



# Abundant community theology:

Working towards environmental and economic sustainability (EES)

Full | February 2022

This research is done by our friends at Tearfund UK

**tearfund**

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This report represents the culmination of a long process in which Tearfund commissioned consultations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the so-called 'Global North' around the theology of economic and environmental sustainability. As such, it draws on the input and contribution of countless theologians, thinkers, writers and practitioners from many countries around the world.

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 Cover image: Residents in the community of Palung, Nepal, who have benefitted from the water pool they built. Photo: Matthew Joseph/Tearfund

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## Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to provide a global framework for Tearfund's theology of environmental and economic sustainability (EES). The report represents the culmination of a lengthy process in which Tearfund commissioned consultations on these issues in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Global North. Those consultation reports comprise over 400 pages of English language text and were examined alongside approximately 20 other Tearfund reports, documents and books as well as the extensive academic literature on these themes. Some of the ideas in this report were also sense-checked by reference panels, made up of Tearfund staff with an understanding of EES and theology. In light of this, in a report of this length, it is impossible to do justice to everything that has been said in those consultations, reports and panels. Some form of selection had to be made and in line with the terms of reference for this report that selection has focussed on the priority issues as articulated by the respondents in the Global South.<sup>1</sup> For that reason, this report does not attempt to say everything that might be of interest to Tearfund in respect of EES theology but it does seek to address the primary concerns of those who were consulted in the regions of the world where poverty and environmental degradation are most evident.<sup>2</sup>

The report begins by highlighting those topics that appeared most frequently in the regional reports and especially those where some divergence of opinion was evident. In doing so, it commences with a discussion of environmental theology before turning to matters of economic interest. This order is followed not because the environment is more important than economics, or because economic concerns somehow serve environmental ones. Rather, this report understands both issues as being in service of people. The primary challenge facing many in the Global South is the daily struggle to feed themselves and their family, to find work, to fund education and health, and to live lives of peace and security. It is imperative that we address those practical concerns. However, the root causes of those challenges are complex and are intertwined with the environmental and economic policies that the world continues to pursue. In this report, a solution is proposed in the form of abundant communities in which a relational emphasis replaces the individualistic, selfish and greedy mindset that is impoverishing communities and destroying our planet. However, in order to lay the foundation for that argument, we begin by unpicking how we understand environmental and economic theologies.

While all of the regional reports were unanimous in decrying the anthropocentrism that has led to destruction of the environment, and of the dominion theology that has acted as a foundation for that degradation, they had different emphases in respect of the solution. Section 2.1.2 lists the following reasons for creation care, all of which were proposed. The concept of environmental justice is not listed among these reasons because it is understood as the umbrella term that encompasses all of them:

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<sup>1</sup> There is no perfect term with which to capture those regions of the world where poverty and environmental destruction are most apparent. 'Global South' and 'Global North' are used throughout this report, but we recognise that such terms cannot be defined precisely, and they certainly are not intended to hold a simplistic geographic definition. Australia, for instance, is not part of the Global South.

<sup>2</sup> This report has successfully prioritised the voices of those based in the Global South, at least in terms of the frequency of citations and quotations from the regional reports. At the same time, it has tried as much as possible to reflect gender equality in its use of quotations. This has not been fully achieved, partly because the regional reports themselves have quoted men to a far greater extent than women. Nevertheless, Tearfund remains committed to full gender equality, not just in its programmatic work, but also in the voices it reflects in works such as this.

- 1.** We should care for creation out of love, worship, reverence and obedience towards God because:
  - a.** All of creation is God's creation.
  - b.** God has commanded us to care for it.
  - c.** Jesus cares for creation.
  - d.** Caring for creation reflects God's character. God loves his creation.
  - e.** God has commanded us to love our neighbour and looking after creation helps preserve the lives and livelihoods of our human neighbours.
  - f.** Creation is God's gift to us, so we care for it out of thanks and praise for what God has provided.
  - g.** Caring for creation is part of the mission of God, and indeed has evangelistic benefits.
- 2.** We should care for creation out of our own self-interest because:
  - a.** Pollution and climate change are bad for our own (human) health and livelihoods. In this sense an ecological commitment can be a vehicle to sustainable economic development.
  - b.** Greed and consumerism (a theology of domination/exploitation) is bad for our own spiritual health and a form of idolatry.
  - c.** The rest of creation holds us to account for what we as humans have done.
- 3.** We should care for creation out of an intrinsic respect, care and love for the rest of creation because:
  - a.** All of creation is spiritual and sacred, reflecting God's fingerprint.
  - b.** We think it is beautiful and want to preserve it for its beauty and majesty.
  - c.** Creation has inherent worth that should be valued for its own intrinsic sake. We love the trees, meadows and whales simply for who they are.
- 4.** We should care for creation out of a different understanding of our identity with respect to the rest of creation because:
  - a.** As bearers of God's image, we have a particular responsibility and privilege to care for creation.
  - b.** We are part of creation, at one with creation, one whole community of creation.
  - c.** Creation praises God, and we join in that cosmic choir as we care for the rest of creation.
  - d.** Creation itself is our neighbour (sometimes extended to the idea that it is our mother/sister) and therefore love of neighbour includes love of non-human creation.

In exploring these options, a distinction was drawn between biocentric and theocentric approaches. Biocentrism emphasises our oneness with the rest of creation, at times to the exclusion of God; theocentrism proposes that any attempt to define our identity as part of creation without reference to God can potentially lead to an unhelpful neglect of our God-given responsibilities in creation care. The report suggests that in a fully rounded theology of creation we need to allow lament for the earth to generate an embrace of all the reasons given above with a particular emphasis on the first category as providing a foundation for the others. This is what is meant by a theocentric theology of creation.

In the process, the report notes that across the whole of the Global South, 'stewardship' was the most common term used to describe our relationship to non-human creation. It further notes that for Global South authors the term does not appear to have the managerial overtones that concerns some Global North theologians. For this reason, the report proposes that the term could be used where the linguistic and cultural context is one in which stewardship is primarily conceived of as service and nurture rather than management.

The report also considers the extent to which it is helpful to embrace the creation spiritualities of indigenous communities who have emphasised the sacredness of creation. The report acknowledges that the Global North has much to learn from such spiritualities to the extent that they embody a more caring, earth-centred response to the rest of creation. However, while the consultation responses from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) clearly supported this approach, it was noteworthy that the Asia report was far more mixed with some comments embracing this kind of eco-spirituality, and others suggesting that they are at risk both of divinising nature and of failing to protect ecosystems in the way that is required. The report concludes that while indigenous spiritualities have much to teach us, discernment is required as to which particular eco-spiritualities are both theologically and practically helpful.

Turning to the economic sphere, the report draws attention to a contrast between previous Tearfund reports that have, on the basis of economic development in China, adopted a largely pro-business tone, and the comments in the Latin America report especially that were far more negative about the impact of big business on communities and the environment. The report suggests that there are good reasons to think of 'poverty', and therefore poverty reduction, in a wider frame than increases in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, and in the process points to Costa Rica as an example of a country that has a low carbon footprint and happy citizens who live long lives, yet who on World Bank terms is merely middle income. This echoes a contribution from the *Abundant Africa* report that we need new metrics for how we measure progress.

The report then explores economic theology as a means to guide us in exploring what might matter in such a new metric. It discusses theologies of grace, poverty, inequality and work suggesting that the Scriptures may not provide detailed policy prescriptions on all these matters but do point us in the direction we should travel: namely reductions in poverty and inequality, fair treatment of workers and an open-handed approach to our wealth and income. All of this is tied together by means of the concept of integral ecology which links together the economic, social and environmental. In respect of structural justice, the argument is made that there is a solid biblical foundation for more attention being paid to the systemic causes of poverty alongside the local, and that reparatory justice may form part of that systemic response.

This section concludes by suggesting that what matters is not so much whether we can identify a particular economic system that is more biblical than another, but that we need to address specific policies within the dominant system and advocate for them to be pursued in line with the theological principles outlined.

The final part of Section 2 is a brief exploration of Pentecostal theology. The report points out that Pentecostalism is the predominant grassroots church movement of the Global South, and so the near absence of reflection on Pentecostal theology in the regional reports is surprising. The report argues that, as a movement, Pentecostalism is so large and varied that no generic conclusions can be drawn as to whether it helps or hinders economic development and environmental protection, and so individual churches and communities would need to be assessed on their own terms. Having said that, the report points to a number of theologians who argue that there are rich theological resources that can enable Pentecostal theology to speak appropriately to EES themes. In particular, attention is drawn to the idea that on the day of Pentecost God created not just a large number of Spirit-filled individual believers, but more importantly God established a community of people who understood themselves as members of one household. That insight has significant ramifications for the main substance of the report.



Section 3 – Abundant Community – represents the heart of this report. It begins by summarising a polarity that appeared in different forms in all of the regional reports, and especially those from the Global South. That distinction is between a theology (or mindset) of abundance and a theology (or mindset) of scarcity. The report is at pains to point out that these two approaches are not primarily concerned with the abundance or otherwise of material goods; they are mainly concerned with the values, attitudes and belief systems associated with whatever goods are in existence. In this way, the theology of an abundant community does not deny our ecological limits, but suggests that how we handle environmental goods could be very different. An illustration is provided by way of the phenomenon of panic buying. The mindset of the panic buyer (the mindset of scarcity) goes something like this:

*I'm not sure there are enough x for everyone;*

*I'm worried that I won't have enough x to meet my needs;*

*therefore, I am going to take as many x as I can in order to safeguard my future requirement for x.*

In contrast, the non-panic buyer (the mindset of abundance) thinks along these lines:

*I'm not sure there are enough x for everyone;*

*I'm worried that everyone won't have enough x to meet all their needs;*

*therefore, I will take just one of x (or even none at all) to ensure that I have left sufficient for everyone else.*

The crucial point is that the fundamental difference between these two approaches is not about the actual quantity of stuff out there, but our attitude towards that stuff. The theology of scarcity tells us we have to selfishly consume and accumulate; the theology of an abundant community tells us we can generously share. The report locates the origins of scarcity thinking in the so-called European enlightenment (especially in how Smith, Malthus and Darwin have come to be understood) and suggests that it has led to a mindset of selfish individualism in which life is essentially a competition. It points out that both the environmental catastrophe and deep economic injustices that surround us are due to this mindset of scarcity and the beliefs and behaviours it engenders.

In contrast, the report shows how such thinking does not dominate in the Global South to the same extent, and that another way is possible. That alternative is characterised by a communitarian ethic in which sharing and care for creation is the norm. Within this frame, we view ourselves as a household who cooperate and care for one another rather than a market of competitors. Importantly, that household includes, rather than excludes, the rest of creation. It is, after all, our common home.

The report makes the case that what underlies all this is a different anthropology. That different anthropology can be found in many indigenous communities and is most clearly summarised in the concept of Ubuntu: 'I am because we are.' The *Abundant Africa* report states:

'All humans are interdependent. We are human because we belong to, participate in and share our society. Maintaining social solidarity is a collective task. Ubuntu extends to caring for the natural ecosystems of which we are a fully dependent part...Ubuntu implies that a person can increase their fortunes by sharing with other members of society, thereby enhancing their status within a local community....Everyone is considered to be important because they belong to our community. Ubuntu means that our abundance as Africans depends on the betterment of our communities and the environment, and promoting it is therefore vital for tackling poverty, political conflicts, injustice and environmental challenges. This can be done through showing empathy for others, sharing common resources and working cooperatively to resolve common problems.'

The report demonstrates the biblical and theological foundations of such an anthropology and suggests that it is this idea that should lie at the foundation of our EES theology, not least because it so clearly originates in the Global South. Such a theology can be summed up in the idea that our identity in Christ is that of an abundant community formed in relation to God, one another, with self and the rest of creation. This is not a vague pantheism but a relational dynamic in which what matters is not just how we relate, but who we are in that relating. It is about a different understanding of me, an expanded version of us, that leads me to conduct myself within our shared home according to a household, rather than competitive market, mindset. This means we share and care abundantly, not just our wealth, but also our power, voices and lives, for we store our riches in the lives and wellbeing of our global neighbours and the planetary home God has provided. As such, it is more about an abundance of love, hope and trust, expressed in relationships, connections and interdependence, than an abundance of goods. All of this is abundance thinking. The report points to the rich theological heritage that undergirds such thinking and shows how this approach both dovetails with and can be distinguished from the relational paradigm and jubilee thinking that has dominated Tearfund EES theology to date.

Finally, the report sets out the practical implications of all this for individuals, businesses, national governments, the international community and Tearfund as a development organisation. For individuals, it means embracing a theology of enough, and so holding our possessions so lightly that sharing of material wealth is the norm rather than an unusual act of charity. The report quotes St Ambrose, 'It is not anything of yours that you are bestowing on the poor; rather, you are giving back something of his.' This might not mean a huge change in how the wealthy behave (though it might) but it does represent a significant alteration in what they think they are doing when they give. When we really believe that our wealth belongs to those who are poor then this substantially reframes the traditional donor-beneficiary dynamic. It also helps us to recognise that the problem is not poverty over there to which the wealthy Global North have the solution. Rather the problem is the mindset of greed that bedevils many of us across the globe and to which a solution can be found in the Ubuntu-like anthropology that is embodied in numerous communities in the Global South. This is not, though, to suggest that a communitarian ethic cannot be found in the Global North, or that greed does not exist in the Global South. In the process, the report calls for individuals to tread lightly upon the earth for it is their own home, indeed their own family, they are trashing in their acquisitive approach to the natural world.

In respect of the commercial sector, this report recognises the contribution of businesses in providing jobs and driving the economy, but it is also concerned about rising inequality and the failure of many businesses to account for their environmental externalities. The report therefore reiterates the calls of others for a 3Ps approach (people, planet and profit) and specifically proposes a far greater embrace of mutual and cooperative forms of business ownership. Indeed, it suggests that conceptually such a partnership model can be extended to the natural environment to the extent that businesses acknowledge the debts they owe the rest of creation for their operations. For governments, the report points to the need to decarbonise, to redistribute funds via taxation both within and between countries, and to forgive debt. It indicates their moral responsibility to assist lower income countries in climate change adaptations and their transition to a low carbon future by providing the climate finance that was promised in 2009 but so far not delivered. For Tearfund, the report suggests that there is an educational task ahead for its supporters so they understand to a far greater extent that the West (and maybe themselves as individuals) might be a major part of the problem and so with changed behaviour can contribute significantly to the solution. It is accepted that this will be challenging. The report encourages an expansion in our generosity, and points to cash transfers as one way that could be expressed as a visible manifestation of what it means to share freely and abundantly.

In conclusion, the report suggests that Tearfund cannot solve world poverty or climate change by itself and indeed is not called to. However, God has enabled the Global South, or more particularly some of its wisdom and theological reflection, to point us in the direction we should go, namely the creation of abundant communities that care for one another and the planet with a relational embrace.



# 1. Introduction

Over the last few years, Tearfund has been engaged in a comprehensive process to define and explore its theology of environmental and economic sustainability (EES). The overall aim of this work has been ‘the development of a theological framework that is biblically robust, theologically articulates an economic ethic of stewardship toward creation, and reflects the diversity of thought from the different contexts in which Tearfund works’.<sup>3</sup> The work has been undertaken in a ‘spirit of inclusion and decolonisation’ which means paying particular attention to the views of those who have the most direct experience of environmental degradation and poverty, and who tend to be in the margins of decision-making spaces. It has also meant listening, not merely to academic opinions, but to grassroots, practitioner and indigenous voices in whatever form they are expressed.<sup>4</sup> This process began with a series of consultations in Africa, Asia and Latin America<sup>5</sup> before it explored the contribution of Global North theologians to these themes. These consultations were summarised in written form and provided the agenda for much of this final report. The process for this report began with an analysis in detail of the consultation responses from the Global South before turning to the response from the Global North as well as a series of internal and external Tearfund publications and key texts written or edited by Tearfund staff. Some of the issues that emerged from that analysis were presented to a reference panel of key Tearfund staff and volunteers, and comments from these panels also went a significant way to informing the content of this report.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, while this report is described as a ‘Global Theological Framework’ it does not attempt to capture everything that could or should be said about EES theology, nor even everything that has been said in the regional reports. Instead, in line with the aims of this project, this report has focussed its attention on the most significant findings of the regional consultations in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and to a lesser extent the one from the Global North. In this way it seeks to reflect the primary concerns of the respondents from the Global South.<sup>7</sup>

The following Section 2 of this report identifies a series of cross-cutting themes that appeared across more than one of the regional reports. In drawing attention to these topics, this report seeks to adopt a ‘both-and’ approach, in that as far as possible it does not choose sides when apparent areas of conflict arise. Such divergences of opinion may be substantial, but they may also simply reflect the linguistic and cultural contexts in which they arose. For that reason, it is perfectly consistent for Tearfund to express some themes and ideas in very different language, or with different phrasing, across the many regions of the world. Indeed, there are good reasons why, as a global organisation, it may intentionally choose to do so and that is the spirit with which Section 2 is written.

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<sup>3</sup> Tearfund (2021) p1

<sup>4</sup> Tearfund (2021) p1

<sup>5</sup> The original intention had been to conduct equivalent consultation in the Middle East, but this level of engagement wasn’t possible during the research period. Some perspectives from this region became represented through the consultation in other areas, but this report does lack the depth of engagement intended with the Middle East.

