, and as such, are not free to do with the earth as they please. Mustol (2013:6) believes that as human beings we overstress the natural environment’s capacity to support us. Therefore, a serious shift away from sinful manipulative, dominating and exploitative attitudes towards egalitarian, cooperating approaches is desperately required. In terms of realistic alternatives, humanity’s heritage should relish a language of critique of violence against the earth and foster possibilities of healing and wholeness. Humans must exist within nature in a life-sustaining way (Ruether 1994:12, 86). Conradie (2006:77-78), for example, holds that an ecological reinterpretation of the mandate of dominion in Genesis calls humans to fulfil their roles of stewards, guardians, gardeners, priests, custodians and caretakers, caring, protecting, nurturing, gardening, cultivating and serving the earth. He states that we can only learn to rule the earth “if we rule over our own ruling”. Proper care for the whole of creation thus necessitates the wise using of resources, sound management, reliability, commitment, dedication, hard work, as well as responsibility towards God as owner of creation. Yet, in the process of countering domination, there should also be an appeal to Genesis 2:15 that speaks about “tiling and keeping”, to the sabbatical rest for the land (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:22). From a feminist perspective, Smith (1997:25), referring to Ruether’s *Gaia and God*, suggests an:

Eschewing of systems of “domination” and the retrieval of “sacramental” sense of the universe. The perception of the Earth as Gaia⁶⁷, a living, energetic, creative system – indeed, an all-embracing organism ... and the perception of Gaia as “matrix of life” can be formative ... of a spirituality ... of the merging of “small selves” and the “surrender” of self which Earth-healing requires.

Delio (2008:78-79), who shares the ecological wisdom of St. Francis of Assisi,⁶⁸ believes that

⁶⁷ Named after the goddess of the earth, Gaia, in Greek mythology.

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive reading on this topic, see Delio (2008).

humans have much to learn from the patron saint of ecology, and calls for greater awareness of human choices that harm the earth and its creatures, be it individual or social. The example set by St. Francis, who strongly opposed domination, but sought to live as co-creature, reminds us of our essential creaturehood – our identity as human beings, members and co-participants in creation. For too long has modern society placed special emphasis on human privileges; we now have to simplify our lives and lessen our use of resources.

3.2.3 Consumerist greed

a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support

Christianity's anthropocentric, dualistic, otherworldly, hierarchical worldview is probably the root cause of ecological destruction, leaving nature as "other" and as a result, completely exposed to human greed (Nash 1989:91). Various biblical texts, for example John 10:10⁶⁹, 2 Corinthians 8:9⁷⁰ and 2 Corinthians 9:10-11⁷¹, have been misused in the Christian tradition as justification for unbridled consumerism. Wachtel (1989:62) maintains that this ecological destructiveness appears logical and attractive because human beings have socialised themselves to see economic well-being, which necessitates ever-increasing economic growth – the primary symbol and attestation of personal and social success, worthiness, identity, and meaning.

Nash (1991:71), referring to Lynn White's *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, argues that people continue to live in a context of "Christian axioms", for instance "perpetual progress", contrary to White's opinion, is commonly regarded by Christian theologians as a heresy. Yet "prosperity teaching" is a common phenomenon in Christian teaching that is built on the idea that God will grant the faithful's wishes, in particular those wishes that involve material wealth. Usually supported with numerous "proof texts", together with an emphasis on faith, prosperity gospel has become a believable theology. John Garfield (2010), one of these teachers, makes the following statement in one of his articles:

⁶⁹ "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (NKJV).

⁷⁰ "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

⁷¹ "Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

God has given every believer the ability to have life, and life more abundantly. He gives us talents and opportunities to exploit. Our stewardship of those opportunities and ideas is a key ingredient of faith that creates wealth. I have to believe that wealth is a possibility for me. If I know that learning to multiply money is part of God's plan for me, I will watch for the opportunities.

Rooted in charismatic American Protestant Christianity, it is not limited to affluent countries like America, but is also prevalent in much of Africa. In addition, prosperity teaching has led to the commercialisation of religion itself,⁷² especially through religious products being sold, for example gospel books, magazines, music and videos. In this situation, religious products become valuable commodities that allow for lucrative business opportunities (Conradie 2009:64).

Haught (1993:84) states that the Catholic priest and notable environmental thinker, Thomas Berry, charges prophetic religion with unleashing a utopian dream of "progress" destructive of nature. Berry is of the opinion that this dream lies behind policies of limitless economic growth, which prove to have ecologically disastrous consequences, Christianity being no less guilty. For example, a few decades ago American Episcopal Bishop William Lawrence made this declaration: "[G]odliness is in league with riches...that man, when he is strong, conquers Nature ... [and] it is only to the man of morality that wealth comes" (quoted in Birch & Rasmussen 1978:53). In Becker's view, human beings hence do this ecological evil because they believe it to be spiritually good. Looking at it from a carefully constructed social and economic perspective, they essentially find spiritual meaning and satisfaction in it. In other words, having an abundance of material possessions is their symbol of being "number one" and blessed by God (1992:153).

b) The impact of industrialisation

Modern industrial society achieved material abundance on a scale never experienced before (Birch & Rasmussen 1978:20). The discovery of the steam engine in the eighteenth century was probably the point of departure for modern industry, characterised by the mechanisation of instruments and utensils using mechanical energy (Childress & Macquerrie 1986:615). As scientific and technological innovations evolved over time, manual production of goods was gradually being superseded by the production by machines using technology. The money

⁷² For a more detailed discussion on the commercialisation of Christianity, and the commodification of churches and Christian practices see Conradie (2009:63-69).

economy already emerged in the sixteenth century, yet it was not until the mobilisation of technology through industrialisation that the economic system started to radically impact upon the natural environment (Northcott 1996:56). Nürnberger (1999:4) confers the idea that the three hundred years between the mid-eighteenth and mid-twenty-first century “will go into history as the passing episode of industrialisation, where humankind multiplied recklessly, indulged in a giant shopping spree, squandered key resources and plunged coming generations back into misery”.

Birch and Rasmussen (1978:20) outline the prospects that this new wave of technology had at its onset: Nature could be tamed and controlled; in the process society could be managed in the interest of material abundance and enjoyment; social problems would be a thing of the past; and above all, long-standing barriers to material progress would be overthrown. Human greed then got the upper hand. People became aware of the power they could possess through controlling and using natural resources on a large scale for increased profits and economic growth. Nature were evaluated in terms of its “economic” potential or “commodity” value and exploited far beyond the limits of need and fairness. While accepting nature’s generosity, humans returned evil for good (Borrong 2005:48, 51, 53). According to Berry and Clarke (1991:134), the concept of reparation has parallels in biology and ecology: Every living being is sacrificed for another one; it “is self-sacrifice that makes the universe possible”. The tragic flaw of modern industrial civilisation is that it continually aspires to evade this law of sacrifice and reciprocity. Humans are not taking precious goods from the earth and offering something valuable in return, but at worse, they are taking beneficial resources and returning poisonous products.

Modern industry is driven by the belief that industrial processes should be the prime aspect shaping society. Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, the interpretation of the mandate of dominion as domination has been very common (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:21), hence it comes as no surprise that it has been classified as a major factor in the roots of the ecological crisis (Northcott 1996:57). Nürnberger (1999:398) identifies industrial society’s most prominent features as an “economic rat race, environmental degradation and spiritual superficiality”. Northcott (1996:79) shares a similar view, and states that modern industrial systems function independently of divine, ethical, personal or ecological restraints. Furthermore, the pursuit of money dislocates God as the ordering force of modern relations and culture. Likewise, Conradie (2009:72) affirms that the desire for what money can buy replaces faith in God. Something that is only of some worth is perceived as if it holds

ultimate worth. Northcott (1996:79-80) observes that at the same time, there is an analogous denial of relationality with regard to the natural environment because industrialised systems' measures of wealth and exchange relations are removed from ecological systems. Industrialism leads to the commodification of nature and considers ecosystems as "materials banks, pollution sinks or productivity zones". This abstraction from the rest of the rest of creation is so severe, Northcott argues, "that even were all the rainforests to disappear ... sea levels to rise two feet ... climate [to] warm by four degrees, and large parts of the world become uninhabitable, individuals and companies who had burnt the energy or consumed the forests in industrial production would still be reckoned wealthy in economic parlance".

It is thus clear that industrialisation has created a breeding ground for unbridled consumerism. It led to the rejection of any teleological or moral significance of physical existence and created a new quest in life: Individual pleasure and material satisfaction and purpose in everyday life (Northcott 1996:71-72). Conradie (2011:34) notes that the Industrial Revolution combined with a consumer revolution has made consumption a social responsibility, and thereby changed frugality from a virtue to a vice.⁷³ Writing from the perspective of African traditional religion, Daneel (1998:245) testifies that Western industrialised cultures are "plagued by ... the 'demon' of consumerism". Northcott (2007:33) makes this provocative statement:

Citizens of the industrial empire increasingly regard it as their birthright that they should continually buy new clothes, own cars, enjoy foreign holidays and fill their lives with the latest electronic entertainment devices while living in super-heated or cooled homes sparkling with every kind of lighting device. The constant turnover of consumer objects, and the waste of precious metals, minerals and fossil fuels used in their making, fosters growing instability in ecosystems and now in the earth system. Industrial consumerism is a form of material culture which is entirely at odds with the regenerative and recycling patterns of natural systems. As the throwaway society mines precious metals and fossil fuels from beneath the earth's surface and later buries them in holes in the ground, or emits them to the atmosphere, it comes into conflict with the earth system and threatens its continuing vitality.

The fact that modern industrialisation has and still delivers immense benefits, cannot be

⁷³ Based on the view of Miller (2003:42).

disputed. Housing size and quality, home appliances and methods of transport, but a few of many examples, have liberated multitudes of people all over the world from poverty and deprivation (Conradie 2011:29). Since the transformation of England into an industrial and consumer society, however, more goods and services were consumed over the last four decades than throughout the entire human history. This modern consumptive way globalised over time, spreading the message that happiness is attained through consumption, and that the more one consumes, the happier one will be. Cooper (1990:75) is therefore justified in saying that industrialism is a perversion of God's will, as human beings are wrongly motivated when their lives are shaped by production processes and revolve around money and possessions.

c) Consumerist greed as ecological sin

Many believe that the objectification and subsequent degradation of the natural world stem from the prime source of the consumer society's commitment to material growth. The last-mentioned is overvalued, while the former is undervalued: The primary goal is "goods and services" for *humans*, which is essentially anthropocentric in nature (King & Woodyard 1999:18). Northcott (1996:41) argues that a culture of "ecologically damaging consumerism" has made the advancement of material fulfilment and human comfort the paramount goal of civilisation. According to Daneel (1998:242), consumerism highlights material progress and upward mobility as if these were morally justifiable tendencies, despite its alienating implications for a sense of self and place. Individual consumers in competition have therefore replaced holistic and integrated modes of thinking (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:22). Hart (2004:141) maintains that human beings are part of creation, and use natural goods to meet their *needs*. In doing so, they have a responsibility to God, present and future human communities, the broader biotic community, as well as to the earth as a whole in the ways that they gather and consume these goods. Because of humanity's overarching greed, however, these natural resources are used for the fulfilment of their insatiable *desires*, and as a result they are unable to fulfil these responsibilities to Creator and creation.

The consumerist belief in affluence cultivated a mentality of "no-limits". In the Western world, and in particular in America, terms like "The New Frontier" were adopted into the language of this unbounded culture. "Frontier", traditionally implying "limit", became essentially the opposite – the starting place, not the stopping place. It further implied a summons to overthrow and control, as well as a challenge to gain control. Ultimately, it

meant the opposite of contentment; acquiring more – more land, resources, wealth, space and more opportunities. The close of one frontier meant the opening of a “new frontier” (Birch & Rasmussen 1978:21). DeWitt (1996:64) observes that in a culture marked with raging consumerist greed, there is no place for intrinsic good – the notion that some action and things are good in themselves, without price. Regardless of its destructiveness of self, community and nature, individual satisfaction and preferences are valued. Moreover, because of their incessant greedy desires, humans have engaged in the worship of Mammon. The desire for what money can buy has practically superseded faith in God. Things of little worth are treated as if it were of ultimate worth. The quest for incessant economic growth and material progress has thus become idolatrous, in the sense that believers in affluence have grown to be obsessed to the extent of being motivated by material progress instead of by a relationship with God (Conradie 2009:73).⁷⁴ DeWitt (1996:61-62) states that it is therefore clear that the global market of consumerism deprives people of their God-assigned stewardship – of themselves, fellow humans, as well as the environment. He observes:

Stewards of God’s world are being transformed into consumers of God’s world, all of which is being transformed in our minds into natural resources and their human use. In all this we deny the diminution and deprivation of our stewardship, we rarely and uncomfortably describe ourselves as *stewards*, but frequently and comfortably call ourselves “consumers”. We have put to use one of God’s many gifts for the distribution of goods – the market – but have expanded our use and faith in this tool so that it is becoming the arbiter of human ethics. We have come to defend religiously our identity as *consumers*, and to defend religiously our creature, *the market*. We have been insisting that the economy of God’s Creation become a subset of our human economy. We have come to worship this creature, rather than its Creator. God’s gift is becoming the people’s god, as the only meriting the status of global worth-ship.

It is thus apparent that the consumer society’s belief in continuous progress effects a shift in the orientation of human life, away from the reflective quest for spiritual fulfilment and associated moral quest for virtues, which were said to prepare the soul for heavenly life, in the direction of material progress. Furthermore, wealth creation becomes the guiding *telos of* the consumer society “with its live-to-shop” philosophy (Northcott 1996:67-68). In the past,

⁷⁴ With reference to the views of Goudzwaard (1989).

productive labour was seen as a means of giving glory to God. Prosperity was a sign of God's favour; poverty *as such* was not a symbol of moral depravity, although idleness in the face of work opportunities was; and the responsible steward was humble, appreciative and hardworking. Over the years, as a humanity sunk deeper into a culture of consumerism, most of these elements were altered. Productive labour was still a priority, yet simple, anti-consumptive and frugal lifestyles of deferred pleasures were entirely abandoned. Prosperity *as such* became a sure sign of God's favour. In addition, poverty, not idleness, became a clear representation of moral depravity and moral failure. Finally, individual happiness as the goal – measured in terms of pleasure, money, material elevation and high consumption – replaced giving glory to God as the ultimate purpose of economic endeavour (Birch & Rasmussen 1978:52-53). It is therefore no wonder that the “traditional vices of avarice and greed are the objects of praise in the new money economy” (Northcott 1996:55).⁷⁵

The myth of progress holds that anything ancient is without doubt poorer, weaker and less fulfilling, and offers less utility and happiness compared to whatever is modern (Northcott 1996:67). Adherents of the ecologically benign consumer culture have willfully allowed themselves to be deceived by this myth. Birch and Rasmussen (1978:44-45), writing from an American context, highlight a number of fundamental assumptions held by the modern consumer society, including the beliefs that nature has a virtually infinite storehouse of resources that exists for human purposes; humans have the right and obligation to use these resources for ongoing improvement in their material standard of living; individual, as well as social improvement is best attained through the elevation of material standards of living; an economic system aimed at continuous expansion of material abundance enhances the quality of life; through the careful use of their power, humans can take control of the future by ensuring systematic material progress for all of humanity; productive labour and material wellbeing represents the good life; the successful person is the achiever; and an overflow of material wealth holds freedom – when people *have* more they can *be* more because their freedom of choice is expanded. Berry and Clarke (1991:46) maintain that this “web of assumptions” has a totalitarian character. Even though it rooted in and centres on the economic sphere, such assumptions pervade all of humanity's social institutions and cultural reflection. “Because of this rejection of the discipline imposed by nature, our religion, morality, civilization, major establishments – everything – have become counter-productive. They are producing the opposite of what they should produce.” As DeWitt (1996:61) states,

⁷⁵ With reference to Weber 1930.

unbridled consumerism is ever-expanding – it covers the entire earth and infiltrates every corner of the inhabitable world. None are left unaffected. Becker (1992:155) comments as follows:

The cultural pathology ... identifie[d] here is precisely the same phenomenon that earlier theologians, exploring the doctrine of original sin, referred to as “total depravity”. This is the all-pervading presence of sin (the assumptions or perspectives of sinfulness) in all the faculties of the human mind (not simply our emotions and will, but our reason as well) and in all aspects of human society (not simply ... the material realm, but also in education, religion, and the highest ideals of a culture). “[T]otal depravity” is not intended to suggest that the individual or society is one-hundred percent sinful, without a scintilla of goodness, but, rather, that there is no aspect of the self or society genuinely free from sin and able to “lead the way” out of sin.

Conradie (2006:47) therefore rightly maintains that we are not merely facing an ecological crisis, but a cultural crisis that needs to be addressed at its ideological roots, lying in the human heart. What rants and rages is a sinful desire for more and more. Watchel (1989:17) acknowledges that, “[W]e have established a pattern in which we continually create discontent.” The human heart, driven by greed toward material privileges, is enslaved in a state of constant wanting (King & Woodyard 1999:16). Northcott (1996:79) puts it as follows: “Money displaces God as the ordering force or guiding spirit of modern relations of exchange and of modern culture ... operat[ing] independently of divine, ethical, personal or ecological constraints.” Becker (1992:152) is thus correct in noting the visible tension between what we humans know we ought to do and what we actually do. “We are caught doing “not what I want” but “the very thing I hate” – all because we are never satisfied by our “affluence”. Birch and Rasmussen (1978:26-27) quotes Robert Heilbroner⁷⁶ in this regard:

Economic growth and technical achievement, the greatest triumphs of our epoch of history, have shown themselves to be inadequate sources for collective contentment and hope. Material advance ... has proved unable to satisfy the human spirit.

Charles Birch (in Birch & Rasmussen 1978:33) analyses the overall negative impact of human consumption and constructs the following formula: Total population x Consumption

⁷⁶ See Heilbroner (1974).

of resources per person x Environmental deterioration per person = Total negative impact of all.⁷⁷ This means that the more people, the larger the impact; the more resource consumption, the larger the impact; and the more environmental deterioration, the larger the impact. The conclusion is serious and unambiguous: Humanity cannot afford the modern world, and neither can the rest of creation. Birch puts it as follows: “The result is a huge and steadily multiplying impact of man on the environment which cannot possibly continue without the gravest consequences to both humanity and the rest of creation” (quoted in Birch & Rasmussen 1978:33). McGrath (2002:68) holds that the notion of this “destructive spiral of consumerist ethos”, being, “You want it? Fine; you can have it” has “encourage[d] patterns of consumption that take us far beyond the earth’s ecological carrying capacity”. Northcott (1996:42) states that, “The mobility, and the appetite for natural resources of ... the consumer society represent a systematic threat to the health of ... natural ecologies”. Likewise, Hart (2004:39) maintains that the forces of rampant consumerism are perverted and hostile to the dignity of the earth. Because of its greed, the human heart is unwilling to accept responsibility for its anti-ecological behaviour (King & Woodyard 1999:16). “This moral evil”, declares Northcott (1996:44), “cannot be outweighed by the economic benefits” relating to the modern consumer society’s exploitation of resources.

The effect of a culture of unbridled consumerist greed on the environment cannot be negated. At the root of the ecological predicament lies modern consumer society’s belief in notions such as “progress”, “success” and ultimately, “being number one”. DeWitt (1996:62) opposes the notion of “Looking out for number one”, as he believes that it implies seeking first oneself, expecting that somehow “the Kingdom of God will be added unto you”. Furthermore, this notion also converts greed from being understood as a vice into being understood as a virtue. Wirzba (2003:136) holds that our present culture, which is often referred to as a “culture of death”, impedes us from glorifying the Creator as the giver of life. In addition, it indicates just how far we have strayed from “authentic life”. Birch and Rasmussen (1978:41) therefore believe that humans will not easily depart from their mindset of conquest, control and consumption, or the standard of living to which they have become accustomed to. Despite the disappointment of this way of life, we humans will render our own version of St. Augustine’s petition for the sake of affluence: “Lord, make me chaste; but not yet”.

⁷⁷ See Birch (1976) for a detailed discussion.

d) Conclusion: Alternatives to consumerist greed

Considering the exploration in the previous section, it is most obvious that human attention needs to be redirected – away from material, manmade wealth, to a more reflective appreciation for God-given wealth – the earth in all its splendour. Wirzba (2003:136) suggests that turning away from the notion that the world was primarily created for human consumption does not imply that it should serve no human ends. Instead, humanity’s use of creation should always be directed towards the praise of the Creator. In simple terms, “our work and consumption should themselves be forms of prayer in which the goodness and the purposes of God are foremost in mind”. Perhaps a return to the former way of life prescribed in the Protestant ethic could prove much useful in this regard. Birch and Rasmussen (1978:52) simplifies these prescriptions: A person’s area of service to others is in their daily lives; God should be glorified in one’s workaday world, and faithful performance is therefore one’s responsibility before a holy God; a person should work hard and save, yet lead a spare and frugal existence, putting of material and sensual pleasures; disciplined self-denial is most godly, high consumption and wastefulness is not; wealth may be accrued to the extent of one’s hard work and discipline living, and it should be understood as a sign of God’s favour; however, seeing that the world can be an unkind place, a person may remain poor in material matters, yet assured of the fact that God will reward their zealous labour with an abundant everlasting life. Acknowledging that as human beings we need to be transformed from our destructive habits of consumption and that the first and foremost challenge is not to simply change our economy but also ourselves, one may ponder the question: “Can we, given our ecological sin, muster the will to change what we are?” Given the enormous anti-ecological behaviour of socialisation, especially evident in economic “growth-think”, transnational corporations, the bombardment of advertising, and the consumer mentality dominant in politics, education, and even religion, it is quite certain that momentous ecological change cannot simply be realised through *ad hoc* recycling projects and educational campaigns. Significant change require mindful efforts to re-socialise ourselves spiritually – “away from our present materialistic consumer spirituality and toward a new ‘materialistic’ (in the sense of matter-respecting) creation spirituality” – in constructing a positive response to a culture of rampant consumerism (Becker 1992:159). DeWitt (1996:65-66) envisions such change as follows:

I see us free, therefore, to return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue – that avarice is a vice...and the love of money

detestable, that those walk most truly in the paths of virtue and sane wisdom who take least thought for the morrow. We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to be useful. We shall honour...the delightful people who are capable of taking direct enjoyment in things, the lilies of the field who toil not, neither do they spin.