<sup>6</sup> Further details on the coding method used in this report are provided in Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> It is for this reason that the theme of lament does not appear in this report to a very great extent. While lament has been a very prominent idea in recent Global North discussions of environmental theology it hardly appeared in the consultation responses from the Global South. For more on lament, see in particular: Malcolm (2019) ‘Climate chaos and collective grief’, Malcolm (2020) *Words for a Dying World*.

Following this, Section 3 – ‘Abundant community’, presents the substantive heart of this report. In that section, it is suggested that Tearfund might benefit from heeding a call that appeared across the reports from the Global South. That call highlighted the value of framing EES in terms of an abundance mindset. As Section 3 indicates such an approach does not deny our ecological finitude but is instead concerned with how we think about and value the earth’s resources. From a policy point of view, this framing does not necessarily indicate any significant changes to the programmatic activities in which Tearfund is already engaged. However, conceptually and theologically a significant change does take place when we move our mindset from one dominated by individual competition within an inadequate environment to one of communitarian cooperation within a sufficient, if not abundant, ecosystem. Such a mindset incorporates both environmental and economic aspects, and the parameters of this transition are spelled out in detail in Section 3.

While the purpose of this report is to help guide Tearfund in its education and policy work, it is important to recognise the limits of what theology can achieve. While our theology should of course inform our policy outputs, it is not the nature of theology to generate detailed public policy prescriptions on every matter that concerns us. To give just one example, most evangelical theologians would agree that governments in high-income regions should donate a proportion of their GDP to low-income regions. However, the scriptures do not tell us whether that proportion should be 0.5%, 0.7%, 1% or higher.<sup>8</sup> This report therefore points in the direction of its policy implications, but we must not ask it to do the impossible and provide the answer to every possible policy question that is before us.

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<sup>8</sup> This question is a current debate within the UK at the time of writing.

## 2. Cross-cutting themes

Bevans opens his classic work, *Models of Contextual Theology*, with this statement, ‘There is no such thing as “theology”; there is only contextual theology: feminist theology, black theology, liberation theology, Filipino theology, Asian-American theology, African theology, and so forth. Doing theology contextually is not an option....it is a process that is part of the very nature of theology itself.’<sup>9</sup> If we accept Bevans’ statement then we will recognise that, in a report such as this, we are not comparing a normative theology that emerges from the Global North with ‘other’ theologies that arise in Global South settings and making determinations on which aspects of those theologies we might embrace or include in our standard framework. Neither are we taking the theologies that emerge in the Global South and setting them up as a new normative framework for the world, for they are just as contextual as is the Global North theology they might potentially replace. We are instead doing something different. We are reading a set of contextual theologies, each of which has validity in its own context, and asking them to dialogue with one another in a way that hopefully generates, if not a new consensus, then at least a new mutualism,<sup>10</sup> expressed in new possibilities. In this way, by identifying both points of tension and points of agreement between those theologies we hope to arrive at a rich and diverse theological account that honours the contextuality of each paper, remains biblically rooted, yet at the same time fosters new insights for Tearfund as it seeks to develop a global approach for its EES work.

In saying this, there are however two reasons why priority should be conferred upon the theologies that emerge in Global South settings. The first of these is simply that historically those theologies have been ignored, and in some cases even demonised. It remains the case that most courses in theology (including those focussed on EES theology) emphasise the contribution of Global North academic theologians rather than the voices of academics, let alone grassroots activists, from the Global South. In the process, we have failed to listen to the insights and experiences of those whose relationship to the environment and to one another has much to teach the rest of the world. The second reason is perhaps more important. It is the fact that the topic under consideration is one of immediate and practical concern to those who live in the Global South in a way that it is not to those in wealthier parts of the world. As Smith has said in regard to climate change, ‘The rich will find their world to be more expensive, inconvenient, uncomfortable, disrupted, and colourless – in general, more unpleasant and unpredictable, perhaps greatly so. The poor will die.’<sup>11</sup> For this reason alone, their voices must be heard.

### 2.1 Environmental theology<sup>12</sup>

#### 2.1.1 Dominion theology

Unsurprisingly, all of the regional consultations agreed that human relationships to non-human creation were deeply marred. As part of industrialisation and capitalist growth we have exploited and destroyed the world of which we are a part. The following summary from the Chaco Salteño region in the south of Argentina illustrates the intimate connection between ecological, social, economic and political violence:

‘Since the beginning of the 90’s in the last century, an agricultural model for producing soy at a large-scale, dependent on transnational capital, has been applied over extensive sections of the rural zones in Latin America, and in particular, Argentina...This process generates negative

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<sup>9</sup> Bevans (2002) Chapter 1

<sup>10</sup> A form of symbiosis in which all organisms benefit.

<sup>11</sup> Smith (2008) pp11–25

<sup>12</sup> A number of theologians critique the language of ‘environment’ as a synonym for non-human creation as it suggests that humans are at the centre, and everything else surrounds us. At the same time, ‘creation’ technically means everything that has ever been created, in other words the universe and all that is in it. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this report both ‘environment’ and ‘creation’ will be used, in the main, to refer to non-human creation within our particular solar system. In so doing, this report is neither claiming that humans are at the centre or that humans are separate from the rest of creation. This terminology is used simply as a shorthand to ease the flow of the narrative.

consequences in the ecological, social, economic, and political fields. In the ecological field, ecosystems have been altered, giving a foothold to new plagues and diseases. In the social field, profits of business groups have increased, while farmers have lost land and work (greater poverty and exclusion). In the economic field, “enclave economies” have formed, based on mega businesses and capital oriented to foreign markets, with no effect on local rural development.<sup>13</sup>

According to all the regional papers, underpinning this exploitative relationship with creation is the so-called ‘dominion theology’ that was identified by Lynn White as being at the ‘root of our ecological crisis’. White had argued that the replacement of pagan animism with Christianity is what led to the environmental degradation we see around us.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the Biblical origins of such ‘dominion’ theology can be found in the way that Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 have been translated and interpreted, especially in their use of the terms ‘dominion’ and ‘subdue’ (Genesis 1:26: Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:6–8). In the regional reports, such passages were routinely described as being taken out of context, or reflecting an Ancient Near East (ANE) monarchical system or more commonly that they were qualified by numerous other passages, not least the other creation story in Genesis 2.<sup>15</sup> The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) paper quotes Gebara:

‘We humans began to dominate all that seemed to be within God’s dominion. We made God give us the power to dominate! We believed that we had more divine breath than any other created being, and for that reason we built ourselves a hierarchical and mechanical scale of beings that predominates up to today. We built a hierarchical vision of the world and of humanity that provides a basis for our injustices and inequalities.’<sup>16</sup>

And then points to Reimer’s explanation of the true biblical mandate:

‘In the second story of creation, Genesis 2–3, the binomial “rule and subdue” is substituted by “cultivate and watch over” (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew verb abad (cultivate) has here the dimension of work in order to guarantee subsistence. The verb shamar (watch over) designates the basic tasks of caring, managing, administering. Just as a Psalm affirms that God Yahweh is the one who “watches over” Israel, full of mercy and care, so humans should care for and watch over all of creation.’<sup>17</sup>

A mainstay of biblical theology is that we do not just take single verses out of context and apply them in a universal fashion. Rather, we embrace the whole counsel of God and interpret scripture by scripture under the influence of the Holy Spirit. When we do this, not only does Genesis 2 help us understand what is meant by dominion elsewhere, but in addition the Bible’s repeated description of what the ideal king or image-bearer looks like becomes clear. In representing God to the world, in acting as God’s ambassadors within the world, our role is never to dominate, but rather to serve with justice, righteousness and above all love (Psalm 72:1–6, Psalm 145). Valerio<sup>18</sup> has noted that the reason God conferred his image upon humans, and only humans, is not because we are especially different in our being to the rest of creation but because we have a distinct role of nurture and care to play within creation.<sup>19</sup> We are God’s representatives on earth whose job is to facilitate the flourishing of all humans by enabling the flourishing of the rest of creation. It is in this way, and this way alone, that we ‘rule’. As she says, ‘God expects his rulers to be different, to be servant rulers who exercise their dominion with love and compassion, working for justice and against oppression (Proverbs 31:4–9).’<sup>20</sup> The point here is that we cannot just take a word like ‘dominion’ and then fill out its meaning with our own prejudices and assumptions. We must always ask the question: what does

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<sup>13</sup> Uribe (2020) p88

<sup>14</sup> White (1967) pp1203–1207

<sup>15</sup> Uribe (2020) onwards from p30 ; Saxena (2020) p22; Anderson and McGeoch (2020) pp22–30

<sup>16</sup> Uribe (2020) p119

<sup>17</sup> Uribe (2020) p121

<sup>18</sup> Ruth Valerio, Global Advocacy and Influencing director for Tearfund

<sup>19</sup> Valerio (2020) p157. We can add to this the idea that as humans (as image-bearers) we are the only ones known to be required to give an account of how we have looked after creation in the way that God intends.

<sup>20</sup> Valerio (2020) p157

God mean by this word in this context? When we do that then we see that the Biblical vision of rule is not one of violence and exploitation, but primarily one of service and care.

One particular way in which such exploitation and violence was manifest, and which was highlighted by many of the regional reports, was in regard to the experience of women. In these reports, connections were drawn between environmental degradation, economic impoverishment and the reality of gender injustice. The LAC report quotes the Indian ecofeminist Shiva, 'The varieties of grain and vegetable seeds have been selected by women generation by generation over thousands of years. Women are the midwives of agriculture. And now, the transnational companies take ownership and pirate the seeds.'<sup>21</sup> There are other ways in which such linkages exist. For instance, one of the injustices of many economies is that the work of women is often unrecognised and unremunerated leaving women vulnerable. This in turn puts them at greater risk of both gender-based violence and climate change, especially when extreme weather events lead to forced migration. Such women, far from home, may have neither the economic nor social resources to keep themselves safe.

In the LAC report, the connections between these themes was expressed most clearly, at times explicitly linking eco-destruction, capitalism and patriarchy in one single unholy alliance: 'Human-nature and man-woman relationships were affected by sin, which is manifest in the capitalistic and patriarchal system ([otherwise known as] androcentrism). We perceive that the capitalist system treats the Earth like the patriarchal system treats women: "as objects of exploitation," reducing them to a reproductive role.'<sup>22</sup> Just as dominion theology had facilitated the capitalist exploitation and subjugation of nature, so a patriarchal theology has enabled the exploitation and subjugation of women. In the process, women's voices have been silenced. Hence, the cry of the earth echoes the cry of women. Indeed, much was made of the parallel drawn in Romans 8:22: 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time,' and so Cortés poignantly states, 'After having been sources of life – both women and the earth – we have come to be considered as resources to be utilised and abused as the power structure pleases.'<sup>23</sup>

These concerns were evident in other Global South regions too. One Kenyan participant commented that 'Women are so used to our story not being there that we don't recognise it anymore.'<sup>24</sup> In this context, a plea was made for more effort to be put into finding and hearing the stories of women and the exploitation they have experienced. One such story is related in the Asian paper and concerns the Chipko Movement. This was a grassroots response to the problem of industrial logging. Chipko means 'embrace' and the women would literally intersperse their bodies between the trees and the machinery of the loggers as a way to protect their own ecosystem and livelihoods.<sup>25</sup> In this way, these Chipko Women became an inspiration to Indian environmentalists across the whole of the sub-continent and region. This story also reminds us of the role many women have taken across the world in fighting for the earth against the eco-violence of men.

### 2.1.2 Creation care

Hence, whether or not they agreed with White's explanation of its origins, all of the regional reports agreed that we had misinterpreted the biblical references to 'dominion', that such exploitation was both evident and wrong, and that our relationship to the rest of creation should be characterised by love and care. That point was not in dispute – though of course the details of what that means in practice are debated. However, what did emerge from the papers was a range of views as to why we should care for and love creation. Those reasons have been summarised below and collectively they can be considered as different expressions of what it means to engage in environmental justice. In this way justice, particularly justice as

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<sup>21</sup> Uribe (2020) p128

<sup>22</sup> Uribe (2020) p19

<sup>23</sup> Uribe (2020) p128

<sup>24</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p49. The Africa report used a number of verbatim comments from focus groups that formed part of their consultation. They used italics to represent these quotations in their report to distinguish them from quotations from written texts. This practice has not been followed in this report.

<sup>25</sup> Saxena (2020) p13

located in the character of God, acts as an umbrella concept for the ideas listed below.<sup>26</sup> These ideas are presented in four broad categories. However, as will be obvious, the subpoints in each category overlap with each other and so the four top categories are not intended to be fully distinct but represent overall approaches to this theme:

1. We should care for creation out of love, worship, reverence and obedience towards God because:
  - a. All of creation is God's creation.
  - b. God has commanded us to care for it.
  - c. Jesus cares for creation.
  - d. Caring for creation reflects God's character. God loves his creation.
  - e. God has commanded us to love our neighbour and looking after creation helps preserve the lives and livelihoods of our human neighbours
  - f. Creation is God's gift to us, and so we care for it out of thanks and praise for what God has provided.
  - g. Caring for creation is part of the mission of God, and indeed has evangelistic benefits.
2. We should care for creation out of our own self-interest because:
  - a. Pollution and climate change are bad for our own (human) health and livelihoods. In this sense an ecological commitment can be a vehicle to sustainable economic development.
  - b. Greed and consumerism (a theology of domination/exploitation) is bad for our own spiritual health and a form of idolatry.
  - c. The rest of creation holds us to account for what we as humans have done.
3. We should care for creation out of an intrinsic respect, care and love for the rest of creation because:
  - a. All of creation is spiritual and sacred and reflects God's fingerprint.
  - b. We think it is beautiful and want to preserve it for its beauty and majesty.
  - c. Creation has inherent worth that should be valued for its own intrinsic sake. We love the trees, meadows and whales simply for who they are.
4. We should care for creation out of a different understanding of our identity with respect to the rest of creation because:
  - a. As bearers of God's image, we have a particular responsibility and privilege to care for creation.
  - b. We are part of creation, at one with creation, one whole community of creation.
  - c. Creation praises God, and we join in that cosmic choir as we care for the rest of creation.
  - d. Creation itself is our neighbour (sometimes extended to the idea that it is our mother/sister) and therefore love of neighbour includes love of non-human creation.

Clearly, we do not have to choose between these options and some of them, as we will go on to see, are contested. Nevertheless, it is perfectly appropriate to embrace many (and possibly all) of these reasons in a fully rounded theology of creation care. The reason for setting them out in this way is that the first and last

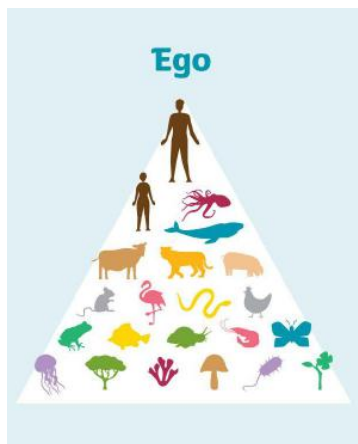
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<sup>26</sup> It might be thought that environmental justice *only* concerns activities that impact others, but given that justice is at the heart of God's character, and because we cannot separate our love for God, self, others and the rest of creation it is appropriate to think of environmental justice as the inclusive term for all of these issues. Part of the reason for this is that the term *justice* is itself contested and encompasses a range of concepts. For a review of these see Nicholas Wolterstorff (2008) *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press



categories represent two distinct theologies of creation care, that to some extent represent alternative approaches to environmental theology, and this is discussed below.

### 2.1.3 Egocentric, ecocentric or theocentric<sup>27</sup>

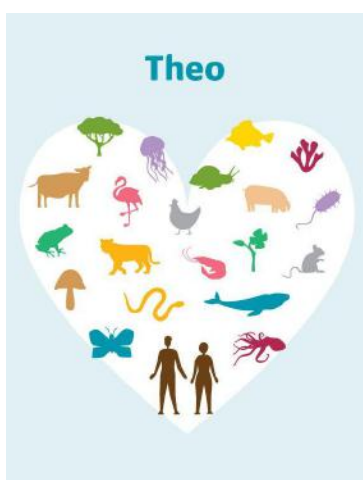


In an important paper, Lowe, Lamb and Padilla-DeBorst have drawn attention to the egocentric (or anthropocentric), ecocentric (or biocentric) and theocentric approaches to creation. The anthropocentric is summed up in this image in which man (sic) is shown as being superior to both women and the rest of creation, and this is a model that is rapidly critiqued as being thoroughly unbiblical for, amongst others things, its hierarchical framing.

At the same time, though, they also go on to critique the so-called biocentric (or ecocentric) framing. Within this understanding, the solution to environmental degradation is to recognise ourselves as being fully a part of creation. Under this model, the distinction between humans and the rest of creation is entirely obliterated. Echoes of this approach can be seen in the fourth category listed above. Within this approach, the emphasis is placed entirely on how we understand ourselves with respect to the rest of creation, and the argument is made that if only humans viewed themselves as a part of creation then our environmental difficulties would be solved. The problem of course is that this model is at risk of leaving God out of the picture.



In contrast, the authors argue for a theocentric framing in which we are called to understand ourselves, the rest of creation and our relationship to creation within the lens of our relationship to God. They write, 'From a biblical perspective, it is only when we align ourselves with a theocentric worldview – with God and God's will at the centre – that we can also pursue right relationships with each other and the rest of creation... In that sense, theocentrism integrates anthropocentric and eco/biocentric concerns without making either the ultimate end.'<sup>28</sup> The particular distinction of the theocentric model is that it does not suggest that we can solve the environmental crisis simply by paying attention to how we relate to the rest of creation; it emphasises that our relationship with God needs to govern our care for the environment. That is what this image is seeking to depict. Humans are shown as equal to one another, and at the bottom of a love heart (symbolising God) because their relationship to the rest of creation is intended to be one of love, care and service, motivated by the love of God.



This framework is found throughout Scripture, but is captured in Genesis 2:15: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.' (NIV) Within this verse, we see both the vertical and horizontal aspects of creation theology at play. Within the vertical frame, humans are under the command of God: 'The Lord God took the man and put him...to...' We did not decide for ourselves where we would go, or what we should do.

<sup>27</sup> Images in this section have been adapted from originals produced by Dave Bookless / Arocha International [www.arocha.org](https://blog.arocha.org/en/noah-beyond-the-blockbuster/)  
<https://blog.arocha.org/en/noah-beyond-the-blockbuster/>

<sup>28</sup> Lowe et al (2021) p54

God decided that for us. At the same time, the rest of creation did not decide our location or responsibility; it was God who both located and purposed us. In addition, though, that vertical relationship of subordination to God is realised in a horizontal relationship with the rest of creation: ‘...in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it’. Many commentators have rightly drawn attention to the Hebrew background to *hā’ā-dām* (translated ‘the man’) whose root meaning is ‘from the ground’ or ‘earthed’. In other words, we are both from the earth and called (by God) to take care of the earth. In this way, the theocentric model being advocated here is seeking to embrace all of the four categories listed in 2.1.2, but what is being proposed is that our theology of creation care must be grounded in our relationship of love, respect and worship of God. In other words, our horizontal relationship with the rest of creation is governed by our primary vertical relationship with God.

Of course, the flip side to all this is what happened in the Fall as described in Genesis 3. If the first two chapters of Genesis reveal a framework in which humanity is working collaboratively with God, with each other, with the earth and with the rest of creation, then Genesis 3 undoes all of that. In acting in disobedience, we sever our relationship with God (they were thrown out the garden), with ourselves (they felt shame), with one another (they blamed each other) and with God’s good creation (the earth will produce thorns and thistles). Genesis 3 represents the theocentric obverse of Genesis 1 and 2. In the absence of God, our relationship to everything, including the community of creation, is destroyed.

#### 2.1.4 Stewardship

This framing matters when we consider one particular controversy that emerged in the regional papers, namely the value or otherwise of the language of ‘stewardship’ to describe our relationship to non-human creation. Across all of the regional papers, and especially those from Africa, LAC and Asia, stewardship was by far the most frequent term that was used to describe that relationship.<sup>29</sup> So, for instance, the Asian paper defined ‘stewardship’ in these terms:

‘Stewardship requires an understanding that the earth, its creatures, and its resources have been given to us by the Creator on trust – to return more fruitful to Him. This implies economic sustainability as well as ecological sustainability. To achieve true economic sustainability, we need to understand human economies as being within the economy (ie ecology) of nature. True economic sustainability (i.e. a level of production that can be sustained indefinitely into the future) cannot be achieved unless we recognise our place within the ecosystem and maintain the abundance and fruitfulness of that ecosystem, with its key relationships and processes intact. This is approaching the biblical idea of shalom. God has given the earth to our possession (Psalm 115:16), but we do not hold the title deed of ultimate ownership. God holds us accountable to Him for how we treat His property. Psalm 104 celebrates not only what the earth provides for humanity but all that God has provided within it for all other creatures who also owe their existence, survival and enjoyment of life to God’s bountiful Spirit. The whole earth should be seen as the field of God’s mission and we Christians should act like missionaries under God’s command... We are not just called to care and serve the land as a whole but also to protect and preserve the entire creation.’<sup>30</sup>

There are at least three significant points worth drawing out from this paragraph. Firstly, stewardship implies that we are not the ultimate owners or possessors of the rest of creation; secondly, stewardship implies that we are under the command of someone else for how we relate to creation; thirdly, that commission is one of caring, serving, protecting and preserving.<sup>31</sup> Viewed through this lens, the concept of ‘care for creation’ becomes a subset, a particular task and identity within the wider framework of ‘stewardship’.

<sup>29</sup> Appendix A: Documents and coding

<sup>30</sup> Saxena (2020) p32

<sup>31</sup> All of these points are also highlighted by Ajulu who defines Holistic Development as Stewardship. Ajulu (2010) pp160–174

A similar understanding is evident in the Latin America paper where the authors draw on Niringiye to make the point that stewardship involves ‘caring for creation and fellow human beings, solely in obedient response to God.’<sup>32</sup> The LAC paper also added an additional theme that in working in this way, we are working as co-creators or partners with God. Indeed, the paper at one point seems to define stewardship as ‘our cooperation with God in the work of creation’.<sup>33</sup> In parallel with the Asia paper, these reflections indicate that the idea of caring for creation is seen as a direct consequence of what it means to ‘steward’ non-human creation. In this way, care for creation is not viewed as an alternative to ‘stewardship’, but as one expression of it. By way of contrast, at least one participant in the Africa report did draw a ‘distinction...between care, which is deeply relational, and stewardship, which is relationally disconnected and simply “gives account of”’.<sup>34</sup> What this demonstrates is that the same term can occupy different semantic fields, even within the same region.

The relevance of this last point is that a number of Global North theologians have argued against using ‘stewardship’ as a way to frame our relationship to the rest of creation. Reasons given for this are that stewardship has managerial overtones, and so implies ownership and hierarchy, that stewardship is not biblical, that it is of inanimate things and that it leaves no place for wilderness.<sup>35</sup> One further point raised in the reference panel was that even if we accept that stewardship implies ‘care’, then it suggests only that humans care for creation when the reality of course is that the rest of creation looks after humans as well. In other words, the term does not imply the bidirectional, communitarian aspect of our place within the created order.

Having said all this, perhaps a resolution to this issue can be found if we recall that all language is contextual. It is possible that in some (perhaps especially Global North contexts) ‘stewardship’ does imply verticality and ownership, as the primary image we may hold is that of the manager of a household. However, for some people in the Global South it is possible that the predominant concept of the steward is not a manager but a servant – one who cares and looks after people within the home or business. In Kenyan hospitals, for instance, the ‘steward’ is the one who serves tea to the patients, and in China the word translated as ‘steward’ also means servant. Whether one views the steward as a manager or servant then goes a long way to explain varying levels of antipathy towards the value of the terminology. At the same time, we also need to recognise the undue influence of Global North theology, and its vocabulary, on the Global South. It may be the case that part of the reason for the prevalence of stewardship language in the Global South is because those areas have inherited a potentially unhelpful term from the North. Whether or not that is the case, given the widespread use of stewardship framing in the Global South, it would probably be wise for Tearfund to adopt a contextual approach to its use. When the linguistic and cultural context understands the steward as a servant then it would be appropriate to use it. When the context understands it as a manager then it is perhaps wise to avoid.

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<sup>32</sup> Uribe (2020) pp38–39

<sup>33</sup> Uribe (2020) p6. From the Africa paper, see also Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p14

<sup>34</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p41

<sup>35</sup> Bauckham (2011) pp61–62; Valerio (2021)

This discussion of stewardship above is not just semantics though, for the theological point at stake is whether we view our relationship to the rest of non-human creation as governed by God, or whether we understand that relationship as existing separately from God. There are clearly pressures within some environmental circles to frame our relationship to the earth in isolation from our relationship with God and we go on to discuss some of these now.

### 2.1.5 Creation and indigenous spiritualities

At the outset, we need to recognise that from a pragmatic, ecological point of view there are many indigenous communities in the Global South whose relationships to the earth and its creatures (including humans!) provide a shining example for those of us whose lives (if not theologies) are influenced by a theology of dominion. One example provided in the LAC paper concerns the Gunadule people. Their whole value system is characterised by a respect and honour for creation which generates sustainability both for them and the ecosystem they inhabit:

‘The Gunadule people have galu (sacred sites). When people enter these spaces, they should do so in silence and raise their prayers to Baba and Nana (God).<sup>36</sup> When cutting a plant, in an act of respect, the nergan (Gunadule doctors) request permission and raise a prayer to God that the plant might be used to give health to someone. Having sacred sites favours the reproduction and sustained harvest of hunting species. In Gangandi, some Suu trees (a fichus) – which grow at the banks of the river are considered sacred and cannot be chopped down. Their leaves and fruits are food for the iguanas which are part of the Gunadule diet. In Gangandi, people are not allowed to eat wild meat, which is another way of avoiding overexploitation.’<sup>37</sup>

This kind of approach to creation care was highlighted again and again in the regional reports, which contained many suggestions implying (whether in an echo of White or not) that the solution to our environmental crisis was a rediscovery of indigenous views in which the natural world was held as sacred. So for instance, one Africa participant commented:

‘Over the years, we have always lived close to nature, because they believe that the spiritual world interconnects with the physical world. And for that reason anything that we do impacts the spiritual as well as the spiritual impacts on the physical or the natural. And so we saw the earth as God – that God is in the very creation. In all the creatures that we see, God is seen in it. So they related very well with the creator, the creation until our worldview was desacralized by Western education. And now our story has changed. Our expectations and values with respect to relating to the earth has changed because now we no longer view the earth as a sacred space... We need to go back to it. We need to see the world as a sacred space.’<sup>38</sup>

And in the LAC paper, we read this:

Here are some theological implications that we can learn from the indigenous people of Abya Yala:<sup>39</sup>

- The Earth is a being that thinks and feels, and, therefore, it is an active subject, and our relationship with it is one of interdependence. It is not a relationship of utilitarianism, but an affective relationship.
- We are part of the Earth because we come from the Earth. Thus, violence toward the Earth is violence toward ourselves.

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<sup>36</sup> The words here refer to God as both male and female.

<sup>37</sup> Uribe (2020) p136

<sup>38</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p18

<sup>39</sup> A term used in Latin America, especially in parts of Colombia and Panama, to signal the presence of indigenous communities in those locations long before they were visited by Europeans. The term therefore has political as well as geographic and ethnic connotations.

- The Earth is our mother and sister, so we love her as part of our family.
- The Earth speaks to us of God, and from this, we know God.
- We learn from the Earth, the animals, the plants, the trees... how to live in community.
- The Earth is sacred.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, the biblical basis for these ideas can be found in the fact that all of creation is good (Genesis 1), that humans are created from the earth (Genesis 2:7), that alongside humans the rest of creation praises God (Psalm 148), that God's breath exists in non-human creation (Genesis 1:30), that all of creation is sacred (Psalm 8:1-3), that non-human creation is to be treated with respect (Deuteronomy 25:4; Proverbs 27:23) and that all of creation will be redeemed alongside humanity (Romans 8:21). The point made in all of the regional papers was that too much Western theology has forgotten this tradition. Influenced by dominion theology, it has separated humans from the rest of creation and caused the exploitation of nature. Hence, what is required is a rediscovery of our true biblical mandate which is expressed in the indigenous communities who retained a belief in the spirituality and sacredness of God's creation. 'The Gunadule population recognizes the earth as sacred because there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. What is sacred is life; Baba and Nana (God) gave us the vocation of caring for God's work and not destroying it.'<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Bauckham, comments,

'The Bible has de-divinized nature, but it has not de-sacralized nature. Nature remains sacred in the sense that it belongs to God, exists for the glory of God, even reflects the glory of God, as humans also do. The respect, even the reverence, that other creatures inspire in us is just as it should be. It leads us not to worship creation (something that is scarcely a serious danger in the contemporary western world) but to worship with creation.'<sup>42</sup>

For Bauckham, de-divination means that nature is not divine, not an aspect or part of God. As such, we do not worship nature, for to do so is idolatry. In contrast, to recognise the sacred aspect of nature is to understand the rest of creation as reflecting God's handiwork, and as that which praises God through its being, and therefore that with which we can join in a chorus of praise. Fundamentally, it is about refusing to think of the rest of creation in instrumental terms as existing solely for our benefit. We are part of the created order that alongside the trees, flowers, dolphins and mountains give praise to God for what he has created.<sup>43</sup> There is a right and proper sense in which we must affirm God's transcendence, his separateness from creation, alongside his immanence, his ongoing presence within all of creation. Holding these two realities together enables us to worship God for and alongside the rest of creation, without worshipping creation as God.

Having said this, it is important at the same time to acknowledge that recognising the sacred, and indeed spiritual, aspects of nature in this way are not on their own sufficient for a fully rounded theology of creation. If we do not intentionally bring God into this picture then we can end up divorcing our life in the community of creation from the creator who brought that life into being, and in the process we can fail to take seriously our God-given role as custodians of nature. Even worse, there is some evidence that this approach may not lead to the environmental benefits that we might think it would.

This was especially evident in the Asia paper that adopted a distinctive tone with regard to the spirituality of nature. That paper certainly recognised that the spiritualities that arose from the multitude of religions in its region did at times help restore a more appropriate relationship to creation. However, they also indicated that at times those indigenous spiritualities had the entirely opposite effect. They drew attention to the fact that one consequence of emphasising the sacredness of non-human creation too much is that we arrive at a place where nature itself is deified. 'In most Asian countries, the synchronisation between humans and

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<sup>40</sup> Uribe (2020) p134

<sup>41</sup> Uribe (2020) p136

<sup>42</sup> Bauckham (2011) p13

<sup>43</sup> Bauckham (2011) pp52–53

nature is so deep that people regard nature elements as deities....Unfortunately, such worship has neither protected our environment nor has it given a proper framework to sustain the economy.<sup>44</sup> At face value, at least according to White, such deification should lead to an increased respect and care for non-human creation. However, as the Asian report points out, this is not always the case:

‘Despite the prevalence of strong pantheism in many Asian countries (India, Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand) animals are being mistreated, rivers which are worshipped as goddesses are being polluted, and trees which are thought to be the abode of deities are being destroyed. It is hard to imagine nature elements that are considered to be deities have become the object of exploitation by its worshippers.’<sup>45</sup>

According to Vishal Mangalwadi who is quoted with approval in the Asia report:

‘There is a naive and mistaken notion in the West that our environmental crisis is a result of the human desire to have dominion over creation. The fact, on the contrary, is that we cannot manage the environment unless we see ourselves both as an integral part of creation, therefore dependent on it, but also as being over creation, and therefore being responsible for it. The environmental mess in India, which is far worse than in the industrialised West, is a clear indication that the worship of nature damages creation more than our attempts to manage it.’<sup>46</sup>

Given the impact of climate change, Mangalwadi’s final statement may be going too far. It may also be the case that the environmental destruction described in these last two quotations is more a product of our sinful human nature than the worldviews under consideration. Nevertheless, these comments act as a counterpoint to the frequent assertion that all that is required for us to return to a more appropriate relationship with non-human creation is to adopt White’s thesis and re-sacralize the whole of nature. What this demonstrates is that while on the one hand there are clearly indigenous views that reflect the biblical mandate, and so can and must be listened to in order to foster greater environmental care, we must also recognise that no single worldview is perfect, and certainly the human propensity to sin impacts whatever good might arise from such views. What this also shows is that as soon as we detach creation from the creator then it is at risk of being treated as a resource for our benefit. Indeed, to the extent that nature is worshipped as a means to placate the gods this is precisely what takes place. As such, as evangelical Christians we must constantly remind ourselves that care of creation does not result from worship of creation; only from worship of the creator.

A set of related concepts that were also prevalent in the regional papers were what the Africa paper signalled in its designation of the ‘cosmological turn’ and ‘hermeneutical turn’. These proposals include the ideas that the distinction between humanity and the rest of creation is decentralised and perhaps even eradicated, that we are at one with the rest of creation, that non-human creation should be conferred the status of neighbour, and therefore loved as ‘neighbour’. So the Asian report noted that, ‘When we give emphasis on Jesus’ second greatest commandment, “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” we limit our understanding to the concept of “neighbour” as a human being because we are being taught in that way. Neighbour includes the entire creation ie surrounding.’<sup>47</sup>

If such statements are merely a rhetorical device to encourage us to love and care for creation in the same way that we might love and care for our human neighbour then perhaps there is not too much to concern us.<sup>48</sup> The Scriptures themselves are full of anthropomorphisms that play such a rhetorical purpose. Isaiah 55:12 is an obvious example. If, on the other hand, what is meant by considering creation as our neighbour

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<sup>44</sup> Saxena (2020) p4

<sup>45</sup> Saxena (2020) p18. Pantheism is the view that God just is everything that exists; God is synonymous with the universe.

<sup>46</sup> Mangalwadi (1993) pp107–108

<sup>47</sup> Saxena (2020) p29. See also Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p43

<sup>48</sup> It is worth noting that in his *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Schaeffer draws on a lyric from *The Doors* to entitle his first chapter ‘What have they done to our fair sister?’ The lyric reads: ‘What have they done to the earth? What have they done to our fair sister? Ravaged and plundered, And ripped her and bit her.’ Schaeffer (1970) p10



is more substantive, namely that there is no difference at all between humanity and the rest of creation then this needs to be resisted. Of course, in our creatureliness we are made of precisely the same stuff as the rest of creation. Moreover, our bodies are comprised of countless microorganisms that enable us to digest food, generate vitamins and detoxify harmful chemicals. Biblically, we are made from the earth and must recognise that we did not get our own special day of creation, but came into existence alongside other land creatures on day six. Together with us, they were given both the breath of life and the command to be fruitful and fill the earth.<sup>49</sup> Yet, having said all this, only humans were created in God's image, and that status does confer a different functional role for humans compared to the rest of creation. We do no service to the world if we ignore the particular set of responsibilities God has given us as guardians of creation.