3.2.4 The alienation of humans from the earth community

a) The role of Christianity in rendering religious support

Conradie (2011:5, 7) states that in comparison with other religions, which emphasise the sacredness of nature, the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation, highlighting the radical distinction between Creator and the created order, has indisputably led to a “disenchantment of nature”. It has too frequently displayed “contempt of the world”, as in the past it has focused almost entirely on the salvation of the soul from the world. Accordingly, it showed contempt for the biophysical world and implicitly authorised ecological degradation to continue. Part of the ecological complaint against the Christian faith is the fact that it is innately, or at least historically indifferent and even hostile towards nature and, as a result, anti-ecological (Nash (1991:68). The human race has hereby become incapable of affirming the essential goodness of creation. Nature, in many cases, is seen as “wild” or “something which needs to be conquered”. Christianity is an “urban” religion that does not gel very well with nature and in the process encourages technological transformations of nature (Watts 1970:25). Worster (1979:26-27) employs the term “Christian pastoralism” which, he believes, very much contradicts classical arcadian pastoralism that focuses on a simple moral life, at peace with the earth and all its creatures. He argues that the former idealises the position of the Good Shepherd in relation to His flock (humanity), guarding them against nature’s forces – bears, wolves, lions – and guiding them to greener fields.

Santmire (1985:130) poses the following question relating to another aspect of human alienation from the earth community: “Is it true that [Christians] have been such a people, wandering as strangers and pilgrims through this world, that they never had the time, nor the occasion, nor the will, nor the rudimentary spiritual experience to respond to nature with the kind of theological intensity that they have always devoted to God and humanity?” Haught (1993:44) adds this rhetorical question: “For do [the world’s religions, including Christianity] not teach us, especially through their mystical precepts, that we *should* feel dislocated from our natural environment?” He believes that the roots of our ecological crisis does have a

religious component, as in promoting spiritual homelessness religions have, maybe unintentionally, conveyed the impression that human beings do not “really” belong to the cosmos. In this instance, one may look at the influence of biblical eschatology, or the doctrine of the “end times”, which holds that Christians will be “caught up” to meet the returning of the Lord. The critique against this view incorporated in the Scriptures is that more than often it nurtures the belief that humans are only residing in “a temporary and soon-to-be-destroyed home”, making them reluctant to care for the earth (Horrell 2010:8). For Nash (1991:72-73), most Christian theologians focus tremendously on human history to the neglect of natural history, disregarding the immense influences of the latter on the former. This emphasis has largely been allied with major dichotomies in Christian attitudes towards the “world”, for example material-spiritual and nature-humanity. Conradie (2006:54) reiterates this idea and argues that Christianity is to a great extent guilty of legitimising the alienation of humans from the rest of creation, as it has too often been preoccupied with an “otherworldliness” that hinders humanity’s sense of belonging on earth. Bookless (2008:34) puts it forthrightly: “Too often Christians have been so other-worldly as to be of no earthly use”.

Bookless (2008:14) states that Christianity is responsible for often teaching what is contradictory to the Bible and has thereby warranted human alienation from the rest of the earth, as McHarg (1969:26) argues: In the biblical creation story’s text relating to the “insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature ... can be found the sanction and injunction to conquer nature – the enemy, the threat to Jehovah”. Bookless (2008:14) reiterates this idea by quoting a famous Christian hymn that goes: *This world is not my home. I’m just a passing-through. If heaven is not my home then Lord what will I do?* Similarly, an Afrikaans song, well-known in South African Pentecostal circles, is loosely translated as follows: *Here I don’t want to be, because here is nothing for me. Heaven is my dwelling. And Jesus is my King.* While the latter part holds true, the former part is essentially unbiblical!

b) The impact of Western dualism

The great dualisms of the Western tradition have extensively contributed and reinforced human alienation from the rest of the earth community (Conradie 2006:54). The concept of dualism may be defined as the tendency to separate reality into two distinct parts, the one usually superior and the opposite one being inferior. Examples include supernature and nature, heaven and earth, spirit and matter, sacred and secular, soul and body, (human) history and nature, and male and female – the former commonly “being the superior, and the

interdependencies poorly understood” (Nash 1991:73). Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:20) argue that while dualistic thinking may be appropriate in various circumstances,⁷⁸ it is also extremely distressing in the sense whereby polar opposites are disconnected, value judgements situate one pole above its opposite and social customs and feelings toward nature are based on these judgements. Under these conditions, the oppression of people and the degradation of nature are bound to occur, as Horrell (2010:129) states, dualistic systems “denigrates the material world”. Platonic dualism, for example, splits reality into a transient world of matter and an eternal world of ideal Forms known only by the intellect. The soul, the seat of the intellect, is compelled to dwell in a body, which is part of mutable nature, and is therefore distracted from its true end – communion with the transnatural world of the Forms. The body, like the whole of nature, is perceived as something alien to the essence of a person. Nature is not worthy of any serious participation, and is nothing but a faint shadow of what is truly good and beautiful. The Platonic view is thus that nature, in its stubborn materiality, is inherently disordered and can only be ordered through the imposition of ideal Forms which are foreign to it. The soul exists apart from the body and is always in tension with it (Wilkinson 1991:114-115, 119). Borrong (2005:46) states that in earlier times, the relation of humans and nature was one of balance and harmony. This relationship was disturbed by such systems of thought pervaded by hierarchical dualism.

Snyder (2011:4) record eight symptoms of the “great divorce” between heaven and earth: They maintain that a person can testify to it whenever one agrees that salvation is about the soul and not the body; observes no spiritual worth in material things; considers earthly life as unreal or of little importance; sees physical death as the end of earthly life; believes that beauty in this life, for example in nature, people, art and music, is ultimately insignificant, unless it points to spiritual beauty; views the present world as evil or entirely as being under the devil’s control; ignores the biblical command of creation stewardship; and pictures spirit and matter as two opposing, irreconcilable categories. The last-mentioned is especially significant to the concept of alienation, because, as Deane-Drummond (2006:117) holds, it is responsible for creating the impression that if the material world is designated evil, then finding any goodness in it is a vain task, for goodness is only ascribed to the spiritual,

⁷⁸ Considering the appropriateness of dualism, Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:20) supply several reasons: It is the foundation for some very creative efforts in philosophy; it often simplifies very complex realities; in times of crisis – personal or social – the image of a perfect sphere apart assures purpose and offers hope; and it enlightens imperative distinctions and differences.

immortal realm. Furthermore, it stimulates the idea that the self is in need of liberation from the material world for an ultimate life in an ideal spiritual realm in heaven (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:20). From there the pervasive sense of otherworldliness arises. Interestingly enough, Horrell (2010:129) notes in an example of the intrinsically connectedness of spirit and matter the views of Theodore Hiebert.⁷⁹ Studying the word *ruach* (meaning spirit/Spirit, air, breath, wind), Herbert illustrates how its material and spiritual, worldly and Godly facets are inseparably woven together. He thereby proves that the dichotomies between spirit and matter, and soul and body are the products of Western dualism influencing interpreters, rather than the biblical text itself.

Dualistic thinking, in whatever form it may be, undeniably causes disconnection. Carolyn Merchant (1982:143) laments the culture/nature dualism:

[N]ature/culture dualism is a key factor in Western civilization's advance at the expense of nature. As the unifying bonds of the older hierarchical cosmos were severed, European culture increasingly set itself above and apart from all that was symbolized by nature. Similarly, in America the nature/culture dichotomy was basic to the tension between civilization and the frontier in westward expansion and helped to justify the continuing exploitation of nature's resources.

Systems of dualism deceive humans into accepting the anthropocentric notion that they exist apart from the rest of creation and that human actions alone deserve attention. Bouma-Prediger (1995:271), in referring to the ecological model of Rosemary Ruether, provides concrete grounds for rejecting such a dualistic attitude: it is false because the natural world has its own history, because it is inherently affected by human action and thus a part of human history, and because human beings are deeply rooted in it; it has catastrophic effects as it sanctions various forms of exploitation; and it is not in accordance with the biblical emphasis on a single, all-embracing covenant. Horrell (2010:129-130) also asserts that while dualistic thinking do enhance value in certain contexts, their potentially negative implications for human attitudes towards creation must be resisted. Like Irenaeus affirmed creation's goodness as stated in Genesis 1:31 in his second-century arguments with the Gnostics, we humans need to reassert it now in the face of an emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of life and a focus on the salvation of only the soul. These dualisms, like the rest of the Western tradition, Horrell (2010:130) adds, "[have] been exposed as problematic in its assumptions

⁷⁹ See Hiebert (2008).

and implications, not least in terms of human attitudes towards the environment”.

c) Alienation of humans from the earth community as ecological sin

The alienation of humans from the rest of creation is one of the categories examined for its ideological biases, which contribute toward distorted relationships (Ruether 1994:6). Wallace (2005:30) clearly explains the distinct patterns of alienation. First and foremost, God assumes the image of a “Sky God” who has little or even no association with the universe’s natural process. Accordingly humans, the bearers of God’s image, are not regarded as authentic members of the earth community. Instead, they are considered to be mere “souls” temporarily residing in their physical bodies on earth, awaiting their deliverance into a disembodied eternity; heaven. Any connection between humans and the material world is denied, as the latter is simply the temporary place from which humans are freed by death to return to their originator – their disembodied Source, the “Sky God”. These beliefs utterly confirm that God is against nature, and that the bearers of image also ought to be. Thereby, feelings of absence of family and co-belonging toward the rest of the earth community are instilled in humans, laying the groundwork for ecological destruction. Conradie (2005b:24) believes that alienation has become a way of life, contradicting the notions of familiarity and intimacy.

Haught (1993:39-65) explains the concept of “cosmic homelessness” and its effects on ecological degradation at length. In his exposition, he categorises two primary sources of human feelings of estrangement from nature, the one being humanity’s scientific culture and the other being “spiritual homelessness”. With regard to the first cause, Haught states that scientism⁸⁰, for example, strictly isolates the knowing subject (human knower) from the object-world (nature). The knowing subject are not deemed to be a part of the scientifically known universe, as to be appropriately “objective” about the world, the scientific subject is set apart from nature. In the process, the ecological vision of interrelatedness and interdependence is renounced. On the other hand, Haught holds, spiritual homelessness, is rooted in the religious belief that human life is defined by pilgrimage, sojourning and rootlessness, making authentic existence essentially “homeless”. In order to experience salvation, as human beings we must transcend “the world”. Consequently, the ecologically malignant feeling of cosmic homelessness is a prerequisite for spiritual homelessness. The spirit of cosmic homelessness, Haught adds, is manifested in the feeling that we humans do not truly belong to the created cosmos and that the earth is not really our home. We feel like

⁸⁰ The belief that only scientific methods can harvest true knowledge of reality.

exiles in an alien country. Because the loss of one's home is among the most humiliating experiences that humans can endure, the sense that we don't belong makes us most vulnerable to feelings of shame. Feeling "unaccepted" by our environment, we unavoidably detach ourselves from it in some way, even though we continue to be bound by it. The natural world is perceived as a foreign land, far from our true home. This restless wandering, as a result, hinders an ecologically acceptable relationship with the earth. Owing to the lack of ecospirit, the underlying continuity of ourselves with the universe is ignored, and nature is left to bear the dreadful consequences.

In the Christian tradition, God is often depicted as a monarch in heaven – far removed from the universe – who created humans in His image to fulfil the roles of vice-regents on earth. God thus cedes all control of earthly life to His human servants. As disembodied deity, God is seen as being uninterested in earthly affairs (Wallace 2005:28-29). An overemphasis on God's divine transcendence causes "a deist separation and alienation between God and creation" (Conradie 2005b:54). Such a theistic framework is thus problematic in the sense that it hinders human care of creation (Haught 1993:37-38). Furthermore, the notion of life in another world after death, Maguire and Rasmussen (1998:44, 42) argue, "makes our earth-life the prologue, not the text and context of our being ... Earth as main stage becomes earth as prelude; the biological may be seen as hostile to the spiritual. At the least, its status is diminished. It is not our home but the proving ground for our real home beyond. That is troubling news for the rest of nature". Emphasis on individual salvation redirect human consciousness inward to the self and outward to heaven, away from the earth (Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:22). It is therefore no surprise that many people might ask: "I am headed for heaven anyway, why should I take care of creation?" It is notions like these, however, that qualify as "stumbling blocks to earthkeeping" (DeWitt 1996:91). In the view of Hart (2004:122), "the planet often has been viewed solely as a place of temporary pilgrimage, a short-term place of preparation for a life to come, the context of the human hope for and working out of 'salvation'". Northcott (1996:41) believes that feelings of alienation redefine the place of humanity in a cosmos which is more and more perceived as lacking moral significance or divine purpose, except for its material value to humans. Bruteau (1997:12-13) paints this picture in more detail:

The world has been presented to us as a great machine, something dead and in itself meaningless, something that rolls on relentlessly, ruthlessly, incapable of sensitivity or significance. It starts from a fluke of a fluctuation and thereafter

operates by chance and necessity. It's not trying to accomplish anything, it has no purpose, and we human beings have no special place in it. We are simply an accident, and our request for meaningfulness meets with no reply from the universe. In such a world, how could we have a sense of the sacred that would be anything other than a superstition fit only for scorn? Ever since we've had this mechanistic, accidentalistic worldview, we've been despondent, and when we're despondent, we turn to artificial stimulants such as greed and success, inventions of local meaningfulness. But, deprived of the sense of the sacred wholeness of things, our bonds are weakening. Underneath we know that we're whistling in the dark.

Conradie (2005b:184-185) states that: "The earth is God's house. God has invited us as humans, together with other species in God's household, to tend and keep our room and to make ourselves at home. Instead, we failed to find a home for ourselves and we are now threatening to destroy the whole household. This is the legacy of human sin." As a result, humanity is now endlessly embarking on "the human flight from nature" (Haught 1993:40), as Ruether (1994:139) puts it: "The evaluation of mortal life as evil and the fruit of sin has lent itself to an earth-fleeing ethic and spirituality, which has undoubtedly contributed very centrally to the neglect of the earth, to the denial of our commonality with plants and animals, and to the despising of the work of sustaining the day-to-day processes of finite but renewable life". Mustol (2013:6) believes that although we are eco-physical beings, our lives are not a reflection of our interconnectedness with the earth as ecosystem, of our earthly existence as God ordained it to be. Rasmussen (1996:10) firmly declares, however: "There is no room ... for the earth avoidance carried in the teaching of *contemptus mundi* (contempt of the world). Or any other form of otherworldliness ... Nor is there room for ... the metaphor of ascetic ascent, throwing off the corruptible things of the earth for the precious booty of heaven."

Conradie (2005:114) maintains that the destructive patterns of alienation between humans and the rest of creation are deeply embedded in a culture, which may be described in terms of human sin. Likewise, Snyder (2011:3) believes that alienation – "a divorce" – is the product of the "disease of sin". They apply the metaphor of divorce "for the whole problem of the relationships between God, humans, and the earth". Bookless (2008:37-38) also believes that when humans turn against God, broken relationships are manifested in various directions. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson makes the following statement in this regard: "If you put

God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you” (quoted in Rasmussen 1994:173). There is thus no doubt that disobedience results in turmoil – when people go against God the intended order disintegrates because the whole creation is influenced by human behaviour (Cooper 1990:11). Ruether (1994:142), for example, highlights this crucial link between sin and humanity’s impaired relationship with the environment:

Sin, then, as that sort of evil for which we must hold ourselves accountable, lies in distortion of relationship, the absolutizing of the rights to life and power of one side of a relation against the other parts with which it is, in fact, interdependent.

In this regard, Gilkey (1979:142) says: “The historical dimension of estrangement is passed on communally. We absorb more than our cultural ethos ... we also absorb that community’s ‘fallen’ character – its centering of its world on itself, its inordinate self-love and love of its own”.

The relation between humans and nature is therefore not what it should be (Horrell 2010:46). Evil has alienated us from the goodness of creation (Conradie 2005b:193). Wallace (2005:28) maintains that deep down we humans no longer feel a common kinship with the rest of nature, and do not understand ourselves and our existence to be dependent on the interconnectedness of natural systems. We may tend to regard ourselves a part *of* nature but we do not see ourselves *as* nature itself. We humans consider ourselves as living *in* nature, yet we do not interpret nature itself as *why* we are alive at all. In simple terms, “our primordial sense of belonging to the unified lifeweb that our kind and otherkind need for daily sustenance” has been lost. Daneel (1998:242) makes reference to the term “indoorism”. Such a mentality considers indoor experiences as normal reality and detaches nature as something “outside” – seldom enjoyed, but essentially secluded from indoor life. Schumacher (1973:10-11) expresses his concern for the fact that human beings do not see themselves as an integral part of nature, but rather as an external force, destined to be conquered. He warns against the danger of going into battle with nature, which makes humans forget that if they “win” the battle, they would actually end up finding themselves on the losing side.

The 2001 letter entitled *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good* by Catholic bishops, laid down seven “Convictions That Underscore the Need to Care for the Earth”: God, the Creator of the universe, maintains its existence through His

ongoing creative will; His presence is discernible in the entire creation; God blessed and called all that He created “very good; He loves the community of life; all of God’s creatures share a communal home; the earth He entrusts to the care of humans – they are His stewards in the world; and God’s intention for the earth’s goods is for them to be equally shared. It is therefore clear that the sinful principles, on which human alienation from the rest of creation is based, contradict the inherent value of the whole creation (Hart 2004:52-53).

Feelings of estrangement have blinded people to the beauty of the whole creation, and as such have allowed ecological devastation to continue. St. Bonaventure states:

He, therefore, who is not illumined by such great splendour of created things is blind; he who is not awakened by such great clamour is deaf; he who does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; he who does not note the first principle from such great signs are foolish. Open your eyes, therefore, prick up your spiritual ears, open your lips and apply your heart, that you may see our God in all creatures (quoted in Wilkinson 1991:275).

The recognition that the earth’s fate is humanity’s fate as well, “that the piercing of the ozone layer pierces us too”, does not even arouse human interest or generate a feeling of community (King & Woodyard 1999:4). What humans do not realise, as Hart (2004:24), recalling a 1982 pastoral letter from Dominican Catholic bishops, observes, is that humanity’s sin against nature “always has its repercussions against humanity itself”, evident in the following citation:

Humans! I, Mountain, am speaking. You cannot ignore me! I have been with you since your very beginnings and long before. For millennia your ancestors venerated my holy places, found wisdom in my heights. I gave you shelter and far vision. Now, in return, you ravage me Can't you see? In destroying me you destroy yourselves (John Seed, quoted in Becker 1992:161).

d) The place of humans: Are we home?⁸¹

Considering the corrupt principles on which the three aforementioned ecological sins are built – anthropocentrism, domination in the name of difference of species, as well as consumerist greed – I would justly argue that human alienation from the rest of the earth community is

⁸¹ For a detailed discussion on this question, see Conradie (2005b).

seemingly the primary evil that all forms of ecological destruction are subject to.⁸² Had humans not perceive themselves as existing apart from the rest of creation, they would not see everything in human terms (anthropocentrism); if humanity had the innate ability to affirm creation's goodness, they would not be incapable of fulfilling their duty to guard and preserve the earth's and all its creatures (domination in the name of difference); had humans believe that the ultimate goal of being is to live at peace in their God-given home, in harmony with the rest of God's household, they would not consider perpetual material progress life's supreme purpose (consumerist greed). A number of questions therefore arise: What is humanity's place in creation? How are human beings ought to respond to nature? *Are we at home here on earth?*

Although opinions in this regard might vary, an ecologically-benign approach – taking into account the needs of all living and non-living beings – requires humanity to feel at home, to *be* at home. Murphy (1989:3) frankly states: “There is no point to a religious ethic of the environment unless we believe that our home is on earth and not someplace else ... the earth was created by God to be our home ... we humans are ‘made of earth’ ... we are by nature earthly creatures and ... the earth, our home, has a future that we can responsibly determine”. Horrell (2010:130-131) thus rightly argues that human beings have the unique ability to reflect on contemporary ecological evils, and to take action based on ways formed self-consciously by that reflection. Furthermore, they need to recognise how “unspecial” they are, and how much commonalities they share with other life-forms. McFague (2008:146-158) considers the possibility of a different world, free from ecological despair. She raises three issues in this regard: Who we are as human beings, where we fit in with the rest of creation, and how we should go about getting there. With reference to the first concern, she states that human dignity and the integrity of creation depends on human beings seeing all forms of life, human and non-human, as “good”, as God does. Abandoning the old, a new image of who we are as humans is showing appreciation for something other than ourselves and our human interests. Secondly, contrary to Western belief, human beings live *in* the earth, not *on* it. A new world calls for oneness where people exist in a community of interrelationship and interdependence on the continuum of life, with all earthly beings. Finally, she suggests three

⁸² In this regard, Haught (1993:41) poses the question: “Is it not conceivable that our anthropocentric tendencies”, which are often believed to be the primary cause of ecological devastation, “are themselves secondary symptoms of a more fundamental pathology, that of feeling that we are ... unaccepted by [our] environment [?]”

steps in order for this new world to be realised: Imagining and asking for a different world; seeing the material well-being of the earth community as a spiritual matter; and to persevere in order to attain goodness, through small, daily unremitting changes in behaviour and insight. Likewise, Wirzba (2003:136-148) also believes that an authentic orientation toward God and the rest of creation is possible. He states that the key to achieving this is for humans to become servants of creation – not in a demeaning sense, but by building up the entire creation and thereby aiding its health and wholeness.

Haught (1993:127) affirms that humanity's existence is defined by relationships – they would not be who they are without the concrete ties to other beings. The whole universe, each and every depth and complexity of the cosmos produces what we are as humans. There is no completely resilient boundary between the self and its constitutive world. Bruteau (1997:14-15) maintains that the concept of “universe” implies that there is a sense in which it all constitutes one thing. It could be argued that the universe is the original Adam – a large figure of dust, systemised and energised by the breath of God that sustains its continuous development, becoming more diversified, interactive and unified. The universe exhibits the holy “Oneness of Being” – humans need to experience it like this. Even more powerful than the notion of the universe as Adam, McFague (1993) suggests that the world be seen as the body of God Himself, implying that each and every component of creation are intrinsically involved in the divine embodiment of Creation. Furthermore, the “body” metaphor also helps to overcome the traditional fear and hostility toward the physical world in Western cultures.