One final author who has made a similar point is Hannah Malcolm. She is best known for describing a theology of lament that can help us navigate the path between a theology that denies any distinctive role to humans and an anthropocentrism expressed in domination over creation. For Malcolm, part of the solution is to embrace more seriously the category of 'climate grief'.<sup>50</sup> Such grief includes a mourning for that which is lost, whether human lives or other species, alongside an acknowledgement of the part we might have played in bringing about that loss. In this way, lament is both a reflection of our love and an encouragement to love in action in that it calls us to make redress for that which has gone wrong. She writes:

'The practice of grieving the Earth equips us to hold our human distance and creaturely intimacy in tension, resisting the desire to control or abuse while acknowledging that we are responsible: both in destruction and in participating in Christ's work of healing. And it holds these tensions in the constant call to prayer, teaching us to listen before we try to sing.'<sup>51</sup>

Section 2.1 has highlighted the fact that across the regional reports, and sometimes within the regions, there exists a diverse (and on occasions contradictory) range of views as to how we should understand our relationship to the rest of creation. All the papers agree that dominion theology – the idea that the earth is merely our resource to do with as we wish – has been highly destructive towards the planet and its life (both human and non-human). There is also unanimity that our role is to care for and preserve creation to a far greater extent than is currently the case. Where the differences lie is in how that ethic of care is understood, and where its moral foundations should be located. For some, the solution is to be found in an embrace of indigenous spiritualities in which the distinction between humanity and the rest of creation is minimised, and in some biocentric formulations, even eliminated. The problem, however, is that all worldviews are beset with the problem of sin, both in theory and in their practice. Hence, what is required is a theocentric approach in which our relationship to the rest of creation is found in the call of God upon our lives to live as responsible caretakers, custodians or stewards of the world in which God has placed us, namely the community of creation. Such theocentrism does not eliminate the problem of sin in how we live, but it does constantly remind us of our need to return to God to reshape both our thinking and our lives.

## 2.2 Economic theology

### 2.2.1 A typology of economic theology

The huge global disparities in wealth of which we are aware perhaps explain one of the most obvious tensions that appeared in the regional reports. That tension concerns their varying responses to the question of capitalism. In the Global North paper, the authors helpfully set out a broad typology of how Christians have responded to this topic:

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<sup>49</sup> Valerio (2020) p149

<sup>50</sup> Theos (2021) Section 3.2

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm (2020) p595

1. Those who defend free-market capitalism as the best mechanism for alleviating poverty.
2. Those who argue for the application of Christian ethics to business practices.
3. Those who seek a significant reformation of capitalism.
4. Those who understand capitalism as incompatible with Christianity.<sup>52</sup>

All of these responses have been reflected to greater or lesser extents in the regional papers and accompanying Tearfund reports. It is therefore not surprising that this issue has become a source of some tension within Tearfund. So for instance *The Restorative Economy* report adopts the most pro-market stance and states that ‘the countries that have done best over the past two decades are ones that established the right enabling environment to foster private sector growth’<sup>53</sup> and therefore ‘the first step towards meeting everyone’s basic needs is for governments to work with markets to create a context in which business can flourish’.<sup>54</sup> Contrast that with the LAC paper which references Marilú Rojas in talking of ‘the destruction of the neoliberal capitalist patriarchal system, which, through its market logic and the hoarding-exploitation of goods produced by ecosystems, is responsible for the destruction of the planet’,<sup>55</sup> and goes on to argue that ‘an alternative world to capitalism is possible; and likewise, another economy is also possible – a world in which all human beings fit together and where people can build a worthwhile life.’<sup>56</sup>

### 2.2.2 Capitalism, poverty reduction and a ‘happy’ planet

In seeking a resolution to this apparent tension we need to dig a little deeper into how we define poverty, and indeed capitalism, for whether or not capitalism has reduced poverty depends crucially on how we understand those terms. Jayakumar Christian, for instance, argues that poverty is primarily about relational disparities of power and not merely the level of GDP per capita.<sup>57</sup> If we agree with that then to claim that capitalism has reduced poverty would be to claim that inequalities of power have diminished, and that is of course far from the case. This is not to deny that the embrace of the free market in China<sup>58</sup> and India has not produced some benefits, but it is to suggest that we need to be nuanced as we make those claims. At most we can suggest that the embrace of capitalism in those regions has increased the per capita income for many and also reduced the number of people living on less than \$1.9 per day. Whether or not it has reduced ‘poverty’ is perhaps another question entirely. This point highlights an issue raised in the *Abundant Africa* report, namely that we require new tools of measurement:

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<sup>52</sup> Theos (2021) p41

<sup>53</sup> Evans and Gower (2015) p11

<sup>54</sup> Evans and Gower (2015) p40

<sup>55</sup> Uribe (2020) p55

<sup>56</sup> Uribe (2020) p68. It is important to recognise that there is not necessarily a contradiction between the two viewpoints described. China and Latin America began their embrace of free-market capitalism with very different social and economic starting conditions, and due to their different political situations have pursued it in distinctive ways. This goes a long way to explaining this apparent tension, and it is also a reminder that ‘capitalism’ is not one thing – either to be embraced or rejected.

<sup>57</sup> Christian (1999) Chapter 1 and p121

<sup>58</sup> Though some would argue that China’s approach of state capitalism is markedly different from the free market capitalism that predominates in the West

‘GDP counts the value of goods and services produced in a country, so more is better, even if it comes at the cost of trust and social cohesion. GDP measures income, but not equality, growth or destruction, and ignores social cohesion, health, happiness, spirituality and the natural world. It usually ignores unpaid work (therefore excluding many women) and the informal economy, which three in five people around the world rely on for their income. Measuring GDP alone drives greed, inequality and exploitative extraction from both people and the planet.’<sup>59</sup>

In response they issue a call for a new, community developed ‘People’s Abundance Index’ which would be a more holistic measure of wellbeing that goes beyond the narrow confines of income and wealth.

One alternative measure currently in existence is the *Happy Planet Index* produced by the New Economics Foundation. It measures a country’s wellbeing based on self-reported life satisfaction scores (ie how happy people are), life expectancy, inequality of outcomes within the country and the average ecological footprint of citizens in the country. They are keen to point out therefore that the index is not a measure of the happiness of a country’s citizens, but a measure of the ‘happiness’ of the planet which includes the wellbeing of the citizens combined with the wellbeing of the earth.<sup>60</sup> To use theological language, we might say that it is a measure of the happiness of the ‘community of creation’. Interestingly, using this index, Costa Rica has repeatedly come out top of the rankings despite having a GDP that is classed as only middle income, and which at \$12,000 per capita is a fifth of that of the US. What is even more striking about the Costa Rica example is that there is some evidence that in one particular region the poorer you are, the happier you are and the longer you live.<sup>61</sup> The reason for this seems to be that among the poorest communities the social ties are far stronger, and strong social ties seem to be more significant than other factors in generating wellbeing and a long life. All of this suggests a model in which a population can be happy, live long lives, have a low impact on the environment and yet in GDP terms not be rich. Such redefinitions of what we mean by wealth and poverty are therefore worthy of further consideration, at least before we claim that capitalism reduces poverty – it only does so on one particular measure of poverty.<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, we also need to appreciate that ‘capitalism’ is not one thing; it is certainly not to be equated with a functioning market as these have existed since antiquity. It is clearly the case that when one compares so-called ‘stakeholder capitalism’ with ‘market socialism’, the distinction between these two approaches begins to evaporate entirely. As such, it seems inappropriate on biblical grounds to make broad sweeping statements along the lines of either ‘capitalism is evil and must be dismantled’ or ‘socialism is righteous, and every Christian should support it’. What is clearly needed is reform of our current economic system, and to the extent that we call that system ‘capitalist’, this would suggest that what is needed is a reformed capitalism. However, to say that is neither to support nor condemn ‘capitalism’ as such; it is simply to affirm that changes are required. At the same time, we need to recognise that there is no perfect economic system anyway. We live in a fallen world populated by sinful individuals so any economic system we create will necessarily fall short. The task for the Christian is to point in the direction we should go, but never to claim that we have arrived at the perfect solution.

In *God of the Empty-Handed*, Christian makes the point that poverty does not have one single cause. It is multifactorial, even if all of those causes can be analysed in terms of the imbalances of power. In the same way, to the extent that capitalism has done any good this has not been because of one single policy idea. The good of capitalism is found in many different areas: the security and stability of private property; a well-educated and healthy workforce; entrepreneurial freedom; the availability of capital, stable currencies

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<sup>59</sup> Giljam et al (2021) p38

<sup>60</sup> <http://happyplanetindex.org/>

<sup>61</sup> Marchant (2013) See also Martínez and Sánchez-Ancochea (2016)

<sup>62</sup> The inadequacy of defining poverty (and therefore poverty reduction) as an income of less than \$1.9 per day is further evidenced by the work taking place on multidimensional definitions of poverty. These definitions include factors that actually describe people’s lives such as poor health, schooling, quality of housing and threats of violence. The significant point about these definitions is that they do not track national income as measured by GDP. Two nations can have the same GDP per capita yet a wildly different Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI); another two can have the same MPIs, but very different GDPs per capita. See <https://ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>

and so on. At the same time, there are also elements associated with it that we would undoubtedly eschew: a narrow focus on profits; systematic ignoring of social and environmental externalities; the propagation of desire; a focus on consumption; the goal of relentless growth and so on. What this means is that we do not need to make a decision for or against capitalism as such. We can simply state that there are specific policy goals that are good and that should be pursued – eg. a healthy, educated workforce – and there are others we would definitively avoid – eg. the failure to address environmental externalities.

The reality is that what we measure often attains an undue importance in our lives, our politics and in the goals for society, and what we fail to measure we tend to ignore. If we measure GDP growth, then GDP growth becomes an unquestioned purpose. Yet, the covid pandemic has taught us that some of that which we failed to account for – in particular, unpaid care work – has turned out to be of central importance. Hence, what this discussion suggests is that the EES goal for which we strive should perhaps be defined theologically rather than economically, and certainly not in terms of being for or against certain ‘isms’. Yes, we seek a reduction in poverty but what we mean by that is, amongst other things, a reduction in power imbalances, a thriving ecology, greater social capital, an increase in social and political participation, greater security (especially for women) and of course in addition fewer people living on less than \$1.9 per day. Perhaps the greatest contribution of theology is not so much in specifying the precise metrics that could be used, but in providing a vision for what it is we seek. With that in mind, the following section considers the theological principles that might guide our thinking in this area.

### 2.2.3 A theology of grace

One of the authors especially highlighted by the Global North regional paper was Kathryn Tanner.<sup>63</sup> While she has written on the theology of creation,<sup>64</sup> this section will briefly explore her reflections on theology and economics. In contrast to others who have written on this intersection, Tanner locates her theological economics not in particular ethical prescriptions, but in the whole sweep of scripture and God’s relations with the world. She makes the case for a ‘theology of grace’ which is grounded in God’s nature and interactions with the world, and which provides a framework for how we should relate to one another, not merely in so-called spiritual matters, but also in the material realm. This economy of grace is a non-competitive economy in which whatever I have received can be freely distributed without in any way diminishing my own status or wellbeing. I do not lose because you win; rather we both flourish in such a non-competitive world. Crucially, for Tanner, this is the model God has provided to us in his own being and relations with the world. She says, ‘The whole Christian story, from top to bottom, can, I think, be viewed as an account of the production of value and the distribution of goods, following this peculiar noncompetitive shape,’<sup>65</sup> and she goes on:

‘The first person of the Trinity does not begrudge the second and third anything; the Triune God does not begrudge the world anything; the Word does not begrudge the man Jesus anything; Jesus does not begrudge us anything. Making what one has the root and impulse of giving to others is simply the summary story of God and the world.’<sup>66</sup>

Crucially, for Tanner, this model of generous giving, this economy of grace that has been modelled for us by God is intended to set the benchmark for how we engage with one another. ‘The recipients do not hold these goods simply for themselves as a form of exclusive possession, but distribute them to others in much the way God has distributed those goods to them in the first place.’<sup>67</sup> She states that such goods are to be distributed ‘in an indiscriminate, rather profligate fashion’.<sup>68</sup> The question of course is what does all this mean in practice? It is one thing to recognise that, for instance in respect of knowledge or love, whatever I receive I can pass on to you without in any way diminishing what I have received. In economic terms, such

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<sup>63</sup> Theos (2021) pp37ff

<sup>64</sup> Tanner (1988)

<sup>65</sup> Tanner (2010) p179

<sup>66</sup> Tanner (2010) p180

<sup>67</sup> Tanner (2010) p179

<sup>68</sup> Tanner (2010) p178

goods are non-rival. However, Tanner emphatically suggests that to restrict an economy of grace to merely the ‘spiritual’ dimension is to accept a thoroughly unbiblical sacred-secular divide. Instead, ‘the Christian tradition as I am developing it affirms at a minimum that God creates the whole world, in all its aspects – material and spiritual – according to such a noncompetitive economy, so that it should be such a noncompetitive economy to every degree possible.’<sup>69</sup> Clearly, a huge amount of weight is placed on that final phrase ‘to every degree possible’ because of course Tanner does appreciate that if I give you my loaf of bread to eat, it does preclude me from eating it as well. Therefore, in her *The Economy of Grace*, she provides concrete examples of how such grace and giftfulness might work. As the Global North report comments, ‘She shows...how welfare provision based purely on need, minimum wages, unemployment cushions and a multiplication of public goods are expressions of unconditional divine giving.’<sup>70</sup> Similarly, ‘she points to worker-owned and managed businesses and social enterprises (like the Mondragon experiment in the Basque region in Spain), credit unions and other similar developments in economic democracy that embody alternatives to the way ownership is structured and profit is pursued.’<sup>71</sup> Such examples may not necessarily embody the lofty language of profligate giving that theologically characterises God’s relations to the world. Nevertheless, what Tanner has provided is a theological framework that is rooted in the grand narrative of scripture, and which provides for us a model of how we might operate economically with one another.

#### 2.2.4 A theology of the economy

In light of Tanner’s framework, the question that confronts us is what are the broad policy objectives that a theology of grace might generate. There are, at least, four for us to consider. The first of these is simply that before Jesus returns, poverty (in all its forms) should be reduced. Reduction rather than eradication is intentional here for as Jesus told us we will always have the poor with us (Mark 14:7; Matthew 26:11; John 12:8). Some campaigners get very exercised by this passage because it has been abused by some neoliberal Christian thinkers to argue that because we will always have the poor with us, we should not do anything to tackle poverty. That however is not remotely Jesus’ point. Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 15:11 ‘There will always be poor people in the land.’ The point of that passage is that there will always be poor people because the nation has failed to live up to God’s command to be generous and open-handed with their prosperity (Deuteronomy 15:4–5,11). In other words, if we live in accord with God’s commands, God has provided enough for there to be no poor people, but we are not living in obedience, and so there will always be poor people. Therefore, we must be generous and open-handed. Jesus’ statement, rather than an assertion about the inevitability of poverty, is a command for us to tackle it.<sup>72</sup> It is also a recognition of the fact that we live between the now and the not yet. The promise of the kingdom has been given to us, and we see that kingdom breaking in here and there, but that promise will not be fully realised until Jesus returns. So of course, we can and do work for poverty eradication, and we see signs of that inbreaking kingdom in places, but complete eradication will not take place until the eschaton.

Secondly, we should also be seeking a reduction in inequality. While almost all Christians would agree that we should tackle poverty, it is in respect of inequality that we enter into areas of controversy. We might agree with Blomberg when he states that, ‘There are certain extremes of wealth and poverty which are in and of themselves intolerable’,<sup>73</sup> but we disagree when we put actual figures on what those extremes might be. The Global North paper points out how ‘the average CEO pay among FTSE 100 companies in 2017 was 145 times higher than the salary of the average worker, up from 47 times in 1998.’<sup>74</sup> Most of us would think that 145 times is excessive, but what about 45? We need to be clear that the Scriptures do not provide concrete answers to these questions. However, what Scripture does indicate is a set of qualities that characterise those who are described as both righteous and rich.<sup>75</sup> One of the most significant of these is simply that we do not consider our possessions as exclusively our own or as the products of entirely our

<sup>69</sup> Tanner (2010) p181

<sup>70</sup> Theos (2021) p39

<sup>71</sup> Theos (2021) p40

<sup>72</sup> For more on how biblical definitions of poverty are not restricted to the economic sphere, see Thacker (2017) Chapter 3.

<sup>73</sup> Blomberg (1999) p245

<sup>74</sup> Theos (2021) p11

<sup>75</sup> For more on this, see Wright (2006) Chapter 8 and González (2006)



own effort. Instead, we recognise them as a gift from God, on loan from God to be used for God's purposes. 'Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth.' (Deuteronomy 8:17–18)

Christian has helpfully added to this the fact that fundamentally, 'Poverty is relational....It is about inequality, and specifically about inequality in power relationships.'<sup>76</sup> To be clear, in saying this, Christian is not simply reducing poverty to inequality, but rather affirming that a fundamental feature of poverty is inequality in power. Of course, one of the ways in which such power imbalances are expressed and fostered is through inequalities in economic power. There are numerous scriptural narratives that remind us of the importance of equality – whether expressed in terms of power, finances or in any other dimension. In the first place, we must remember that we have all been created equally in the image of God. Various interpretations have been proffered for what precisely is meant by the *imago dei* of Genesis 1:27, but in recent years a consensus has emerged that at the very least it should be interpreted in light of its ancient near-east background in which only the king or supreme ruler bore the image of God. Hence, when Genesis tells us that everyone is created in God's image, both men and women, the author is making a profound egalitarian statement about our dignity and worth vis-à-vis one another and God. We are all equal under God, and all equally capable of representing God to the world. Biblically, this is part of the reason why the Old Testament laws of redistribution (Leviticus 25; Deuteronomy 15) were established precisely to prevent the kind of gross inequality that is so prevalent in today's society.<sup>77</sup> We see this issue addressed in the condemnations of the Old Testament prophets, 'Woe to you who add house to house, and join field to field, till no space is left, and you live alone in the land.' (Isaiah 5:8) We also see it reflected in Paul's appeal to the Corinthians for the church in Jerusalem where he says, 'Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality.' (2 Corinthians 8:13–14 NIV)

Thirdly, there is a repeated biblical refrain that work should be rewarded appropriately. The Old Testament is replete with injunctions that we must pay a fair wage, pay it in a timely manner, and treat our workers well (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14,15; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5). Indeed, in the book of James, the wealthy business owners are excoriated for their maltreatment of their labourers:

'Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.' (James 5: 1–6)

Catholic Social Teaching, in particular, has been prominent in extending these thoughts into the concept of a just wage, which lies behind the current living wage campaigns.<sup>78</sup> This represents a significant challenge to the market ideology which believes that a fair wage is whatever the market demands. It may be difficult to determine precisely what a fair wage is, or how flat a pay structure any organisation should have, but what is clear is that market demands cannot and must not be the sole determining factor in making salary decisions. As part of this, we must also recognise that for various reasons there are those who cannot work: those with different abilities, those who are older or who are children, those who are sick. In the Old Testament, the categories often grouped together were the orphans, the widows and the strangers. The interesting thing about these groups was that in advocating for their relief the level of support that is

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<sup>76</sup> Christian (1999) p121

<sup>77</sup> For more on the social, political and environmental costs of inequality see Pickett and Wilkinson (2009) Stiglitz (2012), cited in bibliography.

<sup>78</sup> This is most explicit in Pope Leo's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* and was then followed in John Paul II's 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*.



encouraged is arguably much higher than the kind of welfare payments we might see today. In Deuteronomy 26:12, we read the following: ‘When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns.’ The word used for ‘eat their fill’ is the same used in Deuteronomy 31:20 when it describes the land flowing with milk and honey and people eating their fill and thriving; it is also used in Nehemiah 9:25 when it describes them like this: ‘so they ate, and were filled and became fat’. In other words, provision for the economically vulnerable, for those who cannot work, was not to be set at mere subsistence, or basic needs, level. It was to be set at a level where they could feast, thrive and indeed arguably grow ‘fat’. Again, this is far away from an economic mindset which believes that we should restrict provision for the economically destitute to a bare minimum in order to always provide an incentive to work. That is not the mindset that the scriptures advocate.

The last principle to be outlined is simply that of integral ecology. This is the idea that the social, economic and environmental aspects of our lives are intertwined. The Nobel prize winning activist and scholar Wangari Maathai shows us one way in which this is true:

‘The way I look at it, we tend to put the environment last because we think the first thing we have to do is eliminate poverty and send children to school and provide health. But how are you going to do that? In Kenya, one of our biggest exports is coffee. Where do you grow coffee? You grow coffee in the land. To be able to grow coffee you need rain, you need special kinds of soils that are found on hillsides, and that means you have to protect that land from soil erosion so you don’t lose the soil. You also want to make sure that when the rains come you’re going to be able to hold that water and have it go into the ground so that the streams and the rivers keep flowing and the ground is relatively humid for these plants. For the rains and the rivers you need forests and you need to make sure these your forests are all protected, that there is no logging, that there is no charcoal burning and all the activities that destroy the forest. All this really needs to be done so that you can be able to grow good coffee, so that you can have an income, so that you can send your children to school, so that you can buy medicine, so that you can take them to hospitals, so that you can care for the women, especially mothers. We see that the environment is something to exploit, because we see the environment in terms of minerals for example, or forests, or even raw materials that we produce on our land, or even land itself. We see it in terms of what we can exploit rather than the medium in which all of these activities have to take place. But you can’t reduce poverty in a vacuum. You are doing it in an environment.’<sup>79</sup>

This has also been a special concern of Pope Francis who has written frequently of the concept. In *Laudato Si’*, he commented that ‘the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from...how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.’<sup>80</sup> This is what he meant by an Integral Ecology: an environmental concern that includes the social and economic dimensions of life. For this reason, in his more recent *Let us Dream*, he wrote, ‘*Laudato Si’* is not a green encyclical. It’s a social encyclical. The green and the social go hand in hand. The fate of creation is tied to the fate of all humanity.’<sup>81</sup> In practical terms, this means that whether as governments, businesses or as individuals, we need to intentionally consider all of these aspects as we conduct our activities in the world. Governments can no longer pursue growth irrespective of its impact on the planet, businesses cannot ignore the environmental and social costs of their ventures, and individuals must stop consuming on the basis of the greatest value for money alone, or as a means to prop up their social status. All of us need to think far more integrally than has hitherto been the case.

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<sup>79</sup> Maathai (2009)

<sup>80</sup> Francis (2015) p141

<sup>81</sup> Francis (2020) p32

### 2.2.5 Structural justice

One final theme that was very strong in all of the regional papers and which cuts across many of the issues we have been discussing is that of structural justice. The fundamental idea here is that those who work in the areas of poverty alleviation and environmental protection need to pay attention to the structural causes of the issues they face, and not just limit themselves to micro-alleviations. The LAC paper comments:

‘Humanitarian movements...respond to real needs, but they do not analyse the social relationships that cause them, being reduced to a form of quieting the conscience, without condemning the logic of the unjust social and economic system. This is the model implemented by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Doctors without Borders, and countless humanitarian institutions.’<sup>82</sup>

Without an effective answer to capitalist underdevelopment, “sustainable human development” becomes a response that is “insufficient, incoherent, contradictory, or a simple euphemism and a list of good intentions.”<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, the Africa report described a series of global economic policies that ‘continue to “shackle” Africa’,<sup>84</sup> and one participant stated:

‘The church often finds itself where if we have interpreted certain scripture passages in a particular way to suit our self-interest, we’re not ready to listen to God’s Word in ways that are relevant to our times. And that is where we have missed the point...So we can take any passage and interpret it in terms of ‘God calls us to charity’ – which is true. ‘God calls us to kindness when we see poor people’ and so long as we give them our leftovers and our consciences clear us, we can drive on. But we don’t see the Lord who is asking deeper questions of the systemic cause of how the world has come to where it is. When Amos was shouting about the injustice of his days, it would have been easy to educate people to ensure that people who have more give one pair of sandals to those who don’t have any sandals. But he confronts their sin by saying, ‘You treat them like sandals!’ That is deep analysis. So, traditionally we’ve heard sermons on that passage in terms of ‘Be kind to people’ but not in terms of “when you or institutions you endorse treat people like sandals, that is not right – it is sinful.” So, I think it’s in the hermeneutics and, at the risk of repeating, the church has done that limited hermeneutical approach throughout the ages.’<sup>85</sup>

In highlighting this theme, it is worth pointing out how a series of texts surrounding Tearfund’s work have suggested that greater reflection is required in this area. In the 2020 book that emerged from a Tearfund consultation in Kigali the strongest critiques of the aid alone model are all provided by authors from the Global South.<sup>86</sup> This idea that ‘development’ has focussed far too much on charity and to a large extent ignored the structural and systemic causes of poverty is one that is prevalent throughout the theological literature of EES. Guittierez probably offers the most trenchant critique when he says the following:

‘In this situation we would have to give serious thought again to the meaning of the aid that the Churches in the opulent nations offer to the Churches in the poor nations. This economic aid, if not well oriented, could easily be unproductive in respect of the witness to the poverty which they could offer; it may also lead them to a reformist position producing superficial social changes which in the long run will only help to prolong the situation of misery and of injustice in which the

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<sup>82</sup> Uribe (2020) p64

<sup>83</sup> Uribe (2020) p69

<sup>84</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p56. The same point is made in the *Abundant Africa* report which called it a ‘hostile environment’. Giljam et al (2021) p19

<sup>85</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p47

<sup>86</sup> Rutayisire (2020) p17; Foday-Khabenje (2020) pp 26–29

marginated (sic) people live. This aid might also be able to offer, at a cheap price, a good conscience to Christians, citizens of countries that control the world economy.<sup>87</sup>

The African participant who drew attention to this issue in the book of Amos is correct to point out that in its advocacy for the poor the scriptures frequently prioritise the question of justice ahead of a response of charity. The recurrent Old Testament response to the widows, orphans and strangers is characterised more often by calls to change the system which impoverishes them than by calls to provide them with direct support in the form of food, clothing, shelter and so on (Deuteronomy 24:14,15; Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 10:2; Ezekiel 22:29; Malachi 3:5).<sup>88</sup> In light of this, it is excellent that Tearfund does explicitly embrace advocacy as part of its mission. Crucially, the *Advocacy Toolkit* highlights not just ‘advocacy with’ and ‘advocacy by’, but also ‘advocacy for’.<sup>89</sup> While of course the ideal is that all advocacy is undertaken by those directly impacted by an injustice, the reality of our contemporary world is that sometimes those so affected simply do not have access to the perpetrators in the same way that others do. If a coup in Conakry, Guinea has been fomented in boardrooms in London<sup>90</sup> then the citizens of the UK have a moral responsibility to ‘advocate for’ in that circumstance whether or not they can directly engage the Guineans in the process as well.

One particular call that has emerged in this space is that of reparatory justice. Some have argued that the Global North owes the Global South not merely for the atrocities of colonialism and enslavement, but also for climate change, for structural adjustment, for debt servicing and for ongoing illicit financial flows, including tax abuse across the Global South which is facilitated by the Global North. Zacchaeus’ encounter with Jesus did not merely lead to a change of heart and mind, but also to reparations that were consistent with his past behaviour (Luke 19:8). The World Council of Churches have picked up on this story to create the *Zacchaeus Tax Campaign* which calls for the establishment of a reparation fund for these injustices.<sup>91</sup> The fund would be used by low-income countries, especially those whose populations were decimated by slavery, to help them fund climate change adaptations, and build their health and education infrastructure.<sup>92</sup> To date, Tearfund appears to have done relatively little work in exploring the theme of reparatory justice, perhaps partly because this was not an explicit call in the papers from the Global South. Nevertheless, this is perhaps an area that now warrants attention.

One of the reasons for this is that, unless carefully handled, reparations and the language of reparatory justice can end up creating more, not less, division. It is widely accepted that the punitive reparations imposed upon Germany after World War I contributed significantly to the rise of Nazism and all that followed. One of the contributions from the reference panel was that part of the solution to this is to recognise that reparatory justice represents just a subset of the wider framework of restorative justice. In addition, we must accept that restorative justice is necessarily incomplete this side of the eschaton<sup>93</sup> and therefore our efforts can only ever be impartial and incomplete. Nevertheless, such partial moves are still warranted especially if combined with other acts of restoration. A further point made in the panel was that economic injustice is never just about money; it is also concerned with dignity and equality. Hence, acts of financial reparation may also be integrated with apologies, with symbolic acts of humility, with honouring of the oppressed and with actions that treat others as equals.

The terms of reference for this report indicated that in the regional reports to date the emphasis had been placed on environmental rather than economic themes, and that this report needed to restore some balance. Section 2.2 has begun to do that. While it is clear that the regional reports, especially those from the Global South, proffered an overall critique of ‘capitalism’, they did not always provide the theological rationale for that critique. When one lives in a context where large multinational companies have destroyed communities, polluted the environment, subjugated women and increased inequality then it is

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<sup>87</sup> Gutiérrez (1969 p152

<sup>88</sup> Two-thirds of the verses referencing these groups advocate a response of justice, one third a response of charity. Thacker (2021)

<sup>89</sup> Watson (2015) p11

<sup>90</sup> Editorial (7 September 2021) ‘Guinea’s coup stems from crisis of legitimacy’, *Financial Times*

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-supports-zacchaeus-campaign-for-tax-justice>

<sup>92</sup> See also the CARICOM ten-point plan for reparatory justice <https://caricom.org/caricom-ten-point-plan-for-reparatory-justice/>

<sup>93</sup> Volf (1996) p94

understandable that one does not feel the need to defend the idea of an alternative economic system. Nevertheless, what has been attempted in this section is to provide some of the theological foundations for the argument that our present economic system – whatever we call it – needs substantial reform and in the process this report has begun to point in the direction of what those policy changes might look like.

## 2.3 Pentecostal theology

One of the more surprising aspects of the regional reports was the relative paucity with which they explicitly referenced Pentecostal theology. This was unexpected for, as many have pointed out, Pentecostalism has expanded considerably across much of the Global South and as such is the grassroots theology in low-income regions at the present time.<sup>94</sup> As Yong comments, 'If liberation theology opted for the poor, it would appear that the poor in the last generation has opted for Pentecostalism'.<sup>95</sup> What follows is then an attempt to address the relevance of Pentecostal theology to EES, but for the reasons given this analysis is not based on the regional reports provided.

In her book, *Pentecostalism and Development*, Freeman argues that Pentecostalism has been good for economic development. In the process of making this argument she develops what she calls 'The Pentecostal Ethic'.<sup>96</sup> Following Weber's protestant work ethic, Freeman suggests that Pentecostalism confers a spirit of 'hard work, saving and a limitation on certain types of consumption'.<sup>97</sup> In contrast to Freeman, Paul Gifford, another anthropologist, is far less sanguine about the contribution of Pentecostalism to economic development.<sup>98</sup> He shares Freeman's view that Pentecostalism is motivating and encourages entrepreneurial behaviour. However, he also thinks that Pentecostalism's enchanted worldview actually prevents appropriate business practices being realised. While modernity would teach that business success depends on hard work, good financial control and wise investments, Pentecostalism at times teaches that such success depends on the relative blessings of God and cursings of the spirit world.

It is important to recognise that there is possibly an economic and environmental divergence in this regard. On the one hand, from an ecological point of view, Pentecostal theology may in its emphasis on the Spirit help contribute to the idea that all of creation is sacred and spiritual, and in the process lead to a more environmentally conscious relationship with that nature.<sup>99</sup> From an economic point of view, Gifford is arguing that an animist perspective is holding back economic development. Certainly, it is possible to see that if you believe everything is controlled by the spirits, and that any business failure has spiritual rather than material causes, then such a view is not likely to generate the sound business practices that are required.<sup>100</sup>

On the one hand, then, there are aspects of Pentecostal theology that certainly at times foster the kind of behaviours that are associated with sustainable economic development: hard work, entrepreneurship, saving to invest and restriction on consumption. Yet, at the same time, there is also much that militates against such development: sweatless work, conspicuous consumption, an animist worldview that tends to see spirits rather than human factors behind a range of life circumstances.

With regard to the environmental sphere, Lamp has suggested that historically Pentecostal theology has not generally been known for adopting an ecologically conscious stance, and this despite the fact that a prominent Pentecostal was one of the founders, if not the founder, of *Earth Day*.<sup>101</sup> Pentecostal themes that have tended to militate against environmentalism include a spirit-matter dualism, a dispensationalist

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<sup>94</sup> Freeman (2015) p3. See also Cox (1995); Jenkins (2011)

<sup>95</sup> Yong (2019) p310

<sup>96</sup> Freeman (2012) pp159–180.

<sup>97</sup> Freeman (2012) p20

<sup>98</sup> Gifford (2015) p48

<sup>99</sup> Lamp (2020) p362

<sup>100</sup> Gifford (2016) p60

<sup>101</sup> Lamp (2020) pp360–361

eschatology<sup>102</sup> and a reduced gospel that focuses entirely on soul-winning. At the same time, he argues that theological resources exist within Pentecostalism that could lead to a different outcome. These include the Spirit's role in creation, the extension of Spirit baptism and redemption to the whole of creation, a revision of eschatology so that it includes a renewed earth and a holistic soteriology empowered by the Spirit.<sup>103</sup> A practical example of the last of these is provided by the Zimbabwean theologian Daneel. He was instrumental in founding the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches and describes how the practice of tree planting is incorporated into a eucharistic ceremony"

'The sacrament itself was preceded by all Christian participants confessing publicly their ecological sins, such as tree-felling without planting any in return, promoting soil erosion through bad land-husbandry activities, river-bank cultivating, and spoiling wildlife by poaching game animals.<sup>104</sup>

After confession, each communicant picked up a seedling and moved with it toward the table where the bread and wine were administered. Thereby nature was symbolically drawn into the inner circle of communion with Christ the Redeemer, head of the church and of all creation. In such action the salvation of all creation and the emergence of a new heaven and earth are anticipated and proclaimed.<sup>105</sup>

Pentecostalism is then a conundrum, and it is no surprise that we can reach a variety of conclusions as to whether or not it helps the cause of environmental and economic sustainability. It is very likely that in some locations, among some groups (if not some families) the positives of Pentecostalism are emphasised and a sense of human agency and responsibility dominates in a way that leads to sound economic growth and appropriate earth-care. And no doubt, there are other places (and other families/individuals) where a different ethic predominates. Pentecostal theology is simply too large a phenomena for any simple conclusions to be drawn – whether positive or negative. Adogame helpfully notes that we need to evaluate the contribution of Pentecostalism to these issues 'on a case-by-case basis rather than making any huge generalisations.'<sup>106</sup>

Irrespective of the practical outworking of Pentecostal theology in particular communities it is important to remember the theological contributions that can be made. In his book *Power and Poverty*, Hughes, the late theological advisor to Tearfund, reminds us that the impact of the Spirit is as much about social holiness and ethical living as it is about signs and wonders. The day of Pentecost led to both bold proclamation and the sharing of worldly possessions.<sup>107</sup> The same idea is expressed by the Hispanic-American scholar Eldin Villafane. He makes the case that a holistic spirituality needs to embrace 'both personal transformation/piety (prayer, mystic, contemplation, thus inner-directed and vertical) and social transformation/piety (justice, advocacy, social action, thus outer-directed and horizontal)'.<sup>108</sup> Drawing attention to the Johannine Pentecost (John 20:21–22), he spells out what this might mean: 'The Spirit's love constrains us to feed the hungry, visit the sick and the prisoners, shelter the homeless and poor.'<sup>109</sup> In light of this, the theology we require will not be found in reducing our understanding of the work of the Spirit, but in increasing it. It will be found in a recognition that the Spirit's work is manifest both in signs and wonders, but also in personal transformation, in ethical living, in the rejection of corruption, in a desire to seek justice and in advocacy for the poor and the planet. From a theological point of view, we could also add to these the Spirit's role in creating the world (Genesis 1:2), and in perfecting and drawing us towards

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<sup>102</sup> Dispensationalist eschatology is associated with the premillennial view that this world is going to get worse before Jesus returns to reign for a thousand years. Hence, there is no point in us trying to improve the social, economic and political situation, and therefore the ecosystem, because to do so might delay Jesus' return when he will fix everything.