Jung (1993:54) firmly declares that the earth is God's home and our home. For too long we humans have refused to see ourselves as an intrinsic member of the whole household of God. People's relationships with their Creator could never be separated from their relationships with one another and the world around them (Bookless 2008:144). Welker (1999:44) agrees that both heaven and earth are “to be understood as primary environments of God's presence and the coexistence of human beings and other creatures”. It is therefore clear that a more holistic, integrated and communal attitude is needed, in which humanity is able to listen to, talk to and feel the rest of creation. After all, as Cooper (1990:69) states, it is not only God's people that are anticipating liberation, the *whole creation* is. “We and the earth and the universe, all together, still live in ‘exile’ from our universal destiny, but not inevitably from one another” (Haught 1993:65). Therefore, humanity needs to extend redemption to all of creation, as St. Isaac the Syrian affirms:

What is a charitable heart? ... It is a heart which is burning with charity for the

whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for the beasts ... for all creatures...This is why such a man never ceases to pray also for the animals ... He will pray even for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united to God (quoted in Wilkinson 1991:305).

McGrath (2002:188), talking about the “re-enchantment of nature”, believes that nature should be cherished and valued, not only for what it *is*, but also for what it *foreshadows* – a new creation, reviving and perfecting the weary and devastated world that we know and strive to care for in the midst of what is feared may be its final illness. Re-enchanting nature implies that humans accept its divine origins and meaning, not least in what it implies for humanity’s own nature and ultimate destiny. To re-enchant nature does not simply entail gaining new respect for its integrity and well-being, but moreover, it is about opening the door to a more profound level of existence. Cooper (1990:69) further claims that practical steps need to be taken in order to ensure such an existence: Harmonious living with God, ourselves, fellow humans and nature. In this regard, Jung (1993:89-105) make suggestions for, what he call, “serious homemaking”. In relation to God, we must continually allow Him to lure us into His presence and work on earth. In relating to our inner selves, we must never be self-destructive but always build ourselves up in the wisdom of the Creator. In relation to other species, we should respect animals, plants, and non-sentient life, as our flourishing depends on theirs, and in relation to others, we should treat them with respect, equality, always prepared to forgive and heal broken relationships. With reference to St. Francis’ ecological wisdom, who “was open to relationship, to receiving from all, whether leper, human brother and sister, worms, birds, bishops, water, fire, wind or Blessed Mother Earth ... [and] recognized the Incarnate Word of God in all living creatures”, we can all be at home on earth.

3.3 Conclusion

In the previous exploration, the sinfulness of the roots of the ecological crisis was laid bare, with the aid of the Christian doctrine of sin. For ecotheologians, there should be no doubt that environmental degradation is in essence the result of human sin. “The loss of the theosphere in human consciousness implies damage of the whole ecosphere. Sin has caused pollution, moral and spiritual pollution which has damaged the heart of human beings” (Borrong 2005:154). While the notion that Christianity has made a significant contribution to our ecological predicament holds some degree of plausibility, the abounding tradition of

Christian discourse on the nature of sin proves that Christianity can also serve as an essential means of examining and evaluating our present condition, and thereby holds immense value for structuring a positive, realistic approach for practical solutions. If the ecological crisis is then ultimately a spiritual disease, it requires a spiritual cure.



Chapter 4

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life, work and legacy

4.1 Introduction

This thesis rests on the premise that a retrieval of insights from widely acclaimed theologians may aid contemporary attempts as discussed in the previous chapter, to address ecological challenges. My assumption is that the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and his views on the nature of sin can contribute to the current discourse on hamartology and ecology.

Gaining a proper understanding of Bonhoeffer's views necessitates an understanding of his life, work and legacy. This chapter will therefore offer a brief discussion of these aspects. An account of Bonhoeffer's life, in terms of his childhood and youth, student years and work as pastor and teacher, as well as his involvement in the fight against Nazism and ultimately his death, will firstly be offered. This is followed by a description of his literary works, with special emphasis on his *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall* and *Ethics*. After that, a concise discussion of Bonhoeffer's legacy with specific reference to the reception and interpretation of his theology, the International Bonhoeffer Society (IBS) and his relevance for ecological, political and other contemporary issues follows. This chapter is brought to a close by means of a brief conclusion.

4.2 Bonhoeffer's life⁸³

4.2.1 Family life and youth

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born on 4 February 1906 in Breslau, Germany to Paula von Hase Bonhoeffer and Karl Bonhoeffer. Sabine, his twin sister, was born just moments after him. Dietrich was the sixth of eight siblings, namely Karl-Friedrich (1899), Walter (1899), Klaus (1901), Ursula (1902) Christine (1903) and Susanne (1909). Walter died serving in the German army during World War I and Klaus was to be executed for his participation in Hitler's assassination plot. Karl Bonhoeffer was a professor and physician, who worked as Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology in Breslau and also represented them as director of the University Hospital for Nervous Disease. Later, he was appointed Professor of Psychiatry and

⁸³ This section draws on the work of Bethge (1995), De Gruchy (1987), Nelson (1999:22-70), Robertson (1966) and Floyd (2005:43-58). For additional reading on Bonhoeffer's life, see Bethge (1975, 1979, 1986), Bosanquet (1969), Hamilton (1968), Kuhns (1969), Martin (1963), and Godsey (1965).

Nervous Disease at the University of Berlin. Paula von Hase Bonhoeffer, a descendant from a long line of theologians and pastors, trained as a teacher and after her marriage she focussed all her attention on her family and on home-schooling her children. In 1912, the family moved to Berlin.

Unlike other families, the Bonhoeffer family did not attend weekly worship at the neighbourhood church, but was nevertheless exposed to the Christian faith, among others, by their nannies. Paula was the one encouraging a religious environment for her children, however, for example through Bible stories, traditional Christian hymns, saying grace at meal times, evening prayers, baptism and confirmation. Her father, Karl Alfred von Hase, basically served as the family pastor. After he died in 1914, Paula's brother, Hans von Hase, became their spiritual leader. Paula recommenced participation in church worship after the Confessing Church was established in 1934. After his brother's death in 1918, Dietrich's parents gave him Walter's confirmation Bible, which he kept until his own death.

Dietrich was an energetic boy and performed well in sport, music, as well as learning foreign languages. Much to his father and brothers' disappointment, Dietrich, decided at age fourteen to become a minister and theologian. They even attempted to discourage him by stating that the church is "a poor, feeble, boring, petty bourgeois institution". Dietrich determinedly replied: "In that case I shall reform it!" (Nelson 1999:25). The Nazi's ascension to power in 1933 was much to the family's dismay, especially for their grandmother, Julie Bonhoeffer. Like Dietrich, she made no secret of her opposition to Hitler's regime. Julie died just three years afterwards and Dietrich was the preacher at her funeral. Dietrich's family life and years growing up profoundly influenced his writings.

4.2.2 Student, pastor and teacher

Bonhoeffer completed his schooling at the Friedrich Werner grammar school. During his teenage years, he was very interested in philosophical and religious writings, for example that of Schleiermacher, Goethe, Schiller and Max Weber. In 1923, at the age of seventeen, he enrolled at Tübingen University. During the following year, Bonhoeffer and his brother, Klaus, went on a trip to Rome, staying for three months. His experiences with the Catholic Church there immensely broadened his understanding of the church. Later that same year, Bonhoeffer returned to university, where he focused on his studies for the next three years. Encounters with renowned scholars such as Adolf von Harnack, Karl Holl, Hans Lietzmann and Reinhold Seeberg significantly influenced his thinking. During this time, he also had his

first encounter with Karl Barth's writings. Bonhoeffer was part of one of Von Harnack's seminars, and under the coaching of Seeberg, he wrote his first doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, with the structure of the church as theme. This work was published in 1930.

During January 1928, Bonhoeffer passed his first set of theological examinations. After qualifying for ordination, Bonhoeffer began his initial pastoral ministry serving at the German-speaking United Protestant congregation in Barcelona, Spain at age twenty-two. Over the course of the year he presented nineteen sermons, started a children's service, taught boys' classes, and lectured, as well as dealing with social problems in the community. Whilst serving as a pastor, Bonhoeffer by no means neglected his academic career. During the following year he returned to the University of Berlin, serving as an assistant to German idealist Wilhelm Lütgert, and also presented his first lectures. In addition, he was also preparing another thesis, *Act and Being*, which was accepted in July 1930. The acceptance of this thesis secured him the qualification of an university teacher. At this time he was only twenty-four years old.

In September of 1930, Bonhoeffer enrolled for post-doctoral studies at New York Union Theological Seminary as a Sloane Fellow. Much to Bonhoeffer's disappointment, he found their state of theology rather shallow. Yet, on a more positive note, he made life-changing friendships during this time. African-American student Frank Fisher allowed Bonhoeffer to teach his Sunday school class at Abyssinian Baptist church, where Bonhoeffer learned various lessons on American racism. These lessons he took home and eventually applied to anti-Semitism in Germany. He also met Erwin Sutz, who shared his love of the piano. Sutz later became one of his contacts and confidants during the war years. Bonhoeffer also met Paul and Marion Lehmann, whose door was always open for him. In addition, Paul strengthened Bonhoeffer's appreciation for the church and through him Bonhoeffer became involved in the fight for civil rights and economic justice. Bonhoeffer also met French pacifist Jean Lassere. Practising their English on each other, the two shared hours of theological conversation. It was Lassere who challenged Bonhoeffer to a profounder understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. During this time, Bonhoeffer also met Reinhold Niebuhr, who became one of his mentors. Niebuhr inspired Bonhoeffer to reflect on the church's involvement in the suffering of society.

In July 1931 Bonhoeffer made his way back home, finding Germany's political, social, economic and academic environment dramatically altered. It was during this time that he met

Karl Barth and established a life-long friendship with him. For Bonhoeffer, there was no other theologian with whom he agreed more, although he never viewed Barth uncritically, either in his lectures or writings. He argued with Barth, as he found various things unconvincing, especially Barth's ethics. During the next month Bonhoeffer joined the University of Berlin's theological faculty as unpaid assistant lecturer. He was now twenty-five years old. In the two years that followed, Bonhoeffer presented various courses in systematic theology, including "The History of Systematic Theology in The Twentieth Century", "The Idea of Philosophy in Protestant Theology", "Christology", "Creation and Sin", as well as "The Nature of the Church". His second thesis, *Act and Being*, was published two months later.

On 15 November, 1931, Bonhoeffer was ordained as minister at St. Matthias Church in Berlin. He also served as chaplain at the Technical University at Charlottenburg until 1933. It was around this time that Bonhoeffer started to participate in the activities of the ecumenical movement. He attended various conferences in his capacity as regional secretary for the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, as well as the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work. When Hitler came to power in 1933, Bonhoeffer's academic and ecclesiastical plans were irreversibly altered. From the onset, he was involved in the church's opposition to Nazism. Unsatisfied with their lack of decisiveness, Bonhoeffer left for London in October 1933. He then became pastor of two German-speaking congregations – the German Evangelical Church in Sydenham and the Reformed Church of St. Paul in London. Not heeding Barth's summon to return to Germany, Bonhoeffer remained there for the next eighteen months and therefore did not witness the formation of the Synod of the Confessing Church in Barmen in 1934. On the Confessing Church's behalf, however, he rendered support to German pastors in London against Nazism and also assisted German refugees arriving in England. During this time, Bonhoeffer met George K. A. Bell, Anglican Bishop of Chichester, at an ecumenical conference in Geneva. Bell played a significant role in his friend's life until his martyrdom in 1945. Bonhoeffer's ended his pastoral ministry in London after receiving a call from the Confessing Church in Germany to serve as director of one of five newly established illegal seminaries.

4.2.3 Resistance and martyrdom

Bonhoeffer returned home on 29 April 1935 and became the director of the Zingst seminary of the Confessing Church on the Baltic coast of Pomerania. After a few weeks, in June, the

seminary moved to a small rural town called Finkenwalde. Most students who attended the seminary already received university education and were also on the way to being ordained. Upon completion of the first course, a “House of Brethren” was approved, whereby six students were allowed to remain at Finkenwalde over the holidays, continuing to work with Bonhoeffer. Among the original group were Eberhard Bethge, Winfried Maechler and Albrecht Schönherr, who would later embody Bonhoeffer’s legacy in noteworthy ways. Bonhoeffer’s days at Finkenwalde provided the context of his lectures on discipleship. These were later published as *The Cost of Discipleship*. His classic book *Life Together*, which is a reflection of the spiritual atmosphere at this seminary, also encapsulates all his experiences there, including fellowship, Bible study, singing, worship, solitude, meditation, prayer, the Eucharist and spiritual care.

During these years, the seminarians had the opportunity to interact with various Confessing church congregations, including relatives and other people on whom they significantly depended. Among these were Ruth von Kleist-Retzow and some of her grandchildren, who attended the Sunday services in Finkenwalde. Maria von Wedemeyer, one of Ruth’s granddaughters, was eighteen years younger than Dietrich. In the course of the years that followed, he visited the von Kleist home on numerous occasions. Being addressed as “Pastor Bonhoeffer”, he filled the role of pastor after Maria’s father and brother were killed. Maria later became Dietrich’s fiancée.

Bonhoeffer continued using his contacts in the ecumenical movement, especially his friend George Bell, to gather support for the Confessing Church’s opposition to Nazism. Furthermore, during August 1936, Bonhoeffer’s endorsement to teach at the Berlin University was repealed. Moreover, after two years of operating illegally, the Finkenwalde seminary was closed in September 1937 upon the order of Gestapo. Although twenty-seven students had been imprisoned by the end of this year, teaching and learning nevertheless continued with Bonhoeffer and his Finkenwalde students continuing their work underground. They operated by means of “collective pastorates”, whereby superintendents from Schlawa and Gross-Schlönwitz appointed seminarians as assistant clergy. The Schlawa seminary was moved to an empty farmhouse in Sigurdshof during 1939, with Bonhoeffer working between the two seminaries. The Gestapo did not cease pursuing these illegal pastorates, however, and they eventually managed to close down the Sigurdshof group. In addition, all seminarians had been summoned for military service by March 1940.

By the end of the 1930’s, Bonhoeffer became increasingly frustrated by the Confessing

Church's lack of defiance in the face of the Nazi's unjust and brutal regime. Even the notorious "Crystal Night" on 9 November 1938, whereby the Nazi's destroyed over seven thousand shops, burnt synagogues and Torah scrolls, killed more than ninety Jews and sent over 20 000 of them to concentration camps, did not raise significant protest from pastors and church leaders. Bonhoeffer was infuriated by the church's utter lack of opposition to this tyrannical government. The following year, Herr Werner, Minister for Church Affairs, appealed to all pastors to take an oath, swearing loyalty to Hitler in commemoration of his fiftieth birthday. There was no significant resistance from church leaders and much to Bonhoeffer's despair, the majority of Confession Church leaders obeyed. He became even more outraged by the prospect of his name being listed for German military service. Therefore, at the invitation of his friend, Reinhold Niebuhr, Bonhoeffer decided to leave for America. He travelled to New York on 2 June, 1939, where Niebuhr had laid plans for Bonhoeffer to go on a lecture tour, teach a summer course at Union Theological Seminary, as well as various pastoral activities serving German refugees. However, Bonhoeffer was overcome with restlessness as he continually thought about what was happening in his home country, convinced that he had to share their fate. As a result, the plans that were made never materialised, and Bonhoeffer left for Germany by the end of July. He journeyed via England to pay a short visit to his twin sister, Sabine, her husband, Gerhard Leibholz and their two daughters, Christianne and Marianne, who had moved to England the previous year because of Gerhard's Jewish descent. This was the last time Sabine ever saw her brother.

While Hitler and his government continued full steam with their political tyranny, others risked their lives by participating in underground resistance movements with the aim of overthrowing Hitler's power. Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi (Christine's husband), was a leading member of the *Abwehr*, the counterintelligence agency of the Nazi's armed forces. The *Abwehr* was also the centre of the resistance movement in Germany itself. For Bonhoeffer, the door was now open to become a civilian member of this German military organisation. In September of 1940, Bonhoeffer was banned from speaking publicly and was also required to report his activities to the authorities on a regular basis. Fully engaged in the battle against anti-Semitism, he consequently decided to join *Abwehr's* resistance movement in Munich – led by Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, General Hans Oster, Colonel General Ludwig Beck and Hans von Dohnanyi – who provided cover-ups for resistance activities. In addition, they were conspiring to assassinate Hitler. They managed to convince a sceptical Gestapo that Bonhoeffer could use his ecumenical contacts for the benefit of gathering information for

the intelligence agency. However, Bonhoeffer used his travels to rally support for the resistance and strengthen communication between the Allied countries and the resistance movement. Apart from travelling to Norway, Sweden and Italy, Bonhoeffer crossed the border to Switzerland, making contact with prime ecumenical figures like Karl Barth and W. A. Visser't Hooft. He was therefore instrumental in "Operation 7", an *Abwehr* enterprise that managed to successfully smuggle 14 Jews into Switzerland. Bonhoeffer's plans and journeys were extremely dangerous, yet he was committed to the fight against Nazism.

It was the year 1942, and Dietrich and Maria von Wedemeyer were very much in love. At the time, Dietrich was well over thirty and Maria was just eighteen years old. Although Maria's mother had reservations about her getting married at such a young age, the couple got engaged on 13 January 1943, as Maria agreed to marry Dietrich in a letter written to him. Sadly, on 5 April, 1943, just a few weeks after their engagement, Dietrich was arrested because of suspicions raised by his travels abroad and his role in Operation 7. He was incarcerated at Tegel Prison. Though Dietrich and Maria never joined in matrimony, their love for each other deepened through Maria's few visits to the prison and their mutual correspondence.

Bonhoeffer was imprisoned for a total of eighteen months at Tegel military prison in Berlin. His "home" was cell 92, a six by nine feet room with a plank bed, shelf, stool, bucket and a skylight window. From there, he wrote various letters to his parents, Maria and his closest friend, Eberhard Bethge, the husband of his niece. One of the guards, Corporal Knobloch, agreed to smuggle the letters out of prison. Following the failed attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944, as well as the discovery of secret *Abwehr* papers and documents, Bonhoeffer and other key figures like Hans von Dohnanyi and members of the Bonhoeffer family circle were implicated in the resistance and conspiracy. In October 1944, his brother, Klaus and his brother-in-law, Rüdiger Schleicher (Ursula's husband), were arrested and imprisoned. Bonhoeffer was also transferred to the Gestapo prison at Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse. Thereby, he and Maria lost contact, yet she desperately, though unsuccessfully, attempted to trace his whereabouts. In February the next year he was moved to the Buchenwald concentration camp, where he had to endure the most extreme Nazi brutality. On 3 April 1945, Bonhoeffer was transported to the Flossenbürg extermination camp. However, the van broke down and the prisoners were transported to a little village in Schönberg. They were detained in a schoolhouse, and at their request, Bonhoeffer conducted a prayer service, preaching from Isaiah 33:5 and I Peter 1:3ff. This was Sunday, 8 April 1945. That night they were moved to

Flossenbürg and tried by an SS court. Although the most unthinkable lay before Bonhoeffer, he carried himself with dignity, praying calmly to the bitter end. Along with other members of the resistance movement, including Wilhelm Canaris, Hans Oster, Karl Sack, Ludwig Gehre, Theodor Strunck and Friedrich von Rabenau, Bonhoeffer was hanged on the morning of 9 April 1945. On that same day, Hans von Dohnanyi was executed at Sachsenhausen. Klaus Bonhoeffer and Rüdiger Schleicher were shot by the SS on the night of April 22-23.

Just a week thereafter, on 30 April, Adolf Hitler committed suicide. In addition, just another week after that, on 7 May, 1945, the war in Europe ended. By then Maria, Dietrich's fiancée, was still trying to locate his whereabouts in West Germany. She only learned the tragic news in June. Klaus and Paula, Dietrich's parents, only heard about their son's death in the following month, when H. B. Gisevius came to Berlin and the BBC broadcasted a memorial service for him from London.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life story encapsulates a wealth of themes. His earthly life was short, yet it exemplifies experiences and encounters from all facets of life; family bonds, friendships, service to others, love, imprisonment, suffering, and a passion for his fellow human beings, which kept him going to the very end. These contexts profoundly influenced Bonhoeffer's thought, reasoning and beliefs, and resonates in every inch of his writings.

4.3 Bonhoeffer's literacy works⁸⁴

A scholarly edition of Bonhoeffer's literacy works originally published in German, have now been translated into English, published as the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBWE)* by Fortress Press. As a result of correspondence that has been hitherto unknown, *The English language edition* contains more material than the German works in a number of instances. Here is the complete list of English works:

- *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church, DBWE I* (1998), originally published as *Sanctorum Communio: eine Dogmatische Untersuchung zur Soziologie der Kirche*;
- *Act and Being, DBWE II* (1996), originally published as *Akt und Sein*;
- *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3, DBWE III* (2004), originally published as *Schöpfung und Fall: Theologische Auslegung von Genesis 1-3*;

⁸⁴ This section draws on the work of Floyd (1999:71-92).

- *Discipleship*, DBWE IV (2001) (formerly translated as *The Cost of Discipleship* and first published in English in 1948), originally published as *Nachfolge*;
- *Life Together* (published together with *Prayerbook of the Bible*, DBWE V (2005), originally published as *Gemeinsames Leben* and *Das Gebetbuch der Bibel*;
- *Ethics*, DBWE VI (2005), originally published as *Ethik*;
- *Fiction from Tegel Prison*, DBWE VII (2010), originally published as *Fragmente aus Tegel*;
- *Letters and Papers from Prison*, DBWE VIII (2010), originally published as *Widerstand und Ergebung*;
- *The Young Bonhoeffer: 1918-1927*, DBWE (IX) (2003), originally published as *Jugend und Studium: 1918-1927*;
- *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928–1931*, DBWE (X) (2008), originally published as *Barcelona, Berlin, Amerika: 1928-1931*;
- *Ecumenical, Academic and Pastoral Work: 1931–1932* DBWE (XI) (yet to be released), originally published as *Ökumene, Universität, Pfarramt: 1931-1932*;
- *Berlin: 1932–1933*, DBWE XII (2009), originally published under the same title;
- *London, 1933–1935*, DBWE XIII (2007), originally published under the same title;
- *Theological Education at Finkenwalde: 1935–1937*, DBWE XIV (yet to be released), originally published as *Illegale Theologenausbildung: 1935-1937*;
- *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940*, DBWE XV (2011), originally published as *Illegale Theologenausbildung: 1937-1940*;
- *Conspiracy and Imprisonment 1940–1945*, DBWE XVI (2006), originally published as *Konspiration und Haft: 1940-1945*.

For the purpose of this project, Bonhoeffer's views in *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall*, as well as *Ethics* will be used to construct a detailed analysis of his understanding of the nature of sin. The context of these three publications will thus be briefly dealt with here.