<sup>103</sup> Lamp (2020) pp361–363

<sup>104</sup> This is one example from the Global South where the theme of lament is connected to appropriate earth-care.

<sup>105</sup> Daneel (2011) pp13–136

<sup>106</sup> Adogame (2016) a4065

<sup>107</sup> Hughes (2008) p232

<sup>108</sup> Villafane (1996) p165

<sup>109</sup> Villafane (1996) p168

the eschatological fulfilment for both humans and the world, that is found in Christ, and in which we now experience the first-fruits of that salvation (Romans 8:19–24).

These themes are further developed by the Pentecostal theologian Daniela Augustine in her book *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God*. She makes the case that at Pentecost, the Spirit did not merely infill a series of unrelated individuals, but instead created a new community who share a common life. Crucially, that new community is characterised more by the economy of the household than the economy of a competitive market. Within such a household economy, 'The family's wealth is the wealth of all its members, and material possessions are utilised for the common good since personal well-being flows from the household's shared well-being in mutual safe-keeping.'<sup>110</sup> As she goes on to say, this household does not just extend to the new community of believers, but to the planet which is, as Pope Francis reminded us, '*Our Common Home*'.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the identity of this new community is found not in selfish accumulation but in enabling everyone to flourish, including the rest of creation. If this could be realised then we can offer back to God a healthy, thriving community of creation in gratitude for the gifts God has provided. This Spirit-inspired, indeed Pentecostal, approach lays the groundwork for the theology of an abundant community that is the subject of the rest of this report.

Before proceeding, however, we should note that although Augustine does not develop her ideas in this way it would of course be possible, as Tanner suggests, to conceive of this household (or economy of grace) framing as laying the foundation for a reformed market economy in which the purpose of business is not the acquisition of individual profit, but the flourishing of a whole community. While there are many private enterprises that do pursue such an agenda, it sadly remains the exception rather than the norm. It is nevertheless an ideal for which we should strive.

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<sup>110</sup> Augustine (2020) p372. See also Augustine (2019)

<sup>111</sup> Francis (2015)



### 3. Abundant community

In 1974, two Latin American theologians, C. René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, stood up at the Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization and criticised the US-funded, Western-dominated audience for failing to understand the holistic nature of the gospel. The problem was not so much that Western (we might now say, ‘Global North’) evangelicalism was wrong in the theology it espoused. The problem was the theology it omitted, namely the need to address the pressing social issues that impacted the majority of the world’s population. René Padilla said this:

‘There is no place for statistics on ‘how many souls die without Christ every minute’ if they do not take into account how many of those who thus die, die victims of hunger. There is no place for evangelism that, as it goes by the man who was assaulted on the road to Jericho, sees in him only a soul that must be saved and ignores the man.’<sup>112</sup>

Samuel Escobar expanded upon this trajectory. He wrote:

‘As part of the wealthy...we are trying to reach as many...for Christ as we can. We tell them about Jesus and they watch us throw away more food than they ever hope to eat. We are busy building beautiful church buildings, and they scrounge to find shelter for their families. We have money in the bank and they do not have enough to buy food for their children. All the while we tell them that our Master was the Servant of men, the Saviour who gave his all for us and bids us give all for him.’

<sup>113</sup>

Padilla and Escobar’s critique helped launch what became known as the Integral Mission movement, a theology that is now at the heart of Tearfund’s mission and purpose. In an echo of that reality, today’s challenge is to listen to the comments being offered in the reports that have emerged from the Global South. In particular, this could be done by paying attention to a critique that appeared in a number of places but that was most succinctly articulated in the African regional paper. If we really hear what is being proposed in that report then it could lead to a significant addition to how we think about EES theology.

#### 3.1 Summary of abundant community

In the African regional paper, we find the following comment:

‘The logic of neoliberal economics is based on the idea of managing scarcity. Scarcity is managed by the ‘invisible hand’ of the market in a series of demand-supply relationships. Previous Tearfund reports have demonstrated a tacit acceptance of models of economic scarcity seeking to ameliorate poverty through advocating policies such as ‘ecological footprints’ , ensuring we live within environmental limits (scarcity), ensuring that everyone is able to meet their basic needs, and keeping inequality within reasonable limits. This tacit acceptance of theories of economic scarcity (and a subsequent focus on ‘redistributionist policies’) is in opposition to theologies of God’s abundance.’<sup>114</sup>

Whether or not Tearfund is guilty in the way that is outlined above is not the purpose of what follows. Rather, the reason this excerpt is included is because it brings to the fore an emerging idea in theologies of EES that in different ways appeared in every one of the regional papers. That idea is the contrast between the theology of an abundant community and a theology of scarcity. The argument is that a theology (or mindset if you like) of scarcity underpins the worst of both capitalist exploitation and environmental degradation, and that this framework stands counter to the approach held out for us in Scripture. In what

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<sup>112</sup> Padilla (1974)

<sup>113</sup> Escobar (1974)

<sup>114</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p45–46

follows, this contrast is explored in more detail and the argument is made that the theology of an abundant community could be embraced by Tearfund as a useful contribution to its EES work. To be clear, this report is not suggesting that the abundance framework is the only one that Tearfund should use, but much as Padilla and Escobar argued for the addition of social justice to evangelistic concerns, so this report is suggesting the addition of abundant community framing to Tearfund's existing theological thinking about EES.

We begin with a passage from the Pentateuch:

'There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today...If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.' (Deuteronomy 15: 4–8)

While a theology of an abundant community can (and will) be defended from a range of biblical passages – not least John 10:10 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' – these verses from Deuteronomy provide perhaps the neatest summary of the framework. They stand in stark contrast to the theology of scarcity that dominates Global North thinking and which will be described in detail below. The passage above can be summarised in this way:

There need not be any poverty,  
because God has provided sufficient resources –  
however, this is dependent on our obedience to God:  
specifically, we need to be generous in sharing what we have.

In this way, an abundant community is the outworking, the practical expression, of a theology of abundance. The former refers to what we see – a community of creation in which generosity and plenitude are the norm; the latter refers to the theological framework that enables this, in particular a relational anthropology. In contrast to this paradigm, a theology of scarcity teaches us:

There will always be poverty,  
because God (or the planet) has not provided sufficient resources –  
therefore, if we are to avoid poverty, we need to selfishly accumulate in order to protect ourselves.

The argument of this report is that it is this myth of scarcity that generates the fear, greed and lack of trust in God that in turn leads to environmental exploitation and economic injustices, and as such lies at the root of the problems we are seeking to address.

To be clear, abundance thinking and scarcity thinking are not primarily about the actual quantity of material goods that exist. They are concerned with how we think, value and behave in relation to those goods. Consider the phenomenon of panic buying which unfortunately many of us have witnessed during the covid pandemic. Whether one is a panic-buyer or not, the actual quantity of stuff is the same. The difference between the two is our attitude. The mindset of the panic buyer (the mindset of scarcity) goes something like this:

*I'm not sure there are enough x for everyone;*

*I'm worried that I won't have enough x to meet my needs;*

*therefore, I am going to take as many x as I can in order to safeguard my future requirement for x.*

In contrast, the non-panic buyer (the mindset of abundance) thinks along these lines:

*I'm not sure there are enough x for everyone;*

*I'm worried that everyone won't have enough x to meet all their needs;*

*therefore, I will take just one of x (or even none at all) to ensure that I have left sufficient for everyone else.*

In this way, the mindset of scarcity generates the individualism, selfishness and greed that is ravaging our planet – both economically and environmentally. In contrast, the mindset of an abundant community generates a communitarian, open-handed generosity that fosters relationship and care, both for one another and for the community of creation. It represents a theology of enough where I take what I need, not what I desire (Hebrews 13:5).

As noted, the difference between these frameworks is not a difference between a situation of plentiful resources and a situation of few resources; it is a difference in attitude towards whatever resources happen to exist. Hence, to point to the myth of scarcity is not to claim that, in all places, at all times, there are sufficient resources for everyone to survive. It is an obvious truism that famines occur. Rather the myth of scarcity relates to the fact that at a global level there are sufficient resources for everyone to survive (if not thrive), and that the problem of local scarcity is a problem created by the unfair distribution of those resources. As Sen famously argued, famines do not occur in multiparty democracies.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, that unequal distribution occurs because we adopt the mindset of selfish individualism that is characteristic of scarcity thinking. In other words, in a world of scarcity thinking we are in effect observing panic buying writ large. The crucial point, of course, about panic buying is that often it is the case that the only reason some go without is because others have taken too much.

Similarly, a theology of an abundant community also accepts the finite nature of our earth's resources. There is nothing in abundance thinking that denies the fact that collectively we need to live within ecological limits. Rather, what is being argued is that if we replace scarcity thinking with abundance thinking then what it leads to is a very different distribution of whatever resources do exist. Hence, we can think of overfishing or intensive farming as a form of panic buying which leads to the depletion of resources that might otherwise have been available. Indeed, such behaviour is an example of the integral ecology which was noted earlier. A particular social mindset (individual competition) leads to environmental exploitation (overfishing) which has economic consequences for the communities involved (loss of fish stock to feed a populace). Hence there are times when a mindset of abundance does actually lead to more resources being available; at other times it leads to a much fairer distribution of those resources. However, its fundamental feature is not the quantity or otherwise of resources, but the mindset with which we approach those goods.

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<sup>115</sup> Sen (1999) p178

Therefore, what is at the heart of this theology is a different set of values to the mindset (or theology) of scarcity. It is for this reason that this idea has been entitled 'Abundant community', for at its core is a different way of thinking about how we relate to ourselves, others and the rest of creation. It is about understanding all of creation as existing in a network of relationships, a community of creation, in which those relational bonds matter above all else. It is about thinking of ourselves as members of one household, sharing one common home with everything that God has created. Cortés writes:

'We need a new way of understanding in non-hierarchical, non-sexist, non-classist forms that opens up the doors to an existence with new behaviours and new forms of learning. And although this seems too difficult to accomplish, we cannot doubt our capacity to love and envelop ourselves in the web of life that receives all of the immigrants and children, the flowers and rivers. There is always something in us that makes us feel linked, interconnected, and interdependent.'

She goes on to talk of the Song of Songs as a model for us in which, 'men and women begin to recognize one another as co-inhabitants in the cosmos, living our contradictions, but in search of other models of relationships reconstructed in a more integrated perspective,' and as a 'place where humanity and nature are part of a sacred whole that embraces us with intrinsic dignity.'<sup>116</sup>

What abundance thinking is not about is valuing an abundance of stuff, especially not as an individual. At face value, it might seem as though this approach is in danger of coming close to prosperity teaching. However, the crucial difference is that while abundant community theology is by definition communitarian, prosperity theology is typically individualistic. Abundance thinking is manifest in an 'abundant community', not a healthy and wealthy individual. Despite its superficial similarity, prosperity theology actually works within a scarcity mindset for it rejects the core abundance idea of communal sharing as an expression of our relational anthropology. The Africa regional paper drew a distinction between an 'ethos of community' and 'ethos of individuality',<sup>117</sup> and wrote, 'In God's economy this prosperity is always a shared prosperity, and never the prosperity of one sector of the population over and against another sector (the heresy of the "prosperity gospel")'.<sup>118</sup>

### 3.2 A relational anthropology

The theological foundation for the idea of an abundant community can be found in a different anthropology that is prevalent throughout the Global South, and in the Scriptures, but which has largely been forgotten in the Global North.<sup>119</sup> That anthropology exists among many indigenous communities across the world from the Quechua people of Latin America to the Blackfeet of the Great Plains.<sup>120</sup> It is evident in the Korean concept of Sangsaeng<sup>121</sup> and the Bantu idea of Ubuntu. While this approach appeared in different forms in all of the papers from the Global South, it was most frequently articulated in the reports from Africa in its description of Ubuntu thinking and so it is that description that forms the focus of this analysis. In summary, Ubuntu is the idea that 'a person is a person through other people.'<sup>122</sup> The *Abundant Africa* report describes it thus:

'All humans are interdependent. We are human because we belong to, participate in and share our society. Maintaining social solidarity is a collective task. Ubuntu extends to caring for the natural ecosystems of which we are a fully dependent part...Ubuntu implies that a person can increase their fortunes by sharing with other members of society, thereby enhancing their status within a local community. The philosophy of Ubuntu gives Africans a sense of pride, ownership, sharing and

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<sup>116</sup> Uribe (2020) p129

<sup>117</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p41

<sup>118</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p50

<sup>119</sup> The need for a new, more relational anthropology was however a point that was made in the Global North paper, especially in relation to Zamagni, and in the Theos report (2010).

<sup>120</sup> Burkhart (2004) p25

<sup>121</sup> WCC-CWM (2007) pp129–134

<sup>122</sup> Giljam (2021) p20

caring and motivates us to become better people. Everyone is considered to be important because they belong to our community. Ubuntu means that our abundance as Africans depends on the betterment of our communities and the environment, and promoting it is therefore vital for tackling poverty, political conflicts, injustice and environmental challenges. This can be done through showing empathy for others, sharing common resources and working cooperatively to resolve common problems.’<sup>123</sup>

The central feature of Ubuntu is this idea of irreducible interdependence and interconnection. Newbigin helpfully draws out its distinction from a typical Global North perspective:

‘For African society, the human person is seen as a partner in a whole network of relationships binding him or her horizontally across a widely extended family and vertically to the ancestors who have died and to children yet to be born. To be human is to be part of this closely woven fabric of relationships. By contrast, the Western post-Enlightenment understanding of the human person centres on the autonomy of the individual who is free to make or to break relationships at will.’<sup>124</sup>

Of course, in highlighting this we are not claiming that everyone in a Western context fails to live with the kind of community orientation that is characteristic of Ubuntu thinking, nor that everyone in Africa lives in relational harmony. Individualism affects many in the Global South, and communitarianism has a rich tradition in the Global North.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, Newbigin is right that the predominant mindsets of the Global North and Africa are as he describes. Moreover, such a relational anthropology is not unique to sub-Saharan Africa. It is also found in much of Asia. For instance, writing in a Filipino context, Fr. Beltran chastises Western individualism as being thoroughly unbiblical and then states, ‘The core of being human was defined not by what a living body is in itself, but by its relationship to others – “to be” is “to be in relation”.’<sup>126</sup> American Indian thought has summarised it as, ‘We are, therefore I am’.<sup>127</sup> The LAC paper repeatedly drew attention to these alternative cultural identities, especially among indigenous communities,<sup>128</sup> and in the process, they extended the idea beyond inter-human relationships to also include our relationship to the rest of creation. The point here is not just that we as an individual person must relate well to other humans and to the planet, but that our very identity – how we understand ourselves – is tied up with and formed by our relationships to others and the rest of creation. They said, ‘other cultures, particularly ancestral cultures, possess an integral and communal view of life. Thus, if the creation is affected, all are affected; and if one (living or nonliving being) is affected, all creation is affected.’<sup>129</sup> Similarly, they drew on the Andean concepts of *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña*. The former is often translated as ‘*buen vivir*’ (good life) and both speak to a concept of community, interdependence, and relational harmony with creation and with one another. They comment, ‘We need to learn more about the *buen vivir* (good life) as an ethic of life from the indigenous peoples, which challenges us to a life of community and interdependence, in contrast with individualism and instrumentalisation.’<sup>130</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Giljam (2021) p20. See also Ilo (2014) p265. For more on the relation of *Ubuntu* to issues of poverty see Murove pp135–150.

<sup>124</sup> Newbigin (1989) pp187–188

<sup>125</sup> The monastic movement, the Bruderhof community, some expressions of Celtic Christianity and Franciscan spirituality are all examples.

<sup>126</sup> Beltran (1998) p178

<sup>127</sup> Burkhart (2004) p25

<sup>128</sup> Uribe (2020) pp20, 38, 41, 149

<sup>129</sup> Uribe (2020) p20

<sup>130</sup> Uribe (2020) p137

This understanding is deeply embedded in a variety of non-Western cultures and taught to children through stories and folk-tales. One such story is that of the *Honeyguide's Revenge*. It is a Zulu tale which teaches both the importance of sharing but also of our interconnectedness with the rest of creation. It is a reminder that Ubuntu thinking is not limited merely to our inter-human interactions:

#### 'Honeyguide's Revenge

There once lived a selfish young man called Gingile. He was very greedy and never wanted to share anything that he had. Whether he had a good hunt or a good harvest of corn in his own small garden, he never shared a piece with anyone.

One morning, Gingile was out hunting when he suddenly heard the honey call of Ngede, the honeyguide bird. Gingile was tempted at the thought of fresh honey. He could almost smell the aroma in his imagination. He found the bird on one of the branches of a tall tree and Gingile followed him. Flying slowly, Ngede moved towards the branch on which the bees had built their nest. Gingile quickly gathered a branch, some leaves and twigs and lit a fire. Once the flame started burning properly, he picked up a burning stem and climbed till he could see the beehive. He thrust the burning stem into the beehive. All the bees rushed out, some even stung Gingile, but he was too concerned about the honey to even feel the pain of the sting. After the bees left, he put his hand into the hive and took out the huge honeycomb, dropped it into his pouch and climbed down slowly.

Ngede was anxiously waiting for Gingile to come down to drop a big chunk of the honeycomb as a thank you token. After all, she loved it as well. She looked up at Gingile in anticipation, but Gingile simply laughed at the little bird,

"You really think I will give you a share of my spoils? What did you even do to get this? I have done all the hard work. Go and look somewhere else for food," Gingile said and then left.

Ngede felt betrayed and decided to take his revenge.

One day after many weeks, while Gingile was busy cleaning his garden, he once again heard the voice of the honeyguide. The thought of the wonderful honey filled his mouth with water, so he followed Ngede into the forest and just like last time, she perched on top of a tree, signalling to Gingile about the beehive. Gingile lit the fire and climbed to the branch. However, this time he could not hear the sound of the bees buzzing. He continued climbing, thinking about the honey that he was about to get when he suddenly found himself face to face with a huge leopard. The leopard was immediately awakened by the heat from the stick that Gingile was carrying. The leopard was angry, and she opened her big mouth flashing her large, sharp teeth and growled loudly at Gingile, scraping his forehead with her claws. Gingile was terrified and lost his grip and fell on the ground with a huge thud. The scar made by the leopard stayed on his forehead forever.<sup>131</sup>

Biblically, such a relational anthropology can be found throughout the Scriptures. It is perhaps most clear in Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 that we are one, just as he and the father are one, and in Paul's theology of the body in 1 Corinthians 12. Theologically, it can be found in the Godhead where the personhood of the Father, Son and Spirit is not found separate to their Trinitarian relationships but is rather established through those relationships. Zizioulas, for instance, points out how Western philosophy has bequeathed to us a legacy in which we first exist as some kind of substantive being, and then secondarily relate to others and to God. In contrast, he takes us back to the Old and New Testaments to argue that our very existence subsists in our relationships, primarily our relationship to God. We only have our being precisely because we participate in

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<sup>131</sup> This story can be found in multiple locations, but this version is adapted and abridged from the one found here: <https://mocomi.com/indian-folk-tales-honey-guides-revenge/>



the relationship of the Son to the Father, just as the Son's personhood subsists in his relation as Son to the Father.<sup>132</sup> It is not just then we are created to have relationships as if they are a thing that comes along after our own existence/personhood is established. Rather, we are created as relational and the question is not 'Should we relate?' but, 'In what ways do we already relate?', that reflects who we are meant to be. There are obvious parallels between Zizioulas' paradigm and that of Ubuntu and a number of African authors in particular have highlighted this.<sup>133</sup>

This alternative anthropology has been emphasised because it both provides a theological foundation for a theology of abundant community, and because it explains why so many in the Global North struggle to understand or appreciate an abundance framework. The reason is that they are beset with an individualistic anthropology in which the theology of abundance just does not make sense.<sup>134</sup> By way of contrast if one adopts an Ubuntu/Trinitarian anthropology, a theology of abundant community is the only one that makes sense.

Therefore, if we assume a thoroughly relational and integral anthropology then a new framework emerges. Under this approach, we begin with the assumption that the earth produces sufficient, if not plentiful, resources for everyone to thrive. We recognise that this can only be realised in practice if our default position is to share those resources. We engage in such sharing because our self-understanding is that we are people in relationships, both with one another and with the earth. We simply do not think that any resources we acquire belong to us alone either as individuals or as humans, nor do we think that the planet is our shopping mall from which we can consume and hoard as we please. Rather, our assumption is that the goods of this earth are part of our home, and so belong to everyone, including the animals with which we coinhabit this space. Our only question is how to distribute them in the particular context in which we find ourselves.

There exists a fascinating study which perhaps demonstrates the difference generated by these alternative concepts of the self. In the study, rural subjects from Busia, Kenya and students from the University of California, Berkeley were given an amount of money and then asked how much they would give to an anonymous person next door. At the same time, those anonymous people were asked how much they thought it was fair for them to take from the one who received the money. What the study showed was that whether as givers or takers, the Kenyans distributed much more of the money among themselves than the Californians did.<sup>135</sup> The authors of the study argue that underlying the behaviour of the Kenyans was not simply that they were more generous, or kinder, but that they operated with a different cultural norm in which what is mine is also yours. This is Ubuntu thinking in practice.

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<sup>132</sup> Zizioulas (1985) p39. Zizioulas interweaves a trinitarian theology, theological anthropology and ecclesiology. It is important to recognise that it is possible to embrace his anthropology while rejecting his very hierarchical ecclesiology, and even some of his trinitarian theology.

<sup>133</sup> Klaasen (2013); Ilo (2014) p265

<sup>134</sup> See Hollinger who has identified individualism as the preeminent problem affecting evangelical social ethics: Hollinger (1982)

<sup>135</sup> Jakiela (2015) pp40–54. It should be noted that the authors seem to think that such behaviour militates against economic progress. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 3.5 below.

Before leaving this theme, we need to consider how this understanding dovetails with what is arguably the dominant theological paradigm that has hitherto been adopted by Tearfund, namely the relationships framework. This approach appears, in slightly different forms, in numerous Tearfund documents. In essence it describes the problem we face as a series of broken relationships. These include our relationship with God, ourselves, other people and with the earth.<sup>136</sup> In many ways, the Ubuntu anthropology we have been describing is simply another way of presenting this relational paradigm. However, there is an important difference in emphasis.

One of the challenges of the relationship model is that it is susceptible to a form of Platonising in which the concept of relational harmony, and therefore shalom, is abstracted from its theological roots in Christ. When an emphasis is placed on the problem of broken relationships and the solution of restored relationships then there exists a danger that the concept of relationship becomes detached from the particularity of the gospel. This is very evident in the theology of poverty articulated by some other development agencies which in regard to relationships follow a very similar dynamic.<sup>137</sup> This risk here is that Christ becomes a great moral exemplar of what good relationships look like, and as such is largely interchangeable with other great moral exemplars. Christ shows us how to live justly and righteously, but beyond that appears to have little role in our lives. One can imagine, for instance, an atheist suggesting that fundamentally poverty is about broken relationships with ourselves, our community and our planet, that the solution is healed or restored relationships, and that the way to achieve those restored relationships is to follow the example of great moral leaders such as Gandhi and Greta, and yes we can add in Christ if you want. Of course, Tearfund, with its emphasis on Christ is careful not to fall into this trap, but it serves as a warning that an emphasis on relationships or relationality must always be qualified by its grounding in Christ.

Relational dysfunction is an accurate description of our problem, but by itself it does not identify the cause, which fundamentally is about sin, *incurvatus in se* ('turned inward on oneself'), our propensity to turn inwards and forget about God.<sup>138</sup> This is why the 'solution' of restored relationships falls short of the mark, for again that is merely descriptive of the shalom we seek, but not a roadmap for how to get there. The distinctive feature of Ubuntu thinking is that it brings front and centre the problem of our disordered anthropology. It suggests that at the root of many of our disordered relationships is a disordered understanding of who we are. Moreover, when considered theologically, it emphasises that this disordered sense of self has arisen because we have turned inwards and forgotten about God. In embracing the idea that we are selfish, competitive individuals struggling to survive in a world of scarcity we have abandoned our God given identity in Christ, we have let go of the *imago dei* ('the image of God'), and the consequences are seen all around us in greed, exploitation, abuse of power and ecological destruction.

It is also worth noting that this disordered relationship to self is manifest not just among the wealthy who exploit and impoverish others, but also among those who are poor. In this way, there is a form of scarcity thinking that can affect them as well. More than one author from the Global South talked of the internal oppression that can occur even when the external manifestation of oppressors has been removed. One of the reasons the church and community mobilisation process (CCMP) approach has been so successful is the way in which it has brought to the fore the dignity and worth that is ours in Christ, that we are called with a purpose and authority that stems from our status in Him.<sup>139</sup> This point highlights what has been the danger of some liberation theology. At times, it is clear that some have used (or misused) liberation theology to advocate, in effect, for a reversal of fortunes. In other words, the goal has been that the poor become wealthy, and the wealthy become poor. This has usually occurred when the theology is framed as a class

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<sup>136</sup> Typically, this framework is presented in this fourfold manner. However, in one Tearfund document a fivefold typology is described in which our relationship with people is separated into our interpersonal relationships and the relationships we have with the community. Such a framing may be helpful in that the community category encourages us to consider the ways in which we might be involved in issues of structural injustice, and that is a very important addition. Tearfund (2005) p4

<sup>137</sup> Thacker (2017) pp190–195

<sup>138</sup> *Incurvatus in se*: a Latin phrase used by the early church fathers describing a life lived 'inward' for self rather than 'outward' for God.

<sup>139</sup> Njoroge (2019) pp19–23

struggle. However, this is not what a theology of an abundant community is concerned with. It is not about sticking with a mindset of scarcity and simply changing who are the winners and who are the losers; it is instead about a different paradigm in which everyone wins because everyone shares. Similarly, a decolonised theology does not merely swap the colonial power, it dismantles the edifice of exploitation in its entirety irrespective of who is in charge. Only an anthropology that is centred on the love, forgiveness and grace of Christ can bring that about, because only when we discover our status and worth in Christ are we able to look the wealthy and powerful in the eye and recognise both that we do not want what they have, and that they are of no more worth than ourselves.

The Asian, feminist theologian Grace Ji-Sun Kim makes an important point when she highlights how our vertical relationship with God is essential for the internal transformation of both the oppressed and the oppressor, what is often termed a 'decolonisation of the mind'. This decolonisation enables the exploited to recognise their value and worth, and the exploiters to cease from their abuses of power. She writes:

'Spirit God challenges the Euro-American Christian community to open itself up to deep solidarity with the counter-traditions in the margins, and see itself in light of the Other being oppressed by patriarchy, white supremacy, and economic exploitation. Spirit God transforms women who have internalised inferiority, and transforms men who have internalised superiority so they can achieve a psychoanalytic relational healing, working toward an ethic of mutuality and hope. The Spirit-led Christ community recognises that Spirit God brings liberation, new life, sustenance, empowerment, flourishing, life- balances, and life abundant.'<sup>140</sup>

Her point is that a genuine encounter with God leads to the necessary inner healing for all. Rutayisire makes the same point in his critique of self-help groups. 'Poverty is not just a matter of lack of economic and material resources. Poverty has deep roots in the mentality of the poor and [self-help groups] will not produce a lasting impact unless they find a way to tackle those deep-rooted causes. Helping the poor to save a few coins of their meagre resources once a week will not by itself exorcise the demons of poverty that are well entrenched in the minds, attitudes and practices of the poor.'<sup>141</sup>

Such demons can be expressed in a lack of agency, a lack of entrepreneurship, and a belief that only external help can solve the challenges one faces. This also is a form of scarcity thinking.

The difference then between the relationships framework and that of abundance is one of emphasis. The former is susceptible to emphasising the quality or otherwise of our relationships and so looks to great moral exemplars to help us re-form those relationships. In contrast, abundant community thinking puts the emphasis on our identity in Christ. It causes us to think of an expanded version of 'me' so that it is not merely about how I, as an individual, relate more effectively to someone else or the planet, but more about having a different understanding of who I am. When we see ourselves in Christ, the cosmic reconciler, then my very identity includes (rather than excludes) God, the planet and my global neighbour. I discover myself as part of the wonderful community of creation. Of course, to the extent that the relationships paradigm is framed as a '1+1+2 model' in which my relationship to God ('1') grounds my understanding of self ('+1') which in turn leads to restored relationships with other people and the earth ('+2') then there is no (or at least minimal) distinction between abundance thinking and the relationships paradigm. However, as has been noted, this is frequently not how the relationships paradigm is expressed<sup>142</sup> and as such abundance thinking is a helpful corrective to that imbalance.

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<sup>140</sup> Kim (2015) Chapter 5

<sup>141</sup> Swithinbank (2016) p16

<sup>142</sup> Thacker (2017) pp190–196. See also *Restorative Economy*, where at one important point the relationship with self was left out entirely. Evans and Gower (2015) p23.

### 3.3 A theology of scarcity

Having explored the theological foundations for a theology of abundant community this section unpicks a little more the primary competing paradigm that dominates Global North thinking: the individualistic anthropology that we have been calling a theology of scarcity.<sup>143</sup> The origins of scarcity thinking can be found in the Western philosophical tradition. It begins with the Malthusian assumption that our planet is insufficient. It then combines this with Western individualism and a Darwinian survival mentality to generate a worldview in which we compete as individuals with one another for the scarce resources we need to survive.<sup>144</sup> Within this framework, poverty is the natural consequence of such competition, and the only way to address it is through expanding the economy and then ensuring that some of those who have won in that expansion give some of their excess to those who have lost. This framework is considered the norm, at least among economists, within the Global North. Lowery for instance writes:

‘Assumptions of scarcity and unlimited needs and wants are the twin pillars of classical economic theory. These assumptions underlie actual economic decisions made by firms and governments, creating an imperative toward unlimited economic growth. Under these assumptions, the only humane response to poverty and unemployment is constantly to expand the economic pie, creating more wealth and cutting more people in for a slice. The social and ecological problems created by unlimited economic growth are, in this view, the unavoidable costs of bringing the necessities of life to greater numbers of people. Sabbath and jubilee principles of abundance and self-restraint run counter to these largely unquestioned assumptions of contemporary economics, and focus attention on better distribution, rather than greater levels of production. The problem is not scarcity, but the will to share.’<sup>145</sup>

As has been suggested, this concept of scarcity is central to modern economic thinking. According to one widely used definition, economics only makes sense as a discipline if we begin with an assumption of scarcity.<sup>146</sup> The fundamental idea is that economic goods are those goods which exist in limited supply in comparison to human wants. Importantly, economic goods are not those which are essential for life. They are only those which exist in limited supply in comparison to our desires. For this reason, air – which obviously is essential for life – is not an economic good for in comparison to our desire for it, it is not scarce in normal circumstances. In comparison, gold – which is most certainly not essential for life – is an economic good, precisely because its supply is much less than our demand for it. The fact that economics (and scarcity thinking) is not primarily concerned with the goods that are essential for life, but rather with the stimulated demand for relatively (in contrast to demand) scarce goods is evidence that a scarcity mindset is primarily about an attitude and value-set, not about the actual supply of what we need to thrive. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians he tells us that he has ‘learned to be content with whatever I have’ (Philippians 4:11). There exists a rich theological tradition of ‘enoughness’.<sup>147</sup> Contemporary economic thinking is precisely the reverse of this; learning to be discontent irrespective of how much we hoard or consume.

The origins of these beliefs can be traced back to Smith’s *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Malthus’, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, and Darwin’s, *On the Origin of Species*.

<sup>148</sup> It is perhaps important to note that it was not these texts on their own that generated the mindset of scarcity, but how they were received in the particular contexts of globalisation and industrialisation where they occurred. Having said that, the ideas in the texts have also been part of the problem. Smith has been

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<sup>143</sup> This section refers repeatedly to the Global North framework or paradigm. This is not intended to indicate that this is necessarily the view of the Global North regional paper, but rather that this is the typical framework adopted by Global North economists who write and speak on these issues.

<sup>144</sup> Reda (2017)

<sup>145</sup> Lowery (2000) p151. See also Myers (2001) who drew heavily on Lowery in his concept of sabbath economics. See also Brueggemann (1999) who indicates that ‘the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity.

<sup>146</sup> Robbins (1935) p15

<sup>147</sup> Nyoni (2020); Cox Hall (2017) pp543–565

<sup>148</sup> Smith (1776), Malthus (1803), Darwin (1859). See bibliography for current publication.

understood to argue that economic progress is dependent on the relative scarcity of goods.<sup>149</sup> Malthus famously, and incorrectly, argued that population growth will always far outstrip agricultural supply and therefore unless we do something to curb population growth many millions will die of starvation. Malthus' work inspired Darwin to develop his evolutionary theory in which only those species most adapted to their environments survive and reproduce. The rest are destined to die. In different ways, all these texts provided a framework for European thought in which an assumption is made that the natural provisions of this world are insufficient for humanity, and therefore humans are inevitably caught up in a competitive environment for those scarce provisions. This idea of relative scarcity, the will to survive and the inevitability of competition have become the basis for how much of the Global North operates. This is especially evident in how capitalism has justified an extractive, exploitative relationship to the earth instead of the caring embrace that should have been our mode of interaction. It is also evident in the assumption of competition both at the level of competitive business practices, and at the level of the individual 'Homo economicus' – the idea of the rational, self-maximising economic agent.