4.3.1 Act and Being

Following Bonhoeffer's pastoral ministry in Barcelona, he returned to the University of

Berlin in 1929, noticing the significant political changes. He firmly believed that the church should be the one to challenge the state in the face of injustice. The eighteen months between Barcelona and New York he dedicated to working on his habilitation thesis (*habilitationsschrift*), originally entitled *Akt und Sein* and later published as *Act and Being*.

Bonhoeffer decided to take up the theme of how revelation is concretised. He believes that the place of revelation is the church; the community of faith. This community is concretely visible, and hears and believes the Word of God. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer offers a critique of theologians and philosophers who, in his opinion, are guilty of idealism. Strong critical questions are directed to Barthians. In addition, he challenges, among others, Luther, Heidegger, Husserl, Scheler, Grisebach, Tillich, Bultmann, Schleiermacher and Holl.

Bonhoeffer completed *Act and Being* by February 1930. After he submitted it to the theological faculty for appraisal, the formalities took its course and it was accepted on 18 July 1930. This habilitation thesis qualified Bonhoeffer as lecturer in theology at Berlin. At the time he was only twenty-four years old. The rector, Erhard Schmidt, invited Bonhoeffer to deliver his inaugural lecture. Carrying the title “The Question of Humanity in Contemporary Theology”, Bonhoeffer presented his first lecture as qualified teacher on 31 July 1930.

4.3.2 Creation and Fall

During the winter semester of 1932-1933, in his capacity of *Privatdozent* (unpaid lecturer), Bonhoeffer delivered a series of lectures entitled “Creation and sin: A theological exposition of Genesis 1-3” (*Schöpfung und Sünde: Theologische Auslegung von Genesis 1-3*). The content of these lectures was a response to the social and political turmoil raging at the time. For the people of Germany it was an era of restlessness, bewilderment, anxiety, and hopelessness as the rise of the Third Reich dawned upon them.

Not only did Bonhoeffer aim to emphasise God’s Word as the truth in a time of unrest and disorder through these lectures, but he wanted to give fresh insight on the creation narrative. While Genesis 1-3 had always been accepted as a true account of the beginning of history, people started questioning its relevance by the 1930’s. As a result, the church was in perplexity over the issue of God and creation and moreover, the entire European culture expressed difficulty in understanding humankind’s place in time and history. Themes encompassed in these lectures included creation, community, sin, Christology and the costliness of discipleship. For Bonhoeffer, the idea of human sin or the fall implies human beings wanting to play God, free from all creaturely limits.

Bonhoeffer's students were intrigued by his unique way of dealing with Scripture, the relevance of the topic considering the situation in Germany, the content of the lectures, and ultimately, with Bonhoeffer as person. They consequently requested that the lectures be published. Bonhoeffer sent a copy of the manuscript to the renowned Christian Kaiser Verlag, and although they were initially reluctant, they eventually agreed to publish it. Because of Emanuel Hirsch's *Schöpfung und Sünde* (Creation and sin) published in 1931, Kaiser Verlag requested that Bonhoeffer's work be renamed. It was then published as *Schöpfung und Fall: Theologische Auslegung von Genesis 1-3* (Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3) (1933).

4.3.3 Ethics

Since the rise of the Third Reich in 1933, Bonhoeffer actively resisted the policies of this regime, with or without the help of the church. He especially challenged theologians and church leaders who were congenial toward Nazism and its related social, economic and political transformation. *Ethics*, which is a compilation of thirteen manuscripts, is a reflection of Bonhoeffer's years of Christian opposition to Adolf Hitler and National Socialism and a conspiracy to overthrow this tyrant.

Bonhoeffer's motivation for writing this book was two-fold; his active participation in the resistance movement, and his need to contribute to Germany's reconstruction after the war. Themes encompassed in this work include, among others, creation, worldliness, division and conflict, obedience to God's command, salvation, the church as the Christ-community, reconciliation, and "Natural Life", whereby Bonhoeffer wrestles with Nazi laws that infringes on the rights of personal life. *Ethics* thus needs to be understood within the context of not only Bonhoeffer's theological development, but also in the light of the raging war, his resistance to an unjust government and the conspiracy to overthrow it.

Following his arrest and imprisonment in 1943, these unfinished manuscripts were still lying on Bonhoeffer's desk as the time. These fragments were pieced together, although not in the manner which the author intended, and were edited by Eberhard Bethge. His *Ethik* was first published posthumously in 1949, and is widely recognised as Bonhoeffer's *magnum opus*. A first English translation appeared in 1954.

4.4 Bonhoeffer's legacy⁸⁵

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is not only commemorated as a prominent theologian, but also as pastor, spiritual writer and martyr. Much inspiration is drawn from his life and work, which has been and continues to be influential among religious and non-religious circles. What follows is a brief discussion of his legacy.

4.4.1 Reception and interpretation of Bonhoeffer's theology⁸⁶

Before Dietrich Bonhoeffer's death, he was relatively unknown outside a small circle of friends. He was renowned, however, in ecumenical circles through an established network of contacts in Europe, England and the USA. In his home country, he became established for his authorship of *Discipleship* and *Life Together*. After his death in 1945, he also became known for his martyrdom as part of the Confession Church's struggle against German nationalism.

The posthumous publication of *Ethics* in 1949 was well received by readers. Yet, it was difficult to understand the development of his theology because of the fragmentary nature of his writing, and the fact that his first two books, *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being*, were not received with the same enthusiasm and only became widely known in the 1960s. Though it was never intended for publication, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, which is a collection of correspondence between Bonhoeffer and his family, friends, his fiancée Maria von Wedemeyer and his closest friend Eberhard Bethge, was first published in German in 1951. This stimulated some new interest. It was, among others,⁸⁷ John Robinson's *Honest to God*, published in 1963, that sparked debate on Bonhoeffer's writings. In this book, Robinson interprets Bonhoeffer based on his fragmented theological thoughts. A heated debate on Bonhoeffer's themes of "secularisation" and his "theology of the death of God" in the 1960s contributed to Bonhoeffer's fame.⁸⁸ By the late sixties, the political significance of Bonhoeffer's life and work became recognised in the context of various debates, for example Christian-Jewish dialogue, the civil rights movement, the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the confessing church movement in South Africa and in widening circles elsewhere.

Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer's close friend and also his niece's husband, was most influential in the transmission of Bonhoeffer's legacy. In addition, he played a noteworthy

⁸⁵ For further reading on Bonhoeffer's Legacy, see Klaasen (1981).

⁸⁶ This section draws on the work of De Gruchy (1999) and Nelson (1999).

⁸⁷ See Hamilton (1962), Van Buren (1963), Altizer (1966) and Smith (1967).

⁸⁸ See Müller (1966), Godsey (1960) and Dumas (1971).

role in enabling the world to understand the relevance of Bonhoeffer's theology for various contemporary issues, especially the church's witness in the world. Bethge's monumental biography on this theologian's life, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian, Christian, Contemporary* (1977), immensely contributed to the reception of Bonhoeffer's theology. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, comments as follows: "[M]ost of what we know about Bonhoeffer has come to us through Eberhard Bethge" (quoted in De Gruchy 1999:97).

4.4.2 The International Bonhoeffer Society (IBS)

On the basis of Bonhoeffer's far-reaching influence on scholarly inquiry, the International Bonhoeffer Society (IBS) was established in 1971. Being a non-profit, ecumenical and interfaith educational and scholarly organisation, its purpose is to preserve his legacy and to also increasingly develop knowledge of his legacy through promoting research on his life, ethics and theology.

The IBS English Language selection has members across the globe, including Australia, Canada, Germany, Holland, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States. Its first president was Roman Catholic lay theologian Ernst Feil (1932-2013), who was until recently a member of the IBS Germany section board of directors. Feil played a significant role in the formation, as well as the support of the organisation. The IBS presently consists of a board of directors⁸⁹, an editorial advisory board⁹⁰ and emeriti.⁹¹ The current president is Gaylon Barker, with Stephen Plant as vice-president.

The IBS functions primarily through meetings and conferences held locally and internationally. Since its founding in 1971, it has come together every four years, where various academic papers on Bonhoeffer's work are presented. Such conferences were held in various countries, among others, the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, South Africa and Netherlands. Apart from that, The English Language Section conducts an annual

⁸⁹ Gaylon Barker (president), Keith Clements, Clifford Green, Lori Brandt Hale (secretary), Barry Harvey, Jenny McBride, Stephen Plant (vice-president), Mark Randall (treasurer), Craig Slane, Anna Mercedes, Jeffrey Pugh and Peter Frick.

⁹⁰ Lori Brandt Hale, John Matthews (chairman) and Clifford Green.

⁹¹ John Matthews, Jim Burtness, John Godsey, Dan Hardy, Pat Kelley, Geoffrey Kelly, Michael Lukens, Bill Peck, Larry Rasmussen, Deotis Roberts, Martin Rumscheidt, Charles Sensel, Charles West and Ruth Zerner.

meeting at the American Academy of Religion. The affairs of the IBS are addressed and papers are also read.

The IBS regularly publishes newsletters, as well as books. In addition, it co-sponsored the Scholars' Conference on the Church Struggle and the Holocaust. Since the 1990's, the IBS embarked on translating Bonhoeffer's sixteen-volume works, now published as the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition (*DBWE*).

4.4.3 Bonhoeffer's relevance for ecology, politics and other contemporary issues

Increasing scholarly engagement in Bonhoeffer's work begged questions about continuity and discontinuity in his theology; at first more emphasis was placed on discontinuity, given the emphasis on *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Later several scholars pointed out the continuity of his later writings with his early work. More recently, a plethora of specific interests emerged in fields such as literature, music, drama and film, science and ecology. With reference to the latter, for example, Larry L. Rasmussen (1996:295-316; 2013) highlights and acclaims Bonhoeffer's role as ecotheologian. Stephen J. Plant (2012), on the other hand, employs Bonhoeffer's writings to illustrate the notion of redemption for the entire creation, human and non-human. Peter Scott (2000:371-384) also employs Bonhoeffer's writings to reconstruct the meaning of humans in the image of God in a technological society, while Rodney D. Holder (2009:115-132) analyses Bonhoeffer in the context of discourse on science and religion and based on Bonhoeffer's references to the work of scientist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has left the world a living legacy, and his example is counted among that of other prominent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi. It therefore comes as no surprise that Bonhoeffer's life and work continue to be influential not only among scholars, but also among those engaged in the struggle for liberation and justice. Martin Doblmeier, director of "Bonhoeffer", a critically acclaimed documentary featuring this martyr's life and death, is quoted in saying:

In the world of religion and spirituality, Bonhoeffer is clearly one of the most inspiring writers of the 20th century ... and his life and work continue to have universal appeal ... Conservative Christians are attracted because Bonhoeffer was so Christ-centered and Bible-based. The progressive wing of the church is attracted to his commitment to social justice. In our language of today, he was a man who not only "talked the talk", but walked the walk (in Hames 2006).

In his struggle for racial equality in America, Martin Luther King Jr., for example, has drew much inspiration from Bonhoeffer's tireless efforts and martyrdom, motivating him to continue fighting for this cause. More closely to home, Bonhoeffer's legacy also had a profound influence on former Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the context of the church's struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Nevertheless, De Gruchy (1999:104) maintains that Bonhoeffer's legacy receives appropriation not only in the political arena, but also carries immeasurable relevance for various contemporary issues. *Bonhoeffer for a New Day: Theology in a Time of Transition* (1997a) is a compilation of the papers presented at the Seventh International Bonhoeffer Congress, held in Cape Town in 1996. Scholars from around the globe gathered to present their views on the theme, "Are we still of any use", Bonhoeffer's "soul-searching" question to his fellow conspirators (De Gruchy 1997c:1-2). Participants presented papers on this renowned theologian's relevance for a number of issues including, among others, Christianity, the Church, ethics and human rights in South Africa, civil rights and race relations in America, the ecumenical movement, environmental issues, as well as the apartheid struggle and the reconstruction of post-apartheid South Africa. An interesting example is Asian eco-feminist Chung Hyun Kyung's "letter" to Bonhoeffer, commending his significance for the Korean Student Christian Movement (Kyung 1997:9-19). A noteworthy example for the South African context is John de Gruchy's article entitled "Bonhoeffer, Apartheid, and Beyond: The Reception of Bonhoeffer in South Africa". Here, De Gruchy (1997b:353-365) highlights Bonhoeffer's significance in the South African apartheid struggle and his relevance for post-apartheid South Africa. He employs the testimony of Beyers Naudé who, like Bonhoeffer, remained true to the gospel of Christ in the midst of political and social turmoil. De Gruchy holds that Naudé fulfilled a "Bonhoeffer-like" role in the fight against an unjust government's systems of racism, oppression and injustice and emphasised the need for developing a "confessing church" in South Africa. De Gruchy concludes his article with a discussion on how the church can follow Bonhoeffer's example and remain faithful to its Christian witness in our post-apartheid, multi-faith and multi-cultural South Africa.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter serves as introduction to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his life, work and legacy. The aforementioned information clearly indicates why this theologian has and continues to have such noteworthy impact on people from all walks of life. It also functions as a signpost as to why I specifically chose to analyse this particular theologian's views; he was a passionate

fighter and beacon of hope, holding firm to his Christian principles, in the midst of adversity and calamity. A retrieval of his insights will thus serve as an appropriate resource in the light of our pressing ecological crisis.



Chapter 5

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's understanding of the nature of sin

5.1 Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's work is considered a vital source for gaining an understanding of the concept of sin. He discusses this topic in a number of his publications, among others *Sanctorum Communio*, *Discipleship*, *Life Together* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*. For the purpose of this chapter, emphasis will be placed on his views on the nature of sin in *Act and Being*, *Creation and Fall*, and *Ethics*.

Bonhoeffer's interprets the nature of sin within the framework of the classical understanding, i.e. sin as pride, greed, moral failure and deprivation of the good. In *Act and Being*, Bonhoeffer discusses sin in terms of sinful deeds (acts), as well as sinful nature (being), whereas in *Creation and Fall*, he primarily deals with sinful being that leads to sinful acts. In *Ethics*, he focuses on the sinful being of human beings. Although Bonhoeffer's views on the nature of sin are diverse, there is a discernible pattern in his arguments; he understands sin as being in disunity with God – human creatures alienated from the Creator. His Christology is indispensable for understanding his hamartology and in all instances he sees faith in Christ as the only solution to the overall problem of sin and evil.

When analysing Bonhoeffer's views on the nature of sin it is important to consider the context in which the particular work was written. This was dealt with in the previous chapter. This chapter offers an analysis of Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin, firstly in *Act and Being*, then in *Creation and Fall* and finally, in *Ethics*. The analysis is brought to a close by means of a short conclusion.

5.2 Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin in *Act and Being* (1996)

5.2.1 Act and being: "in Christ" vs. "in Adam"

In order to understand Bonhoeffer's views on the nature of sin in *Act in Being*, there are a few basic concepts that shape the context of his ideas, which need to be understood. The first is the Heideggerian term *Dasein*,⁹² translated as "human existence" or "being" (1996:109).

⁹² This, Bonhoeffer (1996:138ff) contrasts with *Wiessein*. Whereas *Dasein* ("there-being") is the "distinctive form of human existence", *Wiessein* ("how-being") is the "form in which Dasein at any moment actually

“Being”, on the one hand, is the ground of existence; “act”, on the other hand, descends from being, in the same way that act gives rise to being (1996:122). Second is the idea that *Dasein* can only be perceived “from outside”, through revelation. As such, the only place where *Dasein* can be understood is the church, the community of faith, proclaiming Christ’s death and resurrection (1996:109-116). Accordingly, any existence apart from Christ is “inauthentic”. Existence encountered with Christ has been rejected and accepted in its entirety, and therefore existence can only be sinful and forgiven. This follows that only through faith – only through Christ – can there be an understanding of *Dasein* and ultimately, an understanding of sin (1996:116-118). The third aspect is that the old humanity is ensnared by sin and guilt, and only through faith in Christ can they bear the new humanity (1996:120). Faith is the act and also the being of the new humanity – those in Christ, while unfaith is the act and being of the old humanity – those without Christ. Being is therefore grounded in either faith or sin. Temptation, which lures us into sin, away from God’s community, is only nullified through faith (1996:122-123). Being can therefore be distinguished into new human beings “in Christ” and old human beings “in Adam”. The latter constitutes the groundwork for Bonhoeffer’s views on the nature of sin in *Act and Being*.

5.2.2. Unfaith: Act and being “in Adam”

Bonhoeffer (1996:136-137) initially provides a brief account of the knowledge of sin. In his view, which is based on Luther’s, human beings would not be able to know that they are sinners, except through revelation. Therefore, knowledge of sin is only possible through faith in Christ. He maintains that the whole being of human beings are sinful, no part is left unaffected. Accordingly, only through faith can the totality of our being be placed in truth, thus making knowledge of sin accessible. In faith, *Dasein* is no longer in the power of *Wiessein* (“how-it-is”) (1996:138).

In Bonhoeffer’s view, one could either be in faith or unfaith – the latter referring to the state of being “in Adam”, in sin. This state of “untruth”, Bonhoeffer (1996:137) also refers to as the “culpable perversion of the will ... of human essence”. To be in a state of sin implies being turned into the self, that the heart is not directed towards God. Having separated themselves from God, as well as from community with others, humans stand alone in untruth. The world is considered “their” world, whereby they are their own creator and lord, having their beginning and end in themselves. In this state of self-glorification, God is no longer the

exists”. *Wiessein* is thus “*Dasein*’s being-how-it-is”.

source of life but has become a mere religious object.

This follows that sin is the violation of *Dasein* by *Wiesein*, the violation of being by “being-how-it-is”, of human existence by the actual form in which it exists (1996:137-138). Bonhoeffer (1996:138-141) argues that in the face of sin, the line between the two is blurred because the self has taken possession of its *Dasein* and has thereby become its own master. Thus, having to bear the weight of being creator and bearer of its world, trapped in aloneness, human beings become terrified of themselves. As such, they rise and proceed toward charging themselves – dressed in the language of conscience – by becoming their own ultimate judge. Their response is active repentance (*contritio activa*).⁹³ Being in Adam, being in sin, human conscience and active repentance implies grasping at the self, and confirm and justify human beings’ self-glorifying loneliness. They make themselves the defendants and thereby appeal to their better selves in a world where the self reigns and justifies. Being in sin, they misinterpret their condition, and thereby seek themselves not in Christ but in themselves. They hope that their repentance will save them from their sinful reality, but only keep their sins because these are perceived through the conscience, which imprisons them and orders them to continuously behold their sin. Not realising that there could never be sufficient penitence for sin, sin only increases when perceived through the conscience, punishing the self. Conscience in this sense is therefore from the devil, torturing and driving humans to despair. Being unable to bring death upon themselves, they latch onto themselves, with their knowledge of themselves trapped in untruth.

Bonhoeffer (1996:144-145) holds that an act of sin – “misconstruing the self that takes place when *Dasein* is violated by its being-how-it-is as one who falsely claims to possess full power of the self” – corresponds to being-in-sin. Thus, sin should be understood in two ways; on the one hand, as an act, and on the other hand, as being. As act, the distinguishing feature of sin is inexcusable guilt. Sin is the turning in of the human will or essence into itself and as such, any self-seeking decision is deemed to be an act of sin. Conscience plays a significant role here, in the sense that decisions are intentionally taken against God.

Bonhoeffer (1996:145) maintains however, that sin could never only be a free act at a particular point in time. Otherwise, it would be possible for humans to withdraw into sinlessness. In addition, human essence in its totality is affected by sin. Apart from the act,

⁹³ This is the opposite of *contritio passiva* or passive repentance (1996:139), something only possible through faith in Christ (1996:141). See the discussion on page 82.

sin thus also needs to be recognised as being, which could be done in two ways. In the first instance, the continuity of sin is sanctioned by nature in the sense of original sin. In this regard, sin is a human-bred product and thereby remains a part of human nature. In the second instance, sin could also be “a pretemporal deed that gave rise to sin in the present”. Sin as entity – an ontologically prior deed – precedes the act of sinning. Bonhoeffer (1996:145) believes that in this regard sin cannot touch humans existentially: It is transcended within them; they remain in control of it even when it subdues them. Sin as entity therefore absolves humans of their guilt, as it is “the master into whose hands human beings are utterly delivered” (1996:145).

Aligning himself with the view of Luther, Bonhoeffer (1996:146-147) understands sin as both original sin and as egocentricity. Sin as being is rooted in “being-a-person”, whereas sin as act is constituted by the self seeking itself. In their whole sinful being, humanity is guilty of their false, self-seeking decisions. Humanity and the individual are therefore one – in the individual fall, humanity falls. The humanity of Adam filters down into the individual human’s incomprehensible acts of sin. While the individual is responsible for each sinful deed, the humanity of Adam within is committing these. The individual act is simultaneously the deed of humanity and therefore, each person bears the guilt of all humanity. The entire being of humans is in the humanity of Adam and as such, there can be no retreat from individual sinful acts into a sinless being. In Adam, act constitutes being in the same way that being constitutes act. The two are effectively interrelated, and because of this, both act and being carry guilt.

Bonhoeffer (1996:147-149) furthers his analysis of human beings “in Adam” by discussing the terms “everydayness”, “conscience” and “temptation”. He states that guilt is the “everydayness” of those in Adam. It is a continual decision for solitude and “a *coercive* seeking after pleasure in the creature” (1996:147). As such, they are constantly engaging in the (hopeless) flight from the right knowledge that appropriately marks the limits of pleasure. Everydayness of those in Adam only escalates, because the wilder they flee, the more oblivious they become to their hopelessness. This superficiality – which appears to be life-orientated, but in reality has its beginning and end in death – conceals their solitude.

According to Bonhoeffer (1996:148), “conscience” in Adam is not an authentic conscience, but rather the point where in desperation and solitude, human beings become aware of themselves, thereby attempting to overcome them. What arises is only a general consciousness of their aloneness – not authentic consciousness – and this is precisely what

conscience seeks to abolish by the restoration of human beings to themselves. Law and death, the powers of this world, overpowers them, causing anxiety. Human beings are thereby not able to be freed from the self. They consider themselves immortal and have to endure their endless solitude. Bonhoeffer (1996:142) holds that there is another type of conscience, however, which he describes as “the voice of God ... insofar as conscience is the place where Christ, in real temptation, kills human beings in order to give them life or not”. Conscience other than this is therefore unfaith.

Bonhoeffer (1996:142) distinguishes between two kinds of “temptation”; temptation as the work of Christ, in which human beings die of the law, and temptation as the ultimate grasp for the self, “seeking the self in oneself”. Furthering his argument, Bonhoeffer (1996:148-149) states that is the first kind of temptation that reveals the guilt character of the solitude of those in Adam: They “are forced to recognise that their guilt and death are the ground and the end of their flight”. Also, they become aware that God is not the source of their life and that that their knowledge and will is now rooted in death. Anxiety is tied with this recurrent death. Human beings are no longer in solitude, as everything now speaks to, accusing them, yet they remain defenceless and alone. This temptation, where those in Adam die through Christ, is their end of sinners – it is their death – which either brings eternal death or eternal life. Life that comes from death is therefore God’s free gift to those who believe. “For then God turns one’s eyes away from oneself, and gives them God’s own orientation ... towards Christ, the crucified and risen one who is overcoming the temptation to death” (1996:149-150).

5.2.3. Faith: Act and being “in Christ”

The truth of human sin could only be discovered through the encounter with Christ, at that moment where he breaks through the solitude of those in Adam. Passive repentance (*contritio passiva*⁹⁴) is therefore only possible through faith (1996:141).

Bonhoeffer’s analysis of sin closes with a discussion of the human being “in Christ”. As opposed to being “in Adam”, being “in Christ” implies the seeking of the self only in Christ, being directed only toward Him. Whereas in Adam, being (*Dasein*) is violated by the form in which it exists (*Wiessein*) because humans seek the self in themselves, in Christ, *Dasein* is freed from the power of the self and is now under the power of Christ. Here, human beings no longer consider themselves to be lord and creator, but recognise their being as God’s

⁹⁴ In contrast with active repentance (*contritio activa*). See discussion on page 80.

creatures. As such, they no longer live in unfaith but in faith, being directed toward Christ. They cease living under the conscience of their own voice but continue under conscience as the voice of God. It leads them to Christ and to a repentance which is not a grasp for the self but a repentance rooted in forgiveness. They do not continue losing themselves in the self, but instead look for and find themselves in Christ (1996:150-157). Bonhoeffer (1996:157-159) concludes his arguments, stating that those in Christ is now no longer estranged from God, fellow human beings and the rest of creation, but find themselves in the community of faith. Reference to “I” is replaced with “Christ as Lord and God”. Seeking His revelation and not themselves, *Dasein* and *Wiessein* are restored to their proper status:

Home is the community of Christ, always ‘future’, present ‘in faith’ because we are children of the future – always act, because it is being; always being, because it is act (1996:159).

5.3 Bonhoeffer’s understanding of sin in *Creation and Fall* (2004)

5.3.1. The Beginning

In the introduction of *Creation and Fall*, Bonhoeffer (2004:21) refers to the world as the “old world”. Some, belonging to the “old world”, want to claim the promises of the church – the new – but do not want to leave their old (sinful) ways behind, and thereby deny Christ as Lord of the new. Only the church knows the beginning of all things, because it knows Christ, through whom everything (even sin) is revealed (2004:21-22).

In the first chapter, Bonhoeffer touches only once on the concept of sin with the statement, “... those who know only in their sin about having been created by God ...” (2004:31), but states that this concept will be discussed later in his exegesis. A significant aspect enlightened in this chapter is Bonhoeffer’s view on the beginning of creation. An interesting point that he addresses is our continual questions about the beginning of all things. He argues that asking (and attempting to answer) such questions are futile, as “the beginning is infinite ... [and] endless and so ... has no beginning” (2004:26). Because Bonhoeffer refers here to the beginning of creation, one can deduce that he refers to the beginning of *all things*, including *sin*. Based on Bonhoeffer’s response to questions regarding the issue of “the beginning”, one can therefore also construe his response to the question as to the beginning or origin of sin. He argues that such questions could never be answered, as it only leads to more questions, stating that: “We exist in a circle ... the beginning is everywhere ... for that very reason there is no beginning at all” (2004:26). He further holds that answering such questions replaces

God with human reason (2004:27), and believes that such questions are “godless” (2004:31). In this instance, he makes reference to Luther’s response to the question as to what God was doing before the world was created: “God was cutting sticks to cane people who ask such questions” (2004:31). In Luther’s answer he recalls Augustine, who states that God “was preparing hell for those who pry too deep” (2004:31). On his part, Bonhoeffer’s maintains that such questions imply that we seek to “go behind the creating God ... behind the beginning” (2004:30-31). To question the origin of sin is thus as futile, as it is sinful.

In furthering his argument on the issue of “the beginning”, Bonhoeffer (2004:28-31) states that there are only two parties that can speak of the beginning, namely God and “the evil one”. Us humans, being in the “middle”, have no authority to speak of the beginning (or the end). God reveals truths about the beginning through the Scriptures – to the extent that it is *His Word*. However, the evil one, “who has been a liar from the beginning”, deceives us human beings with lies that he portrays as the truth: “Believe me ... and you will be in the beginning and will be lord of the truth” (2004:29). Attempting to answer questions on the beginning, including the beginning of sin (evil), Bonhoeffer argues, can only be achieved by means of a lie. One may note in this regard that although Bonhoeffer refrains from explicitly addressing the origin of sin, it could be argued that he implicitly does so by addressing the origin of evil. In his view, although there was no sin committed yet, evil was there, existing alongside God. Although “the evil one” does not cause us to sin he deceives us with lies, and in our creaturely freedom we choose to sin by believing his lies.

Another significant aspect that Bonhoeffer (2004:33-36) calls attention to in the first chapter, is the issue of “nothingness”. He believes that this is what lies behind the beginning – just “nothingness” or “non-being”. Furthermore, for Bonhoeffer this “nothingness” is the ultimate attempt at explaining questions about the beginning, including the beginning or origin of sin. This is because sin in itself is nothingness – “the nihil privatum” (2004:34) – implying a state of deprivation. Yet God is forever Lord over this nothingness.

5.3.2. God’s word and work

In analysing Genesis 1:3, Bonhoeffer (2004:41-43) states that God’s *Word* – the fact that he *spoke* creation into existence, implies that He acted out of freedom and omnipotence. At His command everything was called into existence. Creation as God’s work is not the “effect” of His word – His word (or command: the imperative) already represents the work (or what takes place: the indicative). Because we humans are fallen, because we do not continue to

exist in the unity of God's active word, we are unable to discern the inseparability of the two and rather see the creation as a matter of cause and effect. Bonhoeffer (2004:43) further holds that God's word gives form: "It outlines and limits the individual". Thus, our whole creaturely being, the whole human condition, is shaped by the Word and it is the light that creates form; that turns chaotic and disordered matter into an ordered world. Bonhoeffer (2004:44) bluntly states: "Without the light we would not exist, because without the light things do not exist over against each other – for then no form exists. But without existing over against one another there is no freely worship of God ... In the light ... form becomes aware of existing over against something else and so becomes aware of its own existence; and it gives all thanks for this to the Creator." Only through the light can we distinguish the darkness; only through good can we distinguish evil. Christ is this light. Only through His gracious and redemptive character can we recognise our own guilt as sinners and thereby worship God.

On Genesis 1:4, "And God saw that the light was good"⁹⁵, Bonhoeffer (2004:42-43) comments that God looks at the created world and sees it as good, in spite of the idea that it is a fallen world. "God loves God's work and therefore wills to uphold and preserve it ... What is meant here is a goodness that has not yet been distinguished as such over against evil" (2004:46). Bonhoeffer maintains that creation – the work – is the embodiment of God's (good) will, and therefore the work – and not only the will – is good.^{96 97} His exegesis of Genesis 1:11-13 and 20-25 closely links with this idea. Bonhoeffer (2004:59) believes that the meaning of the statement, "... and God saw that it was good ...", is two-fold: "One the one hand God's work in the unspoiled form in which God's will has shaped it is good. On the

⁹⁵ The biblical translation quoted throughout *Creation and Fall* is the one that Bonhoeffer uses in this book and not the New International Version, which I use in the rest of this thesis. In this regard, Bonhoeffer (2004:19) states: "The translation of the biblical text conforms as closely to Luther's version as the original seemed to allow; where it diverges from this, it essentially follows the version of Kautzsch".

⁹⁶ As opposed to the Kantian idea that only the will is good. In response to this, Bonhoeffer (2004:46) argues that: "It is not correct that only the will can be good. A state of things can also be good: God's creation was as such 'very good'. Even in the fallen world a state of things can be good – never in and through itself but always only with God's own act, the new creation, in view." With reference to the aforementioned comment on the "light", this statement by Bonhoeffer reiterates the notion that only through the light is the darkness recognised – only through God's grace are we able to know and confess our guilt.

⁹⁷ Here, the issue of theodicy surfaces. If God created the world good, where does evil come from and how was humans plunged into sin?

other hand it is 'good' only in the way that the creaturely can be good, that is, by the Creator's looking upon it, acknowledging it as the Creator's own, and saying about it, 'It is good'." Only in the light of God's goodness is what has been created good, as Bonhoeffer closes this chapter by stating: "It never knows about its own being except by looking at the word of God, at the freedom with which God creates and upholds" (2004:59). Thus, sin could never exist on its own – as the privation of the good, it depends on what is good. Only through God's goodness can it be known.

5.3.3. Human beings in the image of God

In Bonhoeffer's analysis of the creation of humankind, two significant aspects of the human condition receive attention, namely human freedom and the human body. Scripture holds that humans are made in the image of God. Why is it that among all other creaturely beings, only humankind is made in the Creator's likeness? The first and foremost reason pertains to the notion of freedom. Bonhoeffer (2004:60-61) states that the rest of God's work – the earth and all its beings – are conditioned and therefore not free. As Bonhoeffer states, it is "torn away from, and alien to, to the Creator; it is no longer the Creator" (2004:60). However, because God wants to create beings in His own image, he must create them free, resembling the freedom with which He creates, free to worship Him. For Bonhoeffer (2004:63), "freedom" implies "not a quality ... a possession ... [or] an object ..." Rather, it implies a *relation* between human beings. He defines it "in terms of the existence of human beings over-against-one-another, with-one-another, and in-dependence-upon-one-another" (2004:64). Humans are thus free *for* each other and their Creator. Yet, because they are created in God's image, they are "commissioned and empowered" (2004:66) by Him to rule over the rest of creation – to be "its lord" (2004:66). Therefore, humankind is free *from* the rest of the created world. This constitutes the first aspect of humans created in the Creator's image; the fact that humans are free "for God and the other person" and free "from the creature in dominion over it" (2004:67). Considering these aspects of human freedom, it is clear that humans are created free, endowed with the divine ability to choose. They are free – free to worship God and likewise, also free to serve the evil one and sin against each other and against God. This is what makes humankind distinct from the rest of creation. Bonhoeffer (2004:66-67) powerfully captures the essence of sin as estrangement, which flows from humanity's selfish ruling over the earth, in the following assertion:

We do not rule; instead we are ruled. The thing, the world, rules humankind;

humankind is a prisoner, a slave of the world, and its dominion is an illusion. Technology is the power with which the earth seizes hold of humankind and masters it. And because we no longer rule, we lose the ground so that the earth no longer remains *our* earth, and we become estranged from the earth ... [W]e fail to rule ... because we do not know the world as God's creation and do not accept the dominion we have as God-given but seize hold of it for ourselves ... There is no dominion without serving God; in losing the one humankind necessarily loses the other ... [I]n shying away from exercising dominion over the earth ... human beings have forever lost God and their brothers and sisters. God, the brother and sister, and the earth belong together.

Before addressing the second aspect of human beings created in God's image, Bonhoeffer (2004:68-69) briefly pays attention to the blessing that God lays upon humankind in Genesis 1:28-31. He believes that this blessing remains until it is replaced by a curse. God places on humankind burdens of blessings and curses, which "are inherited from one generation to another, often not understood ... [yet] altogether real ...". In this statement, we discern the notion of "original" sin – the curse of sin laid upon Adam and inherited by the entire human race, manifested in its inclination to sin.

"... God fashioned humankind out of dust from the ground, and blew into its nose the breath of life ..." (Genesis 2:7). The second reason why it is said that humans are created in God's likeness is found in this scripture: The human body is the only creaturely being endowed with the Spirit of God (2004:78-79). The idea that we humans are "born from the ground" prominently stands out here. In the words of Bonhoeffer (2004:76): "Humankind is derived from a piece of earth. Its bond with the earth belongs to its essential being. The 'earth is its mother'; it comes out of her womb ... From it human beings have their *bodies*." Bonhoeffer (2004:76-77) maintains that the human body is part of a person's essence and is not merely the representation of a person's exterior. A person *is* body and soul – they do not simply *have* a body and soul. Bonhoeffer thus believes that our *earthly* bodies are the essence of our existence. He states: "Human beings have their existence as existence on earth. They do not come from above; they do not have some cruel fate been driven into the earthly world and been enslaved by it" (2004:77).⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer (2004:78-79) further states that God is glorified

⁹⁸ The statement here denies the Gnostic idea of a pre-cosmic fall preceding the beginning of the world and human existence (2004:77).

in the human body. This is because it lives solely by His spirit, and that is the essential being of the human being. The human body, the Spirit of God and the rest of creation are intertwined:

For in their bodily nature human beings are related to the earth and to other bodies; they are there for others and are dependent upon others. In their bodily existence human beings find their brothers and sisters and find the earth. As such creatures human beings of earth and spirit are 'like' God, their Creator (2004:79).

For this reason, Bonhoeffer (2004:77) argues that those who reject their earthly bodies sin because they reject their very existence before their Creator. Bonhoeffer (2004:78) rejects this sinful idea and thereby states: "Flight from the body is as much flight from being human as is flight from the spirit. The body is the form in which the spirit exists, as the spirit is the form in which the body exists."

5.3.4. The two trees, the woman and the serpent

In analysing Genesis 2:8-25, Bonhoeffer links the chain of objects and related activities that eventually leads to the first human sin; the act of "reach[ing] out for the fruit of an enchanted tree and in that moment [being] displaced from paradise". This is an act that affects the entire course of history and yet, it is not only an act on the part of Adam, but also on the part of the whole of humankind, an act which represents each individual's "beginning, destiny, guilt and end" (2004:82). Bonhoeffer (2004:83) states that because we all have sinned, it is a story not just about the first humans, but about all of humanity.

Attention is paid first to the tree of life, then to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and then to the creation of the woman, while the role of the serpent is highlighted in Bonhoeffer's analysis of Genesis 3:1-3. While no prohibition is attached to the tree of life, there is one attached to the tree of knowledge: The human is prohibited from eating its fruit because it carries with it the threat of death. Bonhoeffer (2004:83) states that life, knowledge and death are here spoken of as if they are somehow connected, and he dedicates the rest of his exposition to analysing this connection.

The tree of life – at the center – is equated to God, the center or source of life. Adam's life revolves around this center "in the unity of unbroken obedience to the Creator" (2004:84). Being innocent and oblivious to disobedience, Adam possesses life in freedom, *before* God. Adam has therefore no desire to take possession of or to seize hold of this center. He is completely oriented towards the source of life. Bonhoeffer (2004:84) states that while the tree

of life may not be threatened by a desire to be seized by Adam because he already possesses life, the tree of life is endangered by the tree of knowledge of good and evil, that is the freedom in which Adam has life. Yet, in what way is it endangered?

According to Bonhoeffer (2004:84-85), the prohibition and the threat of death attached to the tree of knowledge of good and evil are of great significance. For Adam, who lives in unbroken obedience to his Creator, the concepts of “death”, “good and evil” and “prohibition” are incomprehensible. However, as a human being, Adam does understand that this commandment confronts him and indicates his boundary. It challenges his freedom and creatureliness (limit). Bonhoeffer (2004:85) restates the meaning of the prohibition as follows: “Adam you are who you are because of me, your Creator; so now be what you are. You are a free creature, so now be that. You are free, so be free; you are a creature, so be a creature.” So while the tree of knowledge of good and evil – the human being’s boundary or limit – stands at the center, the tree of life – God, the source of life – also stands at the center. This implies that God is both the boundary and the center of human existence (2004:86). Adam knows only his creaturely limit because he knows God, but at this stage he knows nothing about evil and therefore does not understand the prohibition as a commandment that can be transgressed. For Adam, grace is the basis of his freedom and creatureliness, and as such he understands the prohibition only in terms of “the *grace* of the Creator toward the creature” – “only as a renewed gift” (2004:87). While only God possesses knowledge of good and evil, Adam lives in the unity of disobedience, and therefore does not understand that which is twofold, or the split of knowledge into good and evil. He cannot comprehend either, and therefore “lives in the strictest sense *beyond good and evil*”.

So, inevitably, what Bonhoeffer (2004:88-93) substantially emphasises next is the concept of good and evil – “*tob* and *ra*”, *tob* meaning “pleasurable” and *ra* meaning “painful” (2004:88).⁹⁹ For Bonhoeffer (2004:88), *tob* and *ra* implies the “ultimate split ... the deepest divide in human life”. Bonhoeffer further states that in being split apart, they essentially belong together, as the one cannot exist without the other: “There is no *tob*, nothing that is pleasurable/good/beautiful, without its being already immersed in *ra*, in that which is painful/evil/base/false” (2004:88). What is good or pleasurable has essentially passed through and has overcome evil, and likewise, what is evil or painful is strengthened by the good

⁹⁹ *Tob* is the Hebrew word for “good, pleasant, delightful, delicious, happy, glad, joyful”, while *ra* is the Hebrew word for “bad, evil, disagreeable, displeasing, unpleasant, harmful” (2004:88).

through which it becomes possible (2004:88-89). Bonhoeffer (2004:89) makes this provocative statement:

Healthy human beings in pain are borne up and nourished by what brings pleasure; in their experience of pleasure they are churned up by what is painful, in good by evil, in evil by good. They suffer from an inner split.

But how is this “inner split” within humans effected? This inner split is established once human beings gain knowledge of good and evil; not only Adam, but each one of us who eats from the tree of knowledge, and then *dies* because of the threat of death attached to the prohibition. This implies that the tree of knowledge is then also the *tree of death*, which stands in opposition to and endangers the tree of life. Sin implies that humans transgress the established boundary and center and thereby lose their life (2004:89). Bonhoeffer (2004:90) further explains the state of this human divide: “A human being who knows about *tob* and *ra* knows immediately about death. Knowing about *tob* and *ra* itself constituted death ... Humankind is dead in its own good and in its own evil.” Being dead in this sense does not mean the end of one’s physical life or existence, but rather the inability to *live before God* and yet having to live before Him. Death here implies “standing before God as an outlaw, as one who is lost and damned ... receiving life from God no longer as grace ... but as a commandment that stands in one’s way and with a flaming sword denies one any way of retreat” (2004:90). It implies no longer gracefully possessing life in freedom, but living by a *commandment*, which demands what one is unable to fulfil; no longer living from the centre or source but living out of oneself, one’s own resources and one’s own knowledge of good and evil, yet being unable to do so. Bonhoeffer (2004:91) sums this up cycle of sinfulness up in the following statement:

Humankind lives in a circle; it *lives* out of its own resources; it is alone. Yet it *cannot live*, because in fact it does not live but in this life is dead, because it *must* live ... *must* accomplish life out of its own resources and just that is its death (as the basis at once of its knowledge and of its existence!).

Bonhoeffer (2004:92) describes humanity’s fallen condition as a state of disunity. As such, humans remain in a split-apart world because their lives are rooted in antithesis and contradiction. We could never escape to or even comprehend living *beyond good and evil*. Only through Christ can we overcome living by the commandment, be freed from the curse of death and live a life by grace. What now remains is the question as to how we humans fall

away from God and create this world of contradiction for ourselves.

Perhaps the answer to this becomes more apparent in analysing the next aspect that eventually leads to the first human sin, the incomprehensible act of seizing the tree of knowledge and the tree of life; the creation of woman. Bonhoeffer (2004:96) believes that each person, in their own way, is alone. Like we are alone in evil and hopelessness because we have hated others and pushed them away, Christ was also alone in the fullness of deity, just like Adam was alone in hope of community. While no suitable partner for Adam is found among the animals – which are formed from the ground – God eventually creates a helpmate for him from Adam's own human flesh. Adam understands the uniqueness of Eve, but the fact that she has been formed from his flesh is no cause for pride or for him wanting to claim her for himself. Instead, Adam accepts her in gratitude as a gift from God. Adam understands the unique bond between them as him belonging to her and her belonging to him (2004:97).

So in what way is Eve a helper and partner to Adam? Bonhoeffer (2004:98) argues that she fulfils this duty in the sense of helping him bear the limit imposed on him, the limit that he alone, in unbroken obedience, had to bear in his human freedom and creatureliness. Although Adam continued to live his life within this boundary and although transgressing it was incomprehensible to him, he could not really love this life. God knew that Adam could only bear life in its boundedness if it is borne in *love*. For this reason God created Eve, who becomes the boundary and object of Adam's love, as Bonhoeffer (2004:98) states: "Indeed love for the woman was now to be the human being's very life (in the deepest sense of the word)." Adam's love for Eve, his helper and partner, thus helps him to bear the limit. She is grace to him as the prohibition was grace to him – she is the limit imposed by God on him, the limit that he loves and will not transgress. This is the instant where the sinful concept of falling away from God is illuminated. Bonhoeffer (2004:99) described this act as "the point where love for the other is obliterated". This implies that the desire to seize the tree of knowledge and the tree of life is produced once love for the other is abolished. As a result, the human being can only hate the limit and longs – uncontrollably – to either possess or to destroy the other. God's grace, the creation of a partner to help us bear the limit and live before Him in community, becomes a curse. The very thing that we accepted in humility in grace now becomes the foundation for our pride and rebellion, as we insist on our contribution to the other's making, lay claim upon them and adamantly maintain that they are derived from us. The very other who is supposed to deepen our love for the Creator reinforces our hatred for the Creator. Bonhoeffer (2004:99-100) explains:

The power of the other which helps me to live before God now becomes the power of the other because of which I must die before God. The power of life becomes the power of destruction, the power of community becomes the power of isolation, the power of love becomes the power of hate.

Bonhoeffer (100-102) further maintains that the ultimate belonging to one another finds expression in human sexuality – another concept highlighted in his analysis. Genesis 2:25, “And they were both naked, the man and his woman, and they were not ashamed”, means that in the unity of unbroken obedience – where a person essentially understands their own being as derived from the other, belonging to the other and destined for the other – there is no guilt, no shame. However, shame is the product of a torn-apart world, of antithesis, of contradiction. It is caused by the knowledge of dividedness; humankind’s, the world’s and one’s own dividedness. In this state of guilt and shame we no longer accept the other as God’s gift, but obsessively desire them for our own selfish purposes. Correspondingly, the other person is no longer satisfied with belonging to us, but solely desires to gain something from us. Bonhoeffer (2004:101) sums this up by stating that: “Shame is a cover in which I hide myself from the other because of my own evil and the other person’s evil, that is, because of the dividedness that has become between us.” As a result, the relation between knowledge, death and sexuality forms an indispensable part of Bonhoeffer’s understanding of evil and sin.

Therefore, what now follows is the final link in the chain of activities leading to that first sinful act – the serpent. The endangerment of the tree of life by the prohibition attached to the tree of knowledge, as well as the creation of Eve, was dealt with in the preceding. The serpent’s “pious” question to the woman is the last activity, chained with the previous ones, which eventually leads to the first human sin. In his analysis of Genesis 3:1-3, Bonhoeffer (2004:103) states that the prohibition, the woman, as well as the serpent, all come from the Creator. However, somehow these blessings are turned into curses as “now, strangely, they form a common front with humankind” against God: The prohibition that Adam accepted as grace now becomes a wrath-provoking law; the woman, man’s helper and partner in bearing his limit now leads him off the right path; and the serpent, a very creature of God, now becomes an object of evil.

Bonhoeffer (104) states that the Bible only offers a strange, indirect answer to how this comes about: Sin is a result of human guilt. On the one hand, to blame sin on the devil, while on the other hand, to blame sin on human freedom used in the wrong way both imply a

misinterpretation and misconstrual of the Scriptures, as well as an apology for sin. The essential aspect here is that this hideous act occurs in God's creation, through God's creatures. Bonhoeffer (2004:104) thus believes there is only one explanation for sin; "truly to lay all the guilt on human beings and at the same time to express how inconceivable, inexplicable and inexcusable that guilt is". The fact that humans – *God's creatures* – oppose God and do evil is what makes it so inexcusable. Human sin cannot be blamed on the devil, or an "imperfect" creation, or an evil force or "the fall of the angels": "The guilt is mine alone; I have committed evil in the midst of the original state of creation" (2004:105). The fall takes place in God's created world, through His creatures, and that is what makes it inexcusable.

Bonhoeffer (2004:105-106) notes that in this biblical account, the devil is nowhere introduced in bodily form, yet evil comes to pass through God's created beings – humankind, the serpent and the tree. The serpent uses the very word of God against Him, and thereby opens humankind's mind to questioning God's word: "Did God really say, You shall not eat from every kind of tree in the garden?" This question immediately places God's word in dispute; as if God would not impose such an unfair thing on humankind because it would imply that God's love is limited. It therefore awakens in humans the desire to go behind God's word and thereby provide a human understanding of God's character. Furthermore, this question appears to defend God's cause; to clarify God's "false" words. Evil only has power to the extent that it stands for God's cause: "In posing its question it derives its existence from the power of God alone, and is able to be evil only where it is pious" (2004:106-107). Bonhoeffer (2004:107) therefore believes that evil in its overt form is powerless; only to the extent that it hides under good – where it "is veiled in the garb of piety" – does it have any real power. What appears to be pious is entirely godless as it calls the whole of God's word into question: "Did God really say ...?"¹⁰⁰ It is "godly" questions like these, states Bonhoeffer (2004:107), through which we give into evil and become

¹⁰⁰ Here, Bonhoeffer (2004:107) poses a list of questions to illustrate his argument: "Did God really say that God is love, that God wishes to forgive us our sins, that we need only believe God, that we need no works, that Christ died and was raised for our sakes, that we will have eternal life in the kingdom of God, that we are no longer alone but upheld by God's grace, that one day all grieving and wailing shall come to an end? Did God really say: You shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not bear false witness....? Did God really say this to me? Or does it perhaps not apply to me in particular? Did God really claim to be a God of wrath toward those who do not keep God's commandments? Did God really demand the sacrifice of Christ – the God whom I know better, the God whom I know to be the infinitely good, all-loving Father?"

disobedient to God. Had such questions not been veiled under good, we would be able to resist them: “But Christians are not open to attack in that way; one must actually approach them with God, one must show them a better, a prouder, God than they seem to have, if they are to fall.”

Bonhoeffer (2004:107-109) maintains that the real evil is not the serpent’s question as such, but the fact that the question itself already contains the wrong answer: “No, God naturally did not say that” (2004:109). The woman therefore acknowledges this and is thereby from the outset won over by the serpent. This question therefore lures humankind into sin by obliging them to pass judgement on the word of God, rather than listening to it and obeying it. They use some principle or notion of God to rebel against His word, and “at that point they have become God’s master, they have left the path of obedience, they have withdrawn from being addressed by God” (2004:108). In hiding under good, in appearing to be defending God’s cause, Adam understands the question as such and thereby makes his *own* discovery, based on his own knowledge, of “being for God”. The serpent uses what is false to cause the demise of what is true. Bonhoeffer (2004:109) therefore warns us: “May we be on our guard against such cunning exaggerations of God’s commandment. Evil is certainly at work in them.” He argues that although the serpent is not Satan, the question that he poses is certainly “*the satanic question*”, which deprives God of His honour and causes humans to wander away from Him and go behind His word (2004:109-110). Bonhoeffer (2004:110) believes that human beings have no defence against such “pious” attacks, other than with an “Away from me, Satan”¹⁰¹ (Matthew 4: 10).

5.3.5. “*Sicut Deus*”: Being like God – knowing good and evil

In Bonhoeffer’s exposition of Genesis 3:4-5, he continues to analyse the conversation between the serpent and Eve. Her reply to the serpent’s question, “We do eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden; but of the fruit of the tree in the centre of the garden God has said, Do not eat from it, and do not even touch it, lest you die”, does not prevent the serpent from trying again and continuing his conversation *about* God (2004:111). This is a clear illustration of how sin lures us with persistence, just as it has done with Jesus in the wilderness, and in this case with the first human beings. Bonhoeffer (2004:111-112) states that by Eve allowing herself to continue with the conversation, the serpent identifies the opportunity to launch his real attack. In replying, “You will not die at all. Instead God knows

¹⁰¹ But in the case of Eve and Adam, they could not say it because they had no knowledge of evil yet.

that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God and know what good and evil is”, the serpent speaks as if he possesses a profound knowledge of God’s character. Bonhoeffer (2004:112) believes that there are some implicit statements in this reply:

But *why* did God say it...? ... God said it out of envy....God is not a good but an evil, cruel God; be clever, be cleverer than your God and take what God begrudges you....God did say it, yes, indeed you are right, Eve, but God lied; God’s word is a lie...for you will not die at all....

In Bonhoeffer’s view, this is the ultimate form of rebellion – the fact that the lie reveals itself as the truth and denounces the truth as a lie. The fact that God attaches to the tree the decree of death is portrayed as a lie, and the fact that the serpent attaches to the tree the promise of being like God is portrayed as the truth. Yet, God’s truth triumphs over the lie – even in its pretence of being the truth – because God’s inescapable word holds true that whoever becomes like Him will certainly face death (2004:112). Sin causes us to become something “good”, while we in fact die in the process. Bonhoeffer (2004:112-113) maintains that this whole process is entirely “inconceivable and unpardonable”.

Bonhoeffer (2004:113) further holds that the point where Satan’s word stands in opposition to God’s word is where the human inner split (referred to above) starts to surface: “You will not die at all” against “You shall die”; God’s truth, linked to the prohibition, pointing to our human limitedness, and God and humans in the His image against the serpent’s truth, linked with the promise, pointing to our human unlimitedness and God and humans being like him; *Imago dei* – humans in God’s image, being for God and others, in all their creatureliness and limitedness bound to God’s word and deriving life from Him and living as creatures in unbroken obedience against *sicut deus* – humans like God in their own knowledge about good and evil, being alone and against God, in their unlimitedness deriving life from their own resources and living as “creator-creatures” on the foundation of the split between good and evil. Adam, who possesses no knowledge of evil, cannot understand the serpent’s promise as rebellion against God’s word however, but only comprehends it in terms of a “deeper kind of creatureliness [that] must be won at the cost of transgressing the commandment” (2004:113-114). It is precisely this standing between God and a false god – who pretends to be the true God – that causes Adam to fall into sin (2004:114).

5.3.6. The fall into sin

In Bonhoeffer's analysis of the remainder of Genesis 3, he comprehensively explores the essence of sin. With reference to verse 6, "And the woman saw that it would be good to eat from the tree and that it was beautiful to look at, and that it was an enjoyable tree to be desired because it would make one wise, and she took of its fruit and ate and also gave to her husband and he ate", he states that without any further reply on the serpent's comment, the woman falls into sin. In response to how this comes about, Bonhoeffer (2004:115-117) holds that having eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, humankind is now *sicut deus* – the limit in the centre has been transgressed, humankind in its unlimitedness now stands in the middle, no longer living from its Source but living from its own resources, no longer needing the Creator because it creates its own life – being alone. Being *sicut deus* implies that humankind in its own attempt to be for God gains its own knowledge of God by going behind His spoken word, rejecting this Word spoken from the center, abandoning the life coming from the center and grabbing for it themselves – standing in the center. "This is disobedience in the semblance of obedience, the desire to rule in the semblance of service, the will to be creator in the semblance of being a creature, being dead in the semblance of life" – the lie portrayed as the truth. Humankind has lost its creatureliness, because it is now limitless, and as such cannot to any further extent be addressed in its creatureliness or even be recognised as humans in their creatureliness – precisely because it no longer desires to be creatures. Only God can do so through the atoning power of Christ. Bonhoeffer (2004:117) believes that in order to fully understand how things eventually leads to this sinful act, three aspects need consideration, namely a recollection of the events leading to sin, the endless split between these events and the actual deed, and extracting the real question at issue in this regard.

With regards to the first aspect, Bonhoeffer (2004:117-119) argues that the chain of events leading to the sinful deed could never in itself be responsible for the deed. The only way in which these preceding events could be related to the deed is to the extent that one identifies the complete *incomprehensibility* of how the evil deed eventually comes about. The first link in the chain of events is the prohibition laid on Adam, revealing his creatureliness and freedom, which is understood solely as freedom from God. Whereas this prohibition could only make God's grace more apparent to Adam, it instead demarcates his distinct existence as creature from that of the Creator and thereby increases Adam's awareness of the distance between the two. The second aspect that increases this awareness is the creation of Eve from

Adam's flesh – his limit taking on bodily form, becoming more distinct. Adam's love for the other could only increase his understanding of the depth of God's grace. Instead, for Adam this more greatly implies that he should transgress his limit, and he accordingly also harms the creatureliness of the other. Finally, the serpent's conversation with Eve increases humankind's awareness of its freedom in unbroken obedience as something over and above and in addition to its creatureliness. This freedom is understood as belonging to its creatureliness, and exercising it thus implies being in the service owed to God. Instead of understanding Eve's deed as pointing to his Creator, Adam only understands it in terms of a fortification of the serpent's words emphasising his freedom and creatureliness. Eve has fallen, and so does Adam – they fall because of each other, yet they bear their own individual guilt.

Pertaining to the second aspect, Bonhoeffer (2004:119-120) identifies the nature of the sinful act: It is inconceivable and inexcusable; it is final and cannot be done away with; and finally, it is a human deed. To deny any of these would imply making an excuse for this guilt. Because of the inconceivability and inexcusability of this sinful act, not even the term "disobedience" could adequately describe it. Instead, *rebellion* represents a more proper description, as it points toward the destruction of creatureliness whereby the creature becomes creator; "a defection, a falling away from being safely held as a creature ... a *continual* fall, a *dropping* into a bottomless abyss, a state of being let go, a process of moving further and further away, falling deeper and deeper ... not merely a *moral lapse* but the destruction of creation by the creature" (2004:120). The degree of this sinful act is so severe, to the extent that the entire world is affected by it, and as such, produces this "fallen-falling" world we know.

Considering the last aspect, the real issue at stake, Bonhoeffer (2004:120) believes the *theological* question should be distinguished from the *speculative* one. In the latter case, the question is why there is evil; what is its origin? For Bonhoeffer, this is not a theological question, as it assumes the possibility of going back behind existence, thereby removing our guilt as sinners and blaming something else. Instead, the real issue in this regard is the question as to how evil can be overcome through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, as it "seeks the real forgiveness of guilt and the reconciliation of the fallen world" (2004:120).

While it is apparent that Bonhoeffer has thus far explored the nature of sin in terms of pride, moral failure and deprivation of the good, he now approaches this matter from a different perspective – sin as desire (concupiscence), which he believes is essentially at issue in this

regard. For Bonhoeffer (2004:122), the statement, “Then their eyes were opened and they became aware that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves an apron” (Genesis 3:7) implies that the fundamental concern here is the problem of sexuality. The split of human knowledge into *tob* and *ra* initially finds expression in Adam’s relation to Eve. Whereas he loved her as the limit imposed by God, he has now transgressed this boundary, no longer accepting it as God’s grace but hating it, understanding it as God’s wrath and abhorrence. As such, the limit now represents dividedness. For Bonhoeffer (2004:123-124) this dividedness essentially means two things. In the first instance, he emphasises the idea of unrestraint desire, which is more specifically expressed through sexual desire. Desiring to be without any limit – hating boundedness – a person claims to possess the other and in the process, destroys the other’s creaturely nature. Furthermore, this sexual desire is rooted in the person’s self-will, which obsessively longs for unity in a split-apart world, and attempts to preserve their own life by destroying the other. In re-producing life, it thus essentially destroys life. Bonhoeffer (2004:123) states: “Human beings create by destroying ... preserves itself while it destroys. Unbridled sexuality is therefore destruction ... a mad acceleration of the fall ... It is affirming oneself to the point of self-destruction.” He thus believes that the fruits of the tree of knowledge of good and evil are obsessive desire and hatred. The other aspect implied by this dividedness is that human beings, in their guilt of hatred and unrestraint desire, attempt to cover themselves, to cover their shame. They do not wish to be seen in their nakedness, because nakedness implies innocence, unity, respecting the limit, recognising the other’s rights and believing in grace. The opposite of this is to cover one’s nakedness in guilt; hating the limit; in shame hiding one’s nakedness. Considering Bonhoeffer’s remarks in this regard, it therefore comes as no surprise that he does not dismiss church dogmatics, which often regards sexuality the essence of original sin. Bonhoeffer (2004:124-126) himself believes that knowing about *tob* and *ra* begins with sexuality, which he sees as a perversion of a person’s relation to the other. Because sexuality involves creating¹⁰² while destroying, the essence of original sin can be perceived in procreation, the preservation of human life from one generation to the next. In a torn-apart world, all of humankind has lost its creaturely nature by becoming *sicut deus*. The only way to cover this shame and therefore sanctify sexuality is through the community of marriage, to be under restraint. As a result, the entire world is now veiled, hiding its state of being *sicut deus*.

Further exploring the essence of sin, Bonhoeffer (2004:127-128) holds that being limitless,

¹⁰² In the sense of procreating life.

having fallen into dividedness, having overstepped the boundary and now hating the limit – knowing *tob* and *ra* – humankind now finds itself in a continual flight from the Creator. This he deduces from Genesis 3:8-10: “And they heard the steps of Yahweh God ... And Adam hid himself with his woman ... And Yahweh God called Adam and said to him: Where are you? And he said: I heard ... your steps ... and I was afraid, for I am naked, and so I hid myself.” This flight of fallen humanity, still falling away from God, is called conscience, which is humanity’s resistance against the Creator’s voice. Human beings are chased by this conscience to their own hiding place in an attempt to flee from God – a place where they can be their own judge and thus escape God’s judgement. As such, they live from their own knowledge of good and evil and out of their own resources – divided from themselves and their Creator. Conscience is thus being ashamed before God, yet a self-justification attempt by covering – in shame – one’s own iniquity. This Bonhoeffer (129) gathers from verse 11-13: “And God said: Who told you that you are naked? You have not eaten from the tree which I commanded you – You shall not eat from it – have you? So Adam said: The woman whom you made my companion gave to me from the tree, and I ate. Then Yahweh God said to the woman: Why did you do this? The woman said: The serpent beguiled me; that is why I ate.” While they confess their sin, they still seek to flee from God by justifying themselves, and based on their own knowledge of good and evil, ultimately blaming God for their sin. Bonhoeffer (2004:130) argues that this is therefore not a true confession of sin. Whereas God’s call should be seen as grace, it is only seen as wrath and hatred, as in their rebellion they seek to escape from God and thereby continue to fall.

5.3.7. The effects of the fall

The creation narrative follows that God curses not only the serpent and humankind, but also the ground itself. Bonhoeffer (2004:132-135) holds that having sinned, human beings now find themselves in a state between curse and promise, between *tob* and *ra*: The curse being that fallen humans have to continue living in a fallen, destroyed world; the promise being that God allows them to continue living in the world without depriving them of His word. In this divided world, between curse and promise, humankind is alienated from God, not able to uphold His word peacefully, but facing the continual temptation of godlessness. As previously stated, the fruit of the tree of knowledge is shame and unrestrained desire, humankind coming under the law of *tob* and *ra*: The very pleasurable community with the other that was so obsessively desired has afflicted pain. Although the man and the woman can now belong to each other, this very belonging is both a promise and a curse. The world is

destroyed and divided, and alienation is manifested in three ways; their relationship with God, their relationship with each other and their relationship with the rest of nature. Bonhoeffer (2004:133-134) pays special attention to the latter, and states that because of humankind's sin, the ground is now also cursed. There is thus enmity between humans and the rest of creation:

The other created things rebel against ... the creature that thinks it can live out of its own resources. They ... become mute, enigmatic and unfruitful. With the fall of humankind, however, they themselves, as creatures made subject to humankind, fall into dividedness as well; they become nature without a master and thus in rebellion and despair, nature under the cursed, accursed ground ... [O]ur earth ... is cast out of the glory of its created state ... (2004:134).

Bonhoeffer (2004:135) maintains that humankind has indeed become *sicut deus*, and has therefore died. This does not imply death in the sense of the end of physical existence, but rather having to live from its own resources; not being able to live, yet being forced to live; being cut-off from the tree of life. Bonhoeffer (2004:139-140) holds that God is now the preserver of the fallen, sinful world. While God affirms their sinfulness, he does not expose their nakedness: "And Yahweh God made cloaks of skin for Adam and for his wife and clothed them with these" (Genesis 3:21). In the fallen world, He thereby restrains humankind's obsessive desire and imposes order by showing their limits. "Humankind remains between *tob* and *ra*, remains split; even with its *tob*-good it remains beyond God's good. With its whole existence [Dasein], split as it is between *tob* and *ra*, it remains far away from God, continuing to drop downward, in the fallen and falling world" (2004:140). However, God preserves the fallen world for death, and thus, for the resurrection with Christ and the new creation.

The creation narrative ends with God giving instructions for the tree of life to be guarded, "lest [Adam] stretch out his hand and pluck from [it] as well, and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22). Although little has been said about this tree previously, Bonhoeffer (2004:141-144), in concluding his exegesis, discusses its significance. He states that it is now clear why the tree of life is endangered by the tree of knowledge. Whereas humankind in the *imago dei* lived from God, the centre, where the tree of life stands, humankind *sicut deus* – having eaten from the tree of knowledge of good and evil – is dead. "It is alone by itself ... it no longer needs any others, it is the lord of its own word ... the solitary lord and despot of its own mute, violated, silenced, dead, ego-world" (2004:142). It no longer receives life from

God and is therefore forced to live, finding itself in continual rebellion against existence. As a result, humankind grabs for the tree of life in an attempt to grasp “the life that would put an end to *this* life, that would be the new life” (2004:142-143). Being *sicut deus* – being dead – being its own god and source of life, humankind only desires itself. However, this solitude in the self is the very thing which creates the insatiable, eternal thirst for life. Bonhoeffer (2004:143) maintains that the same manner in which sinful humanity flees from life and grabs for life at the same time, likewise it flees from God while yearning for Him.

5.3.8. Overcoming sin through the Cross

Bonhoeffer (2004:145-146) concludes his exegesis on Genesis 1-3 with the revelation that the tree of life is in fact the cross. Just as the tree of life is humankind’s only hope for life, this dead, sinful world can only be made alive and sanctified by the redemptive power of Christ:

And under the whirling sword, under the cross, the human race dies. But Christ lives. The trunk of the cross becomes the wood of life, and now in the midst of the world, on the accursed ground itself, life is raised up anew. In the center of the world, from the wood of the cross, the fountain of life springs up. All who thirsts for life are called to drink from this water, and whoever has eaten from the wood of this life shall never hunger and thirst (2004:145-146).

Just as Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of the creation narrative starts with Christ, so it ends with Christ.

5.4 Bonhoeffer’s understanding of sin in *Ethics* (2005a)

5.4.1. The centrality of Christian Ethics

For Bonhoeffer, Christian ethics centres more on *being* good than on performing acts of goodness. In his opinion, being good implies a state of the human person in unity with God. Bonhoeffer continually returns to this theme, as he believes in this lies the solution to the problem of sin and evil. As such, being in disunity with God – being alienated from Him and consequently also from fellow humans and the rest of creation – is the essence of sinful being. His interpretation of the nature of sin in *Ethics* revolves around this central idea.

5.4.2. Resisting realm thinking

Bonhoeffer (2005a:60-61) strongly opposes the idea of thinking in terms of realms or dualism, which is equal to legalistic thinking in his opinion. To speak of the world as “evil”

or being “under the power of the devil”, implies that God did not reconcile the world to Himself. He therefore argues that we cannot speak of the world as something to be retreated from: “Human beings, with their motives and their works, with their fellow humans, with the creation that surrounds them, in other words, reality as a whole [are] held in the hands of God ... *Human beings are indivisible wholes, not only as individuals in both their person and work, but also as members of the human and created community to which they belong*” (Bonhoeffer 2005a:53). Bonhoeffer (2005a:61-66) holds that an evasion of the world in the end results in a sinful surrender to the world. This is because of the fact that where sexual sins are overcome, other sins – which are also abhorrent like sexual sins but is regarded as less severe by the world, for example greed – will thrive. The world, or sinful reality, is not something that exists in opposition to the church. It is precisely static thinking, which splits the world into the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the devil that is the real enemy here. The world is not divided between Christ and the devil. While there is a certain love of the world that implies hatred toward God, the whole world belongs to Christ. Static division between the two denies the fact that God has reconciled the world to Himself. The church therefore needs to proclaim this reconciliation.

Bonhoeffer (2005a:67-68) further argues that the world already belongs to Christ, while the church community is the body who calls the world into the very community to which it already belongs. Only through Christ – through the cross – is the world exposed in its sin and submission to God’s love. Thus, faith in Christ is the sole source of all goodness. Bonhoeffer (2005a:75) believes that one could either be in the wholeness of Christ or be torn apart by many influences.

5.4.3 Attempting to know good and evil: The sin which separates humans from God

The distinction between being sinful or evil and sinful or evil *acts* constitutes a significant part of Bonhoeffer’s argument. In his opinion, it is worse to be evil than to do evil; for a liar to tell the truth than for a lover of truth to lie; for a hater to love than for a lover to hate. He further holds that one sin is not like another – they carry different weights. Therefore, some sins are deemed more serious than others; “[f]alling away is far more serious than falling down” (2005a:77).

Bonhoeffer (2005a:77-78) maintains that the fact that evil conceals itself with good or appears in the form of light proves its profoundness. Especially ethicists, “who are so committed to an ethical agenda of what is right and wrong” and so busy judging others do not

recognise this evil. What they do not realise is that ethical reality is only recognisable by looking at it through God's truth. Bonhoeffer (2005a:78-80) continues to name and discuss six different ethical types which all attempt to deal with evil – each in a specific way – but fail to do so. This is exactly because they are caught in the very sin that is condemned, which separates us from God and ultimately brings death: Wanting to know good and evil. Thus, by attempting to avoid evil, by being “pious”, they fall into the trap of evil. People of reason cannot discern either evil or holiness. Wanting to be fair to both sides, they are crushed in-between. They perceive the world as unreasonable and themselves ineffective and consequently, give in to submission to the stronger side. *Fanatics* think they can conquer evil with the “purity of their will and their principles”. However, they miss their goal. Being so occupied with issues of truth and justice, they get caught up in trivial matters and thereby fall into evil. People of *conscience* only have their conscience to support them when making decisions. They are therefore torn to pieces. Evil approaches them in “seductive disguises and masks”, making their conscience anxious. They settle for an “assuaged” conscience, instead of a good conscience. Their conscience is deceived, which is worse than a bad conscience. People of *duty* are extremely focused on responsibility. They choose duty as an escape from decisions. The command is grasped at as being the most certain thing. Those in command take responsibility for the order, not those who act, and therefore those that act will never do something that rests on their own responsibility, which is the only way in which evil can be met and overcome. They will continue to fulfil their duty, even if it means to the devil. Those who live by free *responsibility*¹⁰³ live by their own freedom. They consider actions higher than a clean conscience, and will “sacrifice a barren principle to a fruitful compromise or a barren wisdom of the middle way to a fruitful radicalism”. They should be careful because it is exactly their freedom that causes them to fall. They will give into the bad, knowing it is bad, to prevent the worse. What they do not realise is that the worse at the end of the day may have been the better option or choice. Bonhoeffer (2005a:80) remarks that: “Here lies the raw material of tragedy”. Finally, those who conform to *private virtuousness* perform good deeds according to their abilities. They neither steal, murder or commit adultery. In giving up public life, they always know the limits, which protect them from conflict. As a result, they always have to “close their eyes and ears” to the injustices surrounding them. Only by deceiving themselves can they be kept clean from the “stains of responsible action in the world”. Unrest

¹⁰³ This type describes Bonhoeffer's own ethic of resistance against Nazism. While it is mentioned throughout the text, this is the only instance where he criticises this position (2005a:79).

overpowers them because of what they fail to do. Accordingly, this unrest either demolishes them or they end up yielding to hypocrisy.

Bonhoeffer (2005a:80-81) states that these ethical types deal with sinful misdeeds as opposed to sinful being. Because of this they fail to address the problem of evil. He maintains that the only solution to overcome evil is combining simplicity with wisdom – keeping “in sight only the single truth of God”. Thus, unity with God is the remedy to evil. Human beings in unity with God do not have a “double-psyche” or an “undivided heart”. They are not bound by ethical principles, but by God’s love. For this reason they are freed from the conflicts of ethical decision. They stand next to God, not looking at the world, but seeing reality as it is. Pure principles or a will could therefore never even begin to solve the problem of evil – only faith in Christ can.

5.4.4 Humans in disunity with God

For Bonhoeffer (2005a:84) there is no doubt that God is the God of love, wanting to be in unity with the world. His love and affection for us is manifested in the fact that He becomes human. He wills for us to be truly humans. Humankind on the other hand, desire to be more than human or creaturely beings. We desire to differentiate between holy and ungodly, honourable and despicable, between good and evil. We want to judge and divide the world according to our own set of principles.

Bonhoeffer (2005a:88-90) believes that another aspect that creates disunity between God and humankind is the issue of success. People hold firmly to, and is even overcame by the notion of success. However, for those whom success is the yardstick of all things, the person of Christ “remains alien, and at best pitiable”. Success can even be a justification for injustice, and [g]uilt is scarred over ... by success”. Bonhoeffer (2005a:88-89) comments as follows:

It is pointless to reproach the successful for their methods. This only holds us in the past, while the successful ... win the future, and make the past unchangeable. The successful create facts that cannot be reversed. What they destroy cannot be restored ... No condemnation can make good the wrong that the successful commit. The condemnation is silenced by the course of time; the success remains and determines history. The judges of history play a sad role alongside those who make history; history rolls over them. No earthly power can risk appropriating the saying that the end justifies the means in the way that history so freely and naturally does.

Bonhoeffer (2005a:89-90) lists and criticises three views of success. The first kind of people is those who idolise success. They are not able to distinguish wrong from right, untruth from truth or malice from decency. They lack judgement and are not able to recognise guilt. “Success *per se* is good”. Only through hypocrisy and self-deception can they maintain their sobriety. The second type is people who believe that only the good are successful. While they do not lack judgement and the laws of justice, truth and order, their optimism is a source of deception. On the one hand, historical facts need to be forged to lay bare evil’s unsuccessfulness, which ultimately leads to the opposite stance that only the successful is good. Alternatively, their optimism crumbles and thereby they condemn all historical success. The third type of people is those who hold the notion that all success is evil. Because of their “unfruitful pharisaical criticism”, they do not get to the point of acting and achieving success, which only confirms their view of success. They too, although in a negative sense, measure everything by success. Bonhoeffer (2005a:90) rejects all three these views because success, according to his understanding, is a denial of God’s judgement and it is only in this judgement that one finds reconciliation.

Linked to the idea of success, which is the root of disunity between humans and God, is the concept of secularisation. Bonhoeffer (2005a:126-128) highlights the godlessness of the Western world because of its estrangement from God, stating that they are confronted by nothingness because they have lost their unity with the Creator. Bonhoeffer (2005a:128) describes this nothingness by means of the following the remark:

[This] Western nothingness [is] a nothingness that is rebellious, violent, anti-God and anti-human. Breaking away from all that is established, it is the utmost manifestation of all the forces opposed to God. It is nothingness as God ... Its rule is absolute. It is a creative nothingness that blows its anti-God breath into all that exists, creates the illusion of waking it to a new life, and at the same time sucks out its true essence ... Life, history, family, people, language, faith – the list goes on forever because nothingness spares nothing – all fall victim to nothingness.

Bonhoeffer (2005a:131-132) is of the opinion that only two things can salvage this situation; “the miracle of a new awakening of faith”, which is God’s redemptive power that “creates new life out of nothingness, and a “restraining power” represented by the church and the state, whose rule “sets limits to evil”.

Because Bonhoeffer’s analysis of the nature of sin extensively deals with the idea of humans

in disunity with God, he proceeds to discuss the state of those in sin. They have fallen away from the Creator and thus, away from their creaturely nature and have become their own creator, their own judge and their own source of renewal (2005a:134). Because he sees the church as the only body who can truly proclaim unity with God through the redemptive power of Christ, Bonhoeffer (2005a:135-136) argues that the church is the place of rebirth and renewal of those who have fallen away and as such, the place where “the possibility of forgiveness [for sin] is opened”. Bonhoeffer (2005a:136-137) holds that sin is a deeply personal issue, which stains the community with its guilt. He states: “I am guilty of inordinate desire ... of cowardly silence when I should have spoken ... of untruthfulness and hypocrisy in the face of threatening violence; of disowning without mercy the poorest of my neighbours ... of disloyalty and falling away from Christ.”

Yet another aspect which causes division between God and humankind is the issue of Christian radicalism. Bonhoeffer (2005a:154-157) rejects this quest for being a “pure” human being and believes that radicalism is a sinful ideology. He argues that it stems from the hatred of creation because of the evil in the world. For people who hold this view, reconciliation with the world implies betrayal and therefore a denial of Christ. Christian radicals’ love is limited “to the closed circle of the pious”; it is a “pharisaical refusal of love for the wicked” (2005a:155-156), showing nothing but contempt and suspicion for the world. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer argues (2005a:156), is the “Christian spirit of compromise”. Those who conform to this view always hate the ultimate. They despise the idea of justification for the sinner solely by grace, and freedom and refusal of the world – which is a Christian gift – are regarded as unnatural, against creation, alienation from and even enmity with the world and humankind. Radicalism hates the opposite of what compromise hates and the other way around. Whereas radicalism hates time, patience, wisdom, measure and the real, compromise hates eternity, decision, simplicity, immeasurable and the word. Therefore, Bonhoeffer (2005a:157) rejects both, as he believes they both stand in opposition to Christ, because in Christ the things which oppose each other in radicalism and compromise, inherently stand in unity. He argues that both leads to separation from Christ, as well as to the annihilation of humanness, which is sinful.

As previously stated, Bonhoeffer (2005a:246-248) regards being good superior to acts of goodness, and the only way that humans in their being or essence can be good is if they are in unity with God. As such, he rejects the idea of a static moral ethic that absolutises principles of what is good and evil. Instead, he believes that ethics should always be relative to the

particular situation. This is because the “absolute criterion of what is good and of itself ... turns what is good into a dead law”. Bonhoeffer (2005a:247-248) sees human understanding as pivotal in ethical decision-making. A static moral ethic, which disregards human understanding, in itself is sinful as it “cuts people off from the historicity of their existence in order to place them into the vacuum of a purely private and purely ideal sphere.” Bonhoeffer (2005a:299-300) maintains that the purpose of ethical reflection is the desire to gain knowledge of good and evil. However, this is sinful – “a falling away from the origin” – as it establishes disunity and alienation between God and his creation.

Bonhoeffer (2005a:300-303) describes the state of those in disunity with God, who know good and evil, who have become *sicut deus*, in detail:

[They] understand themselves not within the reality of being defined by the origin, but from their own possibilities, namely, to be either good or evil. They know themselves beside and outside God ... The knowledge of good and evil is thus disunion with God ... Instead of knowing themselves within God, who is their origin, they now must know themselves as the origin. By understanding themselves according to their own possibilities ... human beings come to see themselves as the origin of good and evil ... [H]aving become equal with God, however, they have misappropriated the origin and made themselves their own creator and judge ... In usurping the origin, human beings have absorbed a secret of God into themselves, which causes them to perish ... the secret of predestination, the secret of an eternal disunion ... They have become like God – but opposed to God ... Their life is now divided, estranged from God, other human beings, material things and themselves. Instead of seeing God, human beings see themselves.

Two important concepts which come to mind considering this disunity are *shame* and *conscience*. Bonhoeffer (2005a:303-308) argues that shame arises when humans recognise their disunity with God and other beings. They acknowledge what they have lost and thereby feel ashamed. On the one hand, shame masks their estrangement and on the other hand, it asserts the estrangement and is thus not able to repair the inflicted damage. Humans thus use their shame to cover themselves and to hide from God and their fellow human beings. Because they fail in doing so, they now have to bear life living as alienated beings. Shame is therefore “the memory of disunion from the Creator, and of robbery of the Creator”. Conscience, however, “is the sign of human beings’ disunion within themselves ... it is the

voice of fallen life that seeks to preserve unity at least within itself” (2005a:307). It becomes the norm whereby humans in their disunity seek to restore their relationship with God and others. However, conscience is not an authentic comfort. In reality, conscience is not concerned with God and others, but only with the self of those who bear it. Bonhoeffer (2005a:315) states that ultimately, humans who know good and evil develop a judgemental spirit which “produces especially poisonous flowers when it grows in the secret denial, desperate outrage, or resigned complacency toward one’s own weakness”. Furthermore, this “judging is itself the apostasy from God”, which grows evil fruits in the hearts of human beings.

5.4.5 Overcoming disunity through faith in Christ

It is clear that disunity with God, which is established by the knowledge of good and evil, could never be overcome through human shame, conscience or judgement. A good being or essence can only be brought about through the opposite of that – unity with God. Bonhoeffer continuously reiterates this idea throughout his *Ethics*. He maintains that the judging and knowing that emanates from unity brings about reconciliation, which is only possible through faith in Christ. Humans who have been called into this unity, although they were *sicut deus*, “are filled with a new knowledge in which the knowledge of good and evil has been overcome. They are filled with the knowledge of God ... as those who bear the image of God” (2005a:316-317).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the nature of sin in three of his major works. One can discern that he emphasises sinful being over and above sinful deeds. Although his arguments cover a diverse range, he holds firm to the idea that sin is a state of being in disunity, which is caused by human knowledge of good and evil. Bonhoeffer further holds that this alienation or estrangement filters down into human beings’ relationships with themselves, fellow humans, as well as nature. In his opinion, the only solution to the problem of sin is unity with God, which is only possible through faith in Christ.



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Chapter 6

Critical assessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's view on the nature of sin

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, it was seen how diversely the nature of sin is understood in Christian theology. In Chapter 3, such Christian discourses were interpreted by contemporary scholars in the context of ecotheology. Secondary scholarly works on Bonhoeffer as ecotheologian are included in Chapter 4, whereas Chapter 5 offered an analysis of this theologian's contribution to a Christian understanding of sin. This brings me to the question of how Bonhoeffer's position is related to contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology.

Contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology was captured in relation to the rubrics of sin as pride, greed, moral failure, as "hydra" and as privation of the good, as the ecological sins of anthropocentrism, domination in the name of differences of species, consumerist greed and the alienation of human beings from the earth community.¹⁰⁴ In this chapter, these notions will be placed in juxtaposition with Bonhoeffer's understanding of sin, allowing for a mutually critical correlation in terms of identifying and discussing any parallel or divergent views arising from such juxtaposition.

The following question will thus be addressed here: What are the similarities and differences between Dietrich Bonhoeffer's understanding of the nature of sin and current discourse on the nature of sin in available literature on ecology and hamartology? More specifically, the question is whether contemporary discourse on hamartology and ecology may illuminate aspects of Bonhoeffer's position previously not recognised. Are there perhaps depths of insight in Bonhoeffer's work or inadequacies that comes to the forefront when juxtaposed with contemporary discourse on hamartology and ecology? Inversely, are there depths of insight in Bonhoeffer's position that are not recognised in contemporary discourse on hamartology and ecology?

Each of the aforementioned ecological sins will be discussed individually in light of correlating the views of contemporary scholars with Bonhoeffer's interpretation, highlighting any emerging similarities and differences. Secondary material on Bonhoeffer as

¹⁰⁴ As noted in Chapter 3, classifications of these ecological sins in many instances overlap.

ecotheologian will be integrated with these arguments. This chapter will then be brought to a close by means of a few concluding remarks.

6.2 Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism stems from the egocentric attitude, whereby human beings rebel against God and seek after their own self. As “superior” beings, they want to be their own centre and live by their own authority, principles and perceptions (Hart 2004:8-9; Hall 1986:53; Cafaro 2004:144; Delio 2008:78). Hart (2004:16), McGrath (2002:56) and Hall (1986:56) explicitly link anthropocentrism with the sin of pride, whereby human beings consider themselves the centre of the world. Bonhoeffer (1996:137, 147; 2004:89-91, 115-117, 141-142; 2005:84, 300-303) also argues along the same lines, stating that humans desire to be their own source of life, living from their own resources. Being egocentric, they live by their own knowledge and see the world as a place where they live by their own reign and justification.¹⁰⁵ Hall (1986:56) adds that also connected to the sin of pride is sloth, whereby human beings shy away from their responsibility to care for creation.

It is widely held that humankind is made in the likeness or the image of God. Hart (2004:8-9) and Conradie (2005:100) hold that it is precisely this belief that misleads humans to the idea that it is their right to be elevated above the rest of creation. This problematic view is referred to as *teleological* anthropocentrism, and emphasises humanity’s central prominence in the redeemed creation. In contrast, stands *instrumental* anthropocentrism, highlighting humankind’s central place in the process of the redemption of creation as a whole (David Clough in Horrell 2010:131). Deane-Drummond (2000:143) argues that a distinction that is drawn too sharply between humans and the rest of creation leads to teleological anthropocentrism, but where no distinction is made, humans merely become passive observers in the created order. Similar to Berry (1988:202), Wallace (1996:162) and Brutea (1997:14-15), Bonhoeffer (2004:76-77) maintains that humans and non-humans share the same creaturely essence. They both receive life through the Spirit of God, yet humans are the only creatures endowed with God’s Spirit. Bonhoeffer (1996:60-67) goes one step further and maintains that another feature that distinguishes humans from the rest of creation is that God also endows them with *freedom*. In his opinion, the rest of creation is *conditioned* and therefore not free – they are “torn away from, and alien to, the Creator”. Humankind’s

¹⁰⁵ Note that although specific references are used here, Bonhoeffer continually employs these ideas throughout his writings under discussion.

freedom resembles that of the Creator, who appoints and empowers them to be “lord” of creation, to be free from creation in dominion over it. The earth is considered “their” earth. These statements certainly appear to be anthropocentric and open for criticism. It serves without a doubt as a justification for anthropocentric attitudes, which lead to human domination of the earth and its beings. It is interesting to note the exceptional argument that Bonhoeffer (2004:111-117) makes, however, distinguishing him from contemporary scholars (and also halting any criticism in its tracks): Although human beings are made in the image of God (*imago dei*), in unity with Him, they no longer carry this image because they have gained a knowledge of good and evil and has therefore become *sicut deus* (like God). As a result, they are dead and no longer in union with Him. They are fallen beings and therefore cannot claim the freedom and rights of humans in the image of God. Ultimately, Bonhoeffer is then indeed in agreement with contemporary scholars who believe that the notion of “humans in the likeness of God” does not mandate the elevation of humankind above the rest of creation.

Bonhoeffer (1996:137-142, 146-147; 2004:66-67, 89, 99, 105-106, 132-135; 2005:300-303) generally sees all forms of disunity as the product of an attitude of pride. He believes that because of the inordinate love for the self, human beings sin by seeking to go beyond their creatureliness – behind God’s Word – to gain knowledge of good and evil. Having done so, they are now in disunion with God, themselves, other human beings and nature – trapped in solitude – because they wanted to be lord, creator, redeemer and bearer of the world.¹⁰⁶

Haught (1993:42), on the other hand, explores anthropocentrism as a product of alienation. Because human beings are estranged from God and from the earth, their feeling of abandonment in a “foreign world” is countered by self-inflating and amplifying their own worth. They see the natural world as holding them in captivity and refute this perception by elevating themselves above it, treating it as their possession, undeserving of their care.

Contributions to contemporary ecotheology are in agreement with Bonhoeffer that God’s will for us is to be humans (see Deane-Drummond 2000:143; Bonhoeffer 2005:84). It is not His will that we be god; instead, for our sake, He became human. We sin when we desire to be more than human, break free from our creatureliness and replace God with human reason. We thereby reject His authority, wanting to make the rules ourselves (Cafaro 2004:144; McGrath

¹⁰⁶ Note that although specific references are used here, Bonhoeffer continually employs these ideas throughout his writings under discussion.

2002:54-56, 61-62; Bonhoeffer 1996:137; 2004:105-106, 127-128; 2005:134, 300-302). Bonhoeffer (2004:116-117) furthers this argument, stating that this is because we now live from our own knowledge. We have become God's master – the world's master – and can no longer be addressed by God as creaturely beings. McGrath (2002:62-64) adds to this, asserting that, based on our human knowledge, God becomes a human invention, not the other way around. We therefore play God and lord ourselves over everything that exists.

Anthropocentrism implies an infringement of creation's intrinsic worth – the notion that creation is inherently good in itself. In contemporary circles, such a rejection of creation's intrinsic goodness is severely criticised (see Berry 1988:202; Haught 1993:41; King & Woodyard 1999:6; Gebara 1999:28). Bonhoeffer's notion of creation's goodness, on the other hand, may elicit criticism. He believes that creation can only be good in light of God's goodness (2005:59). From an environmental ethics point of view, this argument may appear to be problematic because it denies the natural world's intrinsic worth. Yet, Borrong (2005:74-75) suggests that environmental ethicists are often more concerned with nature's worth for humanity than nature's worth in itself, which is anthropocentric in itself.¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Bonhoeffer (2005:77-81) also critiques the sphere of ethics, as he believes that ethicists judge according to their own set of principles, their own knowledge of good and evil – the exact sin that separates us from God – and thereby fall into the very trap of evil which they seek to overcome.

David Clough (in Horrell 2010:131) draws attention to the notion of *instrumental* anthropocentrism, which stands in opposition to *teleological* anthropocentrism. He believes that the former points out the centrality of humankind in the process of the redemption of *creation as a whole*. In the Christian tradition, redemption is often emphasised as something solely reserved for human beings, however, contemporary ecotheologians perceive this as an anthropocentric expression. Cooper (1990:69) and Haught (1993:65), for example, affirm that redemption should encompass the *entire* creation. Bonhoeffer (2005:53) also shares this view. Rasmussen (1996:299) comments as follows: “[F]or Bonhoeffer the whole is ... Jesus Christ ... the center of ‘nature, humanity and history’. The drama of redemption for him ... is one in which the whole of creation is reconstituted in such a way that enslaved nature and broken humanity are redeemed together.” Rasmussen (2007:13) further notes that God

¹⁰⁷ In this regard, Borrong (2005: 74-75) refers to environmental ethicists and conservationists such as John Passmore, Eugene Hargrove and Mark Sagoff.

becoming human implies “a thorough ‘earth-ing’ of God” in nature’s joys, pleasures, delights, as well as its distress, sorrows and suffering. In Rasmussen’s view, this was Bonhoeffer’s alternative to German nationalism’s “demonic earth faith and ethic” (1996:298): a cosmic understanding of Christ who reconciled all things – the earth and the whole of creation – to Himself, this reconciliation “realized in our own lives and throughout creation” (Rasmussen (1996:299). He suggests that Bonhoeffer’s earth ethic could therefore also serve as appropriate alternative for us human beings at present, in the face of our current ecological predicament.

6.3 Domination in the name of differences of species

Human domination and exploitation of the earth and its resources follow from the attitude that humans are the highest form of life, the masters of creation and that the world has been created primarily for their benefit. Contemporary scholars, for example Conradie (2011:5), Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:21) and Wilkinson (1991:289-290), condemn this anthropocentric notion, which is generally believed to be warranted by the dominion given to human beings in the biblical creation narrative. “Dominion” is misinterpreted as “domination”, creating the idea that humankind has the right to freely exploit the earth and its resources. Nash (1991:79) and Conradie (2011:6) are of the opinion that the domination of the earth occurs once the idea of divine dominion is removed from caring for creation. In addition, Bonhoeffer (2005:66-67) also believes that dominion without God is problematic, as it is sinful. He maintains that when humans do not serve God, they do not accept dominion as God-given, but rather grab it for themselves. As a result, they do not accept the divine responsibility of exerting dominion over nature. Thus, they stand in disunity with those to whom they inseparably belong: God, their fellow humans and the earth.

Bonhoeffer (2005:119-120) holds that humans, in their rebellion, want to be creator and lord of the world. Contemporary theologians such as McDaniel (1995:123), maintain that the implication of this for the natural world is human domination and exploitation. Contemporary theologians and Bonhoeffer agree that this is as a result of humankind refusing to accept and live within its God-ordained boundaries, seeking to go beyond them (see for example McGrath 2000:80-81; Northcott 1996:50; Rasmussen 1996:101; Bonhoeffer 2004:98-100). Bonhoeffer (2004:98-100, 113-114) adds that in our unlimitedness we humans no longer live as creatures, but as creator-creatures. The ordained limits are not accepted as grace, but become the groundwork for our rebelling against God and claiming for ourselves His gift of

nature. The other – nature – that we accepted in love becomes an object of our hatred, which only increases our hatred towards God. Because of our lovelessness we now seek to possess or destroy the other.

The notion that the ground is cursed because of human sin is predominant in Christian theology. Bonhoeffer too upholds this view. However, Wilkinson (1991:289-290) strongly oppose the notion that weeds or plants of no human use, as well as the ruggedness of the earth, are not a part of the good creation but rather the effect of human sin. He suggests that the ground is cursed because humans are divided from it – a split which is actually within human beings themselves and that causes them to be separated from nature. Yet, Bonhoeffer's view should not be too hastily dismissed. He too suggests that through sin, the human essence is split into *tob* and *ra*, a divide manifested threefold: humankind's relationship with God, their relation with each other, as well as their relationship with the rest of creation. The enmity between human beings and nature is therefore a direct product of this split (2004:132-134).

Bonhoeffer (2004:105-106) asserts that those who want to gain their own knowledge seek to go behind God's Word. Moltmann (1988:91), Wilkinson (1991:25, 27), McGrath (2002:78-79, 83-84) and Conradie (2011:5; 2005:88) maintain that humans use knowledge to continually dominate nature in new and startling ways, believing in the slogan that "knowledge is power". In his article entitled "Science and Religion in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer", Rodney D. Holder (2009:121) comments on Bonhoeffer's account of the advancement of human knowledge in the field of science and technology, and turning to God where this knowledge is insufficient. God thereby becomes a mere "God-of-the-gaps" and not the centre of life (Holder 2009:117). Holder (2009:121) quotes Bonhoeffer on the scientific idea of an "infinite universe": "It seems that in the natural sciences the process begins with Nicolas of Cusa and Giordana Bruno and the 'heretical' doctrine of the infinity of the universe". Holder (2009:121) observes:

The "process" to which Bonhoeffer refers is the movement of the world and humanity toward their own autonomy. This is also at work in other disciplines. In theology reason is sufficient for religious knowledge; in ethics "rules of life" replace the commandments and Hugo Grotius' "natural law" is set up as international law that is also valid *etsi deus non daretur*, "even if there were no God"; in philosophy the deistic view is of the world as a mechanism running by itself.

So while humans continuously employ knowledge to dominate and exploit, nature, on the other hand, counter-reacts by increasingly demonstrating its uncontrollable forces, terrifying humans in the process (Santmire 1985:77; Duchrow & Liedke 1987:66). Bonhoeffer (2004:134) insists that this is because of nature rebelling out of despair against humans who think they are self-sufficient and can live from their own resources; nature and its non-human creatures become uncontrollable, “mute, enigmatic and unfruitful”, exerting their power over humankind. It is generally held that human beings think that they can combat the uncontrollable forces of nature through science and technology, which leads to ever-increasing domination (see, for example, Limouris 1990:5). Both contemporary scholars and Bonhoeffer maintains that we now fall victim to the very science and technology that we created (see Martin-Schramm & Stivers 2003:19; McGrath 2002:54; Bonhoeffer 2004:66-67). Furthering this argument, Bonhoeffer (2004:66-67) states that our dominion becomes an illusion because we are no longer in control but are being controlled. We become slaves and prisoners to the exact thing through which we seek liberation – technology. As a result, we lose our unity with the ground and become estranged from it. Peter Scott (2000:382), as part of his attempt to reconstruct the meaning of humans in the image of God (*imago dei*) in a technological society, affirms that an appropriate response to Bonhoeffer’s statement would be to emphasise the “spatial placing of humanity”. “Spatiality” in this context refers to the place of human beings in the created cosmos. Scott (2000:382) explains:

The natural conditions of human life are part of the givenness of the blessing of God to natural humanity. Nature remains God’s blessing; thereby it is ordered toward the preservation of the creatures of God and is in itself that ordering ... The true exercise of our spatial “naturalness” must be contrasted with our (failing) attempts to rule the world.

From an ecofeminist point of view, the interlocking dualisms linked to patriarchal Western cultures and knowledge systems have been used for the purpose of dominating and exploiting both women and nature (Karen Warren in Smith 1997:19; Nash 1991:219). These dualisms are personified by means of nature being associated with female connotations, such as “mother earth” or “virgin forests” (Gray 1981). Furthermore, it is suggested that domination in the name of gender and domination in the name of species mutually reinforce one another (Conradie 2011:54, 56). Bonhoeffer (2005:76-79) maintains that human bodies and the ground are essentially intertwined. He states that humans are “born” from the ground, from the “womb” of their “mother” – the earth. Could this perhaps indicate that this theologian is

falling in the very trap widely criticised by contemporary scholars, especially ecofeminists? Or could his connotation of the earth's "body" and human bodies possibly be a crucial means of illustrating the interconnectedness between the earth and "her offspring"?

6.4 Consumerist greed

The notion of sin as greed and desire are reinterpreted in an ecological context as consumerist greed. While Bonhoeffer (2004:122-124) does not focus primarily on greed in terms of material possessions, he is more concerned with unrestraint desire, whereby humans transgress ordained limits, seeking after pleasure. Contemporary scholars such as Birch and Rasmussen (1978:21), who also condemn this "no limit" mentality, extensively emphasise the issue of greed and its related quest for continually increasing material possessions. Both highlight the idea that humans in their boundedness become discontent (Conradie 2006:47; Watchel 1989:17; King & Woodyard 1999:16; Becker 1992:152; Bonhoeffer 1996:147; 2005:99). With their hearts turned into the self, the notion of God is eliminated, his divine authority is rejected and the possibilities for humans in their unlimitedness become endless (McGrath 2002:61-64; Bonhoeffer 1996:137). King and Woodyard (1999:18), Northcott (1996:41, 79), and Conradie (2009:72) add that when God is removed from humanity's vision and faith in Him is renounced, focus is placed on the human self and material fulfilment as the ultimate goal of life. Greed and unrestrained desire is changed into virtues and money, superabundance and success become the order of the day, even at the cost of plundering the earth and its precious resources (Conradie 2011:34; Northcott 1996:55; Birch & Rasmussen 1978:53). Rasmussen's article entitled "Song of Songs" (1996:295-316) reflects Bonhoeffer's argument that loving God implies loving the earth throughout. To embrace the earth and be faithful to it, means embracing God and having faith in Him through Jesus Christ, who encompasses the whole of creation. Rasmussen (1996:299) comments: "[Bonhoeffer] never wavered from his loyalty to the earth and immersion in its agonies and ecstasies as the only place God is met, faith is lived, and eternity is glimpsed."

Contemporary scholars such as Ruether (1994:5), McGrath (2002:53), and Daneel (1998:245) believe that the secularisation of the Western world has to a large extent contributed to the sinful quest for money and material possessions. For Bonhoeffer (2005:126-128), the secularised West is in a state of godlessness because of its estrangement from God. Having lost their unity with the Creator, they are faced by nothingness – by death. Being rebellious and violent, these evil forces of nothingness stand completely in opposition to God and His

creatures. DeWitt (1996:61-62) holds that one of these forces is the economic market, which deprives us human beings of our God-assigned duty toward creation. Although it appears to be good, it is actually evil, as it changes *stewards*, who worship God, into *consumers*, who put their trust in the mechanisms of the market. In addition, it determines our human ethics. Bonhoeffer (2004:106-110; 2005:77-81) too emphasises evil that veils itself under good. He argues that although it lures us with its “goodness”, it is actually evil, causing us to submit to sin.

Similar to Bonhoeffer, contemporary scholars deal with the notion of “success” at length. Birch and Rasmussen (1978:44-45), Bruteau (1997:12-13), Wachtel (1989:62) and DeWitt (1996:62) believe that in a culture fuelled by unbridled consumerism, a person’s identity and worth are determined by personal and social success. Economic well-being, “progress” and “being number one” become the goals of those who venerate success – even at the cost of plundering the earth and its precious resources. In addition, Becker (1992:153) and Birch and Rasmussen (1978:52-53) hold that success is perceived as a symbol of God’s blessing and favour and thereby becomes morally justifiable. In the view of Cooper (1990:75), the pursuit of success is a perversion of God’s will. While these scholars only deal with one approach to success, generally those who idolise success, Bonhoeffer (2005:89-90) distinguishes between three views of success: those who idolise success, those who believe that only the good are successful and only the successful are good, and those who believe all success is evil. He maintains that all three types, whether in a positive or a negative sense, measure everything by success. Condemning all three views, he argues that success is sinful as it is a justification for injustice done. Furthermore, it is a denial of God’s divine judgement.

Like Bonhoeffer (2005:126-128), Berry (1991:46), DeWitt (1996:61) and Becker 1992:155) affirm the totalitarian character of these false assumptions of the secularised world. A culture of rampant consumerism infiltrates every sense of our being and every societal structure, leaving us with nothing to lead the way out of sin. Our religion, our morality, our faith, our language, our history – everything – are pervaded. All of these are deprived of goodness and therefore become unproductive. Bonhoeffer (2005:128) adds that our true essence is sucked out and replaced with nothingness. In addition, because “nothingness spares nothing”, everyone and everything is affected.

6.5 Alienation of humans from the earth community

Bonhoeffer (1996:137-141, 140-150; 2004:91, 96; 2005:84-90) and contemporary scholars

such as Wallace (2005:28), Snyder (2011:3), Bookless (2008:37-38) and Conradie (2005:184-185) are in agreement that being alienated from God implies being in a state of isolation and solitude. Our apostasy has caused us to fall away from Him, away from goodness, and we now stand as fallen creatures in disunity from those to whom we are essentially connected: to God, ourselves, other human beings and nature. Having fled from God's authority, we have lost the essence of our being.¹⁰⁸ Bonhoeffer (2004:88-93, 113-114, 133-140; 2005:300-303) ascribes our state of "falling-fallenness" to the act whereby we humans have gained knowledge of good and evil – having become *sicut deus* – and now stand in disunity with our Creator. Continually emphasising this point, it is therefore understandable why Bonhoeffer (1996:137; 2004:66-67; 2005:302-303) explicitly links all forms of sin with estrangement. In his view, sin has transformed us into alienated beings – alienated from everyone and everything.¹⁰⁹ This state of estrangement, argues Bonhoeffer (1996:146-147), is sinful in itself as much it is the effect of sin; it will therefore always lead to other sin.¹¹⁰

Bonhoeffer (2004:127-128, 143) places significant emphasis on sinful *being*,¹¹¹ stating that human beings, in their sin, are engaging in a continual flight from God. A number of contemporary scholars are of the opinion that it is this flight from the Creator that leads to the continual flight from creation. As a result, humans feel dislocated from the natural environment. A sense of homelessness is experienced whereby humans cannot feel at home on earth because they see themselves merely as "passing sojourners" (see Santmire 1985:130; Haught 1993:39-65; Maguire & Rasmussen 1998:42, 44; Conradie 2005:184-185). Because of this feeling of otherworldliness, the feeling that the earth is not their real home and that they actually belong somewhere else, humans think they can dominate and exploit the natural environment as they please (Merchant 1982:143; Horrell 2010:129-130; Wallace 2005:30). Like these contemporary scholars, Bonhoeffer (2004:76-77) firmly rejects this feeling of otherworldliness, arguing that as creatures formed out of the dust of the ground, "[h]uman beings have their existence as existence on earth". The earth is therefore an innate part of

¹⁰⁸ Note that although specific references are used here for Bonhoeffer's views, he continually employs these ideas throughout his writings under discussion.

¹⁰⁹ Note that although specific references are used here, Bonhoeffer continually employs these ideas throughout his writings under discussion.

¹¹⁰ Here, we perceive sin as "hydra", the notion that sin is pervasive and always gives birth to new sin.

¹¹¹ An idea reiterated throughout his writings in question.

human nature. Rasmussen (1996:303) shares Bonhoeffer's view that "[o]therworldliness is the temptation of those who cannot bear earth as it is". He uses Bonhoeffer's arguments on the dysfunctionality and destructiveness of otherworldliness to construct the notion that "otherworldliness and world-weariness ... dumb[s] down a full sense of human responsibility for earth's distress and its cure" (Rasmussen 1996:307-309). In his article entitled "Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) – Jesus Christ and the Restoration, preservation and Reconciliation of Creation", Stephen J. Plant (2012:95-96) commends Bonhoeffer for advocating an authentic "this-worldliness" based on the foundation of Christ's death and resurrection. He states: "This is not, to be sure, a developed constructive theology of creation, or anywhere close to it; but it is, perhaps, a more welcoming standpoint from which such a theology could be developed than many theologians in the Lutheran tradition had achieved." It is therefore of no surprise that Rasmussen (2007:8-9) holds Bonhoeffer's theme of "Christian this-worldliness and for the life of faith as drinking the earthly cup to the dregs" in high regard.

There is general consensus that this lack of feeling of belonging to the created cosmos is intensified by two concepts – the idea of Western dualism and a focus on salvation only for the soul (Conradie 2006:54; Nash 1991:73). Martin-Schramm and Stivers (2003:20), Snyder (2011:4), Deane-Drummond (2006:117) and Bouma-Prediger (1995:271), for example, reject the concept of dualism, whereby reality is separated into two distinct parts, for instance heaven and earth, spirit and matter, humans and nature. They believe that it deceives humans into accepting the idea that they exist apart from the rest of creation, which in turn sanctions exploitation of the natural world. Likewise, Bonhoeffer (2005:60-66) critiques the notion of realm thinking, especially a separation of the world into "God's kingdom" and 'the devil's kingdom", which he believes creates the impression that God has not reconciled the world to Himself. Nevertheless, unlike the aforementioned scholars, who only reject dualistic thinking because it is deemed as one of the roots of enmity between humans and creation, Bonhoeffer (2004:89-92, 113-114, 140) goes significantly further than this – he traces the roots of dualism. For him, the deepest split, the ultimate divide in human life, is *tob* and *ra*. Because humankind has gained knowledge of good and evil, they suffer from an *inner* split, a divide within themselves. As a result, all things in the external world are shaped by contradiction and antithesis.

Horrell (2010:129-130), Conradie (2011:5, 7), Nash (1991:73) and Horrell (2010:129), for example, lament the idea that salvation is seen as something reserved only for the soul, and that as a result of this the soul is regarded as superior to the body. Wilkinson (1991:114-115,

119) believes that this causes humans to feel alienated from their physical bodies – not feeling at home in them – which in turn effects human alienation from the earth. This idea is extensively criticised, as they believe that a person’s body and soul is essentially intertwined. In addition, argue Wallace (1996:162) and Murphy (1989:3), our bodies are formed out of the ground; we are made of the earth and are therefore an indispensable part of it. Haught (1993:40) and Ruether (1994:139) maintain that flight from the body and flight from nature is sinful and should be rejected. Bonhoeffer (2004:78) also condemns this body-earth-fleeing ethic, stating that we humans are born from the soil, yet his explanation of “body” and “earth” powerfully captures the idea why we humans should not feel estranged from our physical bodies and the natural environment. Bonhoeffer (2004:76-79) believes that the bond between humankind and the earth – the idea that we are derived from it – essentially belongs to our being (essence) as humans. Thus, we cannot be humans apart from the earth. Through the earth we have our bodies, filled with the essence of being human – being bound with the earth. Our bodies are a symbol of our relation to the earth, other bodies and moreover, to God. Through bodily existence humans find their fellow humans, the earth and their Creator, whom is glorified and celebrated in it. Bonhoeffer maintains that the idea that earthly bodies are the essence of human existence implies two things. Firstly, that human existence means *existence on earth*, not somewhere else. Secondly, that a body is not merely an exterior, but a person’s essence. As a result, a person does not *have* a body and soul but *is* body and soul. Therefore, the soul should not be elevated above the body, as the one is essentially the other. Scott (2000:381) employs Bonhoeffer’s idea of the significance of “embodied bodies”, “creatureliness”, “worldliness” and “earthliness” to illustrate, what he believes, the only analogy between God and humanity. He states:

Bonhoeffer presents the concept of being in the image of God as “natural”, that is embodied. Human freedom is not the freedom of bodiless beings; freedom operates only in the context of humanity’s “total empirical existence”. So “creatureliness”, “worldliness” and “earthliness” are affirmed in being a human creature before God (Scott 2000:381).

Scott (2000:381) maintains that the only way in which humans can image the likeness of God in a technological society is through the analogous concept of freedom – “freedom of relation”. Human beings can only be in the Creator’s image through what Bonhoeffer refers to as “freedom-for-the-other”, their freedom of relation – with God, fellow humans and nature – which images the Creator’s freedom for humankind. Rasmussen (1996:309)

commends Bonhoeffer for illuminating the significance of the body. He also denounces the idea that we humans tend to have no vital connection to our bodies and the earth. He quotes Bonhoeffer in saying, “The person who ... abandon[s] the earth, loses the power which still holds [them] by eternal, mysterious forces. The earth remains our mother, just as God remains our Father, and our mother will only lay in the Father’s arms those who remain true to her. Earth and its distress – that is the Christian’s Song of Songs” (Rasmussen 1996:297). Rasmussen (1996:309) further makes the following remark:

We soon forget that created life is, in Bonhoeffer’s words ... “the community of men and creatures” that comprises an “indivisible whole” that “participation in [this] indivisible whole” is the very “sense and purpose of the Christian enquiry concerning good” and that “the good demands the whole”.

Rasmussen (1996:295) observes that for Bonhoeffer “Earth” is a matter of “faith-matter” – “faith that endures *in* the world and loves and remains true to the world in spite of all the hardships it brings us”. He further quotes Bonhoeffer in saying: “I fear that Christians who venture to stand on earth on one leg will stand in heaven on only one leg too” (Rasmussen (1996:296). In Rasmussen’s opinion, Bonhoeffer’s earth-ethic is a “well-planted, two legged fidelity to earth” in the midst of our present ecological turmoil and distress (1996: 296).



6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the final results of this study were documented. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the nature of sin was placed in juxtaposition with current discourse on the nature of sin in available literature on hamartology and ecology. Secondary material on Bonhoeffer’s writings was incorporated where appropriate.

It is interesting to note how Bonhoeffer and contemporary scholars complement and build on each other’s arguments. Thus, despite diverse contexts, mutually critical correlation is certainly possible on the grounds of the reconcilability of Bonhoeffer and contemporary ecotheologians. One may conclude that Bonhoeffer, although some of his statements are open to dispute, does in fact provide some insights that contemporary ecotheologians seem to disregard. Such insights provide a platform for constructing fresh ways of thinking and responding to present ecological concerns. In addition, considering the vast amount of available modern literature, contemporary discourse on hamartology and ecology offers an innovative framework in which Bonhoeffer’s arguments can be placed and understood. The findings contained in this chapter could therefore enhance secondary scholarship on

Bonhoeffer's views on hamartology and ecology.



Concluding Remarks

Various disciplines attempt to offer an appropriate response to contemporary ecological concerns. In this project, based on a Christian foundation, it was addressed from an ecotheological perspective. Constructed on the premise that the roots of the ecological crisis at hand may be explored within the context of the Christian notion of sin, the latter was revisited and the nature of sin reinterpreted in the light of ecological concerns. The aim of this task was to assess Dietrich Bonhoeffer's position with regard to contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology by investigating his understanding of the nature of sin and contrasting it with such contemporary discourse.

In this project we have seen the rich diversity of ways in which the nature of sin is interpreted in the Christian tradition. Compared to the vast amount of available literature on hamartology, this thesis offered a concise discussion on the nature of sin, drawing on contributions from a number of Christian traditions. Using this as a groundwork, these ways of thinking were reinterpreted in the light of ecological theology, resulting in a classification of ecological sins into four distinct, yet overlapping, categories, i.e. anthropocentrism, domination in the name of differences of species, consumerist greed and the alienation of humans from the earth community. Once again, this was based on the views of a diversity of Christian traditions. The history of Christian theology can significantly enrich current discourse on hamartology and ecology. In this study I retrieved insights from the renowned German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) by firstly introducing him in terms of his life, work and legacy, and then analysing his views on the nature of sin. Such views were juxtaposed with contemporary Christian discourse on hamartology and ecology, and parallel and divergent views were extracted.

There is no doubt that Dietrich Bonhoeffer's views immensely enhance contemporary attempts to address existing ecological challenges. For him, sharing in the earth's suffering and distress is a matter of faith – faith that believes in the oneness of God, humans and the entire earth community. As creaturely beings, we are innately connected to the Creator and the whole of creation. Therefore, a retrieval of his insights provides us, in the present age, with a source of ecological wisdom that will enable us to understand the roots of, and to appropriately respond to, the contemporary ecological crisis. Like Bonhoeffer, we can stand our "ground" in the midst of pressing ecological challenges, and as suffering servants partake in the earth's distress, firmly rooted in the unity which is only possible through faith in

Christ.



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