This latter idea became possible because of another Global North invention – that of the individual person.<sup>150</sup> It was Descartes who infamously suggested *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) and in the process reduced our identity – whether Descartes meant to do this or not – to the individual thinking subject. When this idea of the lone thinker is combined with the idea that we exist in a world of scarcity where competition is the only means to survival then a framework has been established in which domination, exploitation and competition are the norm. It is this idea that lies at the root of our approach to the environment, other people and our own material wealth. Brueggemann writes:

'We end up only with whatever we manage to get for ourselves. This story ends in despair. It gives us a present tense of anxiety, fear, greed and brutality. It produces child and wife abuse, indifference to the poor, the build-up of armaments, divisions between people, and environmental racism. It tells us not to care about anyone but ourselves – and it is the prevailing creed of American society.'<sup>151</sup>

This framework of thinking also, it is suggested, impacts how some in the Global North think about justice. They understand the world's resources to be scarce, they see the domination, exploitation and impoverishment imposed upon the Global South, and they are moved by compassion to respond. If one assumes the basic tenets of a scarcity mindset then the only possible solution is to expand the economy so that those of us who have a bit more of a social conscience, and who have won in the competition of life can share a bit of our excess with those who have lost. Crucially, however, such 'generosity' is understood as acting against our own natural instincts to be selfish and competitive, and certainly does not question the paradigm that enabled our status as winners. The etymology of 'generosity' is to be of noble birth, and so such charitable behaviour is to overcome one's own natural, more base, less 'noble', instincts to do something out of the ordinary, exceptional and so act generously. Such 'generosity' may be seen in individual acts of charity when we donate to a good cause, but what remains however is the belief that the world does not have enough, that domination and exploitation are the norm, and that the only loving response is for those who have won in the game of life to give from their largesse to those who have not, through acts of charity.

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<sup>149</sup> In saying this, I am not disagreeing with Zamagni who has argued that Smith himself has been misunderstood and misappropriated. I am rather suggesting that Smith's legacy has been one of scarcity, whether or not Smith himself intended that. See Zamagni (2008) pp475–477

<sup>150</sup> Though some, and with some justification, blame the Protestant Reformation for this development.

<sup>151</sup> Brueggemann (1999)

What has been suggested in this section is that at the root of our environmental crisis and economic injustices is a disordered anthropology, a deficient way of thinking about who we are. That distorted sense of self has led us down a path of fear and greed in which consumption and accumulation at the expense of the community of creation is destroying everything. The solution, then, is to rediscover the way of being that God gave us, an anthropology that remains among many in the Global South. It is that alternate framework to which we now turn.

### 3.4 A theology of abundant communities

The Tearfund initiated *Abundant Africa* report draws attention to the TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in which she talks of the dangers of a single story. The report notes her comment that ‘the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.’<sup>152</sup> Nowhere has this been more obvious than in the ‘story’ that is told of many low-income countries across the world. That ‘story’ is simple:

*These countries have a problem;*

*The problem is that these countries are poor;*

*Those of us who have won in the game of life should help address that problem by being generous;*

*Let’s call that generosity ‘charity’.*

But as the *Abundant Africa* report makes clear, that ‘Africa Failing’ story is not true. The reality is that Africa is rich:

‘Africa holds 65% of the world’s arable land; 30% of its mineral reserves, including around 90% of the chromium and platinum in the world; 12% of the world’s oil reserves; and 40% of the world’s gold. Africa is also home to the largest reserves of cobalt, diamonds and uranium on the planet. Africa is the richest continent.’<sup>153</sup>

The problem is not that Africa is poor; the problem, or at least one of its problems, is that Africa’s wealth has been plundered for centuries and continues to be plundered today. This was of course true during the colonial period when around 50 million people either died due to activities associated with the slave trade or were transported as slaves out of Africa. As a proportion of world population, Africa reduced from 18% to just 8% in the two hundred years prior to 1850, and this of course had huge economic consequences for the continent. In addition, Africa continues to be a net financial contributor to the Global North to the tune of \$60bn per year through debt servicing, tax dodging, illicit financial flows and illegal extractive industries.<sup>154</sup> The fact is Africa is not poor, it has simply been robbed – and the same could be said of so many countries in the Global South. Haiti was forced to pay France the equivalent of \$21 billion for the privilege of no longer being enslaved, and the Patnaiks have estimated that Britain stole \$45 trillion during its colonial reign in India, arguing that the wealth of the Global North only exists because of such colonial exploitation.<sup>155</sup> This is not to suggest that disordered internal politics plays no part in poverty in the Global South today. Of course it does. However, a large part of the reason for this is that colonialism created a cohort of internal elites, and divided communities along artificial lines, thereby creating the framework for division and corruption that continues to plague many Global South communities today.

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<sup>152</sup> Giljam (2021) p14

<sup>153</sup> Giljam (2021) p9. To note this is not to ignore the well-described problems of the so-called resource curse. Transparently, for a country to be economically productive it needs to find a way to translate its mineral resources into productive wealth that benefits the whole community.

<sup>154</sup> Health Poverty Action et al (2014)

<sup>155</sup> Patnaik and Patnaik (2021)



This idea of abundant provision that is hoarded and stolen by a selfish few is one that, according to Brueggemann, can be found throughout the scriptures. He points to a series of episodes in which such behaviour is characteristic. Perhaps the most obvious is God's provision of manna in the desert. As Brueggemann notes:

'They had never before received bread as a free gift that they couldn't control, predict, plan for or own. The meaning of this strange narrative is that the gifts of life are indeed given by a generous God. It's a wonder, it's a miracle, it's an embarrassment, it's irrational, but God's abundance transcends the market economy. Three things happened to this bread in Exodus 16. First, everybody had enough. But because Israel had learned to believe in scarcity in Egypt, people started to hoard the bread. When they tried to bank it, to invest it, it turned sour and rotted, because you cannot store up God's generosity.'<sup>156</sup>

Indeed, it is perhaps ironic that the only manna God did tell them to 'hoard' was a symbolic portion so that they could show future generations God's generous provision to them in the desert (Exodus 16:32). In other words, the only time we should keep more than we need is when we are showing others how we do not need to!

As will be obvious, what happened with the manna in the desert acts as an analogy for how we are treating the environment today. God has provided abundantly for all. He has even given us specific instructions for how to look after that environment. Yet, we have ignored him and out of selfishness and greed we have gone our own way and tried to consume and hoard as much of God's created world as we can. In the process, it has gone sour and so we see all around us species extinction, loss of habitats, rising sea levels, land degradation, desertification, global warming, droughts, floods and wildfires. Yet what makes this even worse than the sin in the desert is that those who have done most to cause this problem are not those suffering its worst consequences. Our brothers and sisters in the Global South are dying because the Global North, and the elites in the Global South which they created or co-opted, have worshipped at the idol of greed, and perhaps what is even worse is that despite knowing this they continue with such exploitation to this day.

By way of contrast, abundant community thinking (which accepts the finitude of our planet) does not paradoxically lead to the same behaviours precisely because its emphasis is on what we need, not on our greed. This is clearly illustrated, not just in the Scriptures, but also in the wisdom of so many indigenous communities who continue to remind us that the world is one of abundance if only we stop our selfish exploitation. In the Jubilee book, Jocabed Reina Solano Miselis, who is from an indigenous group in Panama, tells the story of the Balu Wala tree. This tree was a very large and leafy tree, and in its crown was a forest with animals and plantations of corn, sugarcane, succulent bananas, and other crops. All the earth's inhabitants could be fed from this tree. But there were people who appropriated the resources of all and wanted to keep them for themselves, upsetting the harmony of life with their greed. Ibeler is a figure within the Gundadule community who fought against the oppressive system of power, because he knew that everything 'BabaNana had created was not for one group, but for all the children of Olobibbir-gunyai (Mother Earth)'.<sup>157</sup>

As has been suggested, all of the regional reports in different ways drew attention to this reality of abundance, and the mindset of scarcity that so dominates our thinking. The Africa report commented:

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<sup>156</sup> Brueggemann (1999)

<sup>157</sup> Miselis (2020) p76. BabaNana refers to God as both mother and father.

‘Jesus tells us in John 10:10 that, ‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’ The abundant life that Jesus promises is in stark contrast to the death and chaos of sinful economic and environmental practices. Instead, Jesus’ promise is for an abundant life that brings shalom: a deep state of harmony-based healthy relationships between God and human beings, amongst the created order and between human beings. John 10:10 was a key passage across all three consultations.’<sup>158</sup>

This idea was expanded upon in the following liturgical reflection from that report:<sup>159</sup>

‘Call to worship: John 10:10. We are called to worship and to mission, through an invitation to ‘life to the full’, a vision of a flourishing cosmos.

Old Testament reading: Leviticus 25, The Year of Jubilee. The passage recognizes that over time, injustice and idolatry creep in, and the vision of Abundance becomes distorted. The Lord gives clear guidance on the practical steps needed to periodically reset and restore ecological and economic balance.

Gospel: Matthew 6, A Recall to Jubilee. We are called to forgive debts, to give generously, to practice economic reset. We are told not to worry about food or drink or clothes. Life is more than food. Humanity is cared for like the rest of creation.

Confession and lament: Ecclesiastes 2:4–7; 4:1–6; 5:8–17. Everything is meaningless. Pleasure, opulence, and over-abundance hold no meaning. The tears of the oppressed fall without being comforted. Power reigns unchecked. Success holds no meaning. Justice is miscarried, wealth does not bring happiness, hoarding is meaningless. We are frustrated, discouraged and angry.

Intercessions: James 5:1–11. The rich cry and weep because of their troubles. Their wealth is worthless. The labourers in the field cry out. They have been cheated of their pay, their wages held back. The harvesters cry out.

Affirmation of faith: Colossians 1:15–20. Christ existed before creation. Christ holds all creation together. Even the church. The fullness of God lives in Christ, reconciling all things (in heaven and on earth, physical things and spiritual things) to Christ’s self. The cross is the means by which shalom has been established with and between everything.

Call to mission: Luke 12:13–34. The rich fool is the one who lives by greed, measures his life by possessions, and stores up excess in barns, while neglecting the richness of a relationship with God.

Benediction: Deuteronomy 28:1–11. We end with a picture of abundant life, and prosperity: towns and fields, children and crops are blessed. Herds, flocks, fruit baskets and breadbaskets are blessed. Storehouses are filled. The earth is blessed.’

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<sup>158</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p40

<sup>159</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p34

Similarly, in Asia, they drew attention to the World Council of Churches' concept of 'an economy of life' and wrote:

'An economy of life reminds us of the main characteristics of God's household of life:

- The bounty of the gracious economy of God (oikonomia tou theou) offers and sustains abundance for all;
- God's gracious economy requires that we manage the abundance of life in a just, participatory and sustainable manner;
- The economy of God is an economy of life that promotes sharing, globalised solidarity, the dignity of persons, and love and care for the integrity of creation;
- God's economy is an economy for the whole oikoumene – the whole earth community;
- God's justice and the preferential option for the poor are the marks of God's economy.<sup>160</sup>

The Global North report also drew attention to these contrasting paradigms:

'Capitalism, and mainstream economics behind it, is also said to assume that scarcity, and thus poverty, is inevitable, and this encourages people to believe that self-interested competition is natural. Against this dominant worldview, Radical Orthodoxy scholars argue that we should view the world as one of plentitude, because the heart of reality – God's actions in creation, incarnation and salvation – involves matters of gift. In environmental terms, this means recognising the world is not ours to exploit, but is a gift from God. Economically, it means we should pursue a gift-economy, putting gratuitousness at the heart of exchange – a model reflecting the gratuitousness of Jesus ('Give to everyone who begs from you... from anyone who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt.' Luke 6:29–30) and the Jerusalem Church (Acts 2:44–45).'<sup>161</sup>

What all these reports are getting at is that God has provided, at the very least sufficient, if not abundant, resources for us to enjoy as long as we adopt a value set of communitarian sharing instead of a value set of selfish accumulation. The reports do therefore point to the numerous biblical affirmations of an abundance of goods, but these must be understood as only existing within the theology of an abundant community, that is a community which gratuitously shares what it has and understands itself as part of the community of creation<sup>162</sup>. In 2 Corinthians 9:8–11, Paul almost trips over himself in talking of the abundant provision of God, but the context is his appeal to the Corinthian church to give generously to the church in Jerusalem so that there 'might be equality' (2 Corinthians 8:13–14).<sup>163</sup>

Christian highlights how the sharing of which we speak does not just concern money or goods, but also power, information, access and voice.<sup>164</sup> One of the panel respondents suggested that the primary sense in which we might think of an abundant community is one which shares love, trust and knowledge. In economic terms, such 'goods' are non-rival in that there is a potentially unlimited supply. However, abundance thinking does also apply to rivalrous, finite goods and one of these concerns our energy use. Numerous commentators have pointed out how the average carbon footprint of someone in the UK is more than 25 times that of someone in sub-Saharan Africa. A theology of an abundant community does not tell us that we can spend that footprint however we wish; rather it reminds us that we need a fair and equitable sharing of the plentiful resources that God has given us. From an ecological point of view that means that a

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<sup>160</sup> Saxena (2020) p35

<sup>161</sup> Theos (2021) p44

<sup>162</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p40. We could add to these references God's declaration of the goodness of creation and his instruction to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), the commentary on Genesis 1 found in Psalm 104 and its affirmations of God's abundant provision, the numerous references to the promised land of milk and honey, the manna and quail in the desert, the feast of Isaiah 25, Jesus' water into the finest wine, the 12 baskets left over from the feeding of the 5,000, the jar of perfume 'wasted' on Jesus' feet, the parable of the great banquet and the huge catch of fish that broke Peter's nets.

<sup>163</sup> See also Brueggemann (2016) pp70–74; 219–228

<sup>164</sup> Christian (1999)

25 fold asymmetry in what we spend is both unfair and destructive. The UK citizen needs to use far less of their notional carbon allowance precisely so that the African can use more. And while globally there needs to be an overall and significant reduction in carbon emissions to net zero, that requirement falls far more on those of us who currently, and historically, have spent so much more. The plea from many in the Global South at COP26 that the primary responsibility to solve climate change lies with the Global North was entirely correct. It is the North who have generated far more carbon emissions, it is the North who have grown wealthy as a result of that industrialisation, and yet it is the South who are paying the price. It is partly for this reason that calls to limit our ecological footprint must be contextualised. There is a global need to reach net zero as soon as possible, but we need to ensure that in making that case it does not sound like the Global North telling the Global South that they cannot expand their economies in the way that is required to address poverty within their borders.<sup>165</sup>

Of course, given its biblical foundation, this approach is hardly new. In particular, a number of church fathers who wrote long before Smith, Malthus and Darwin dominated the scene provided us with a framework which we need to recall. The particular focus of their concern was how we should respond to the problem of wealth and poverty. A central feature of an abundant community is that any redistribution from those who are wealthy to those who are poor is not a matter of charity or generosity (in the sense of doing something special) but is rather an automatic practice in which the wealthy live according to their identity in Christ. The following quotations from theologians of the 4<sup>th</sup> century all make the same point, namely that the wealthy are not doing something extraordinary when they share their wealth with the poor. Rather, in God's economy, the assets of the wealthy actually belong (morally and theologically) to the poor:

Basil of Caesarea (330–379 AD)

'Will not one be called a thief who steals the garment of one already clothed, and is one deserving of any other title who will not clothe the naked if he is able to do so? That bread which you keep, belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, to the shoeless: that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy. Wherefore, as often as you were able to help others, and refused, so often you do them wrong?'<sup>166</sup>

St Ambrose (339–397 AD)

'It is not anything of yours that you are bestowing on the poor; rather, you are giving back something of his. For you alone are usurping what was given in common for the use of all. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich... You are giving back something that is owed, then, and not bestowing something that is not owed.'<sup>167</sup>

John Chrysostom (d. 407 AD)

'This statement seems surprising to you, but do not be surprised. I shall bring you testimony from the divine Scriptures, saying that not only the theft of others' goods but also the failure to share one's own goods with others is theft and swindle and defraudation.'<sup>168</sup>

Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth but theirs.'<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> This of course is the argument that is helpfully laid out by Kate Raworth in *Doughnut Economics* where she explains how there is both an ecological ceiling beyond which we must not go, and an economic floor beneath which is poverty. Raworth (2017)

<sup>166</sup> Cited in Ramachandra (2008) p107

<sup>167</sup> Ambrose 12:53

<sup>168</sup> Chrysostom (1984) p49

<sup>169</sup> Chrysostom (1984) p55

While these quotations might seem shocking to those who are wealthy, for whom the idea of private property is sacrosanct, there are good biblical and theological reasons to accept them. As noted earlier, Daniela Augustine has suggested that a characteristic feature of the Spirit-filled life is a new community which embraces a household rather than competitive market mindset. We would consider it a hugely dysfunctional family meal if the patriarch hoarded the vast majority of the food and then considered themselves generous as he shared a few scraps with his wife and children. A functioning home is one in which provisions are automatically shared, and such sharing is simply considered the norm. Alexia Salvatierra describes this as ‘family justice’:

‘If I am an individual, dependent on my money for my safety and wellbeing, I must protect and defend it. I must hold on tight. When I see others as the source of my safety and wellbeing, then my money is secondary; it will be best used for the benefit of the whole and the strengthening of our mutual connections. I call this perspective *justicia familiar*.’<sup>170</sup>

While such thinking remains unusual in the Global North, it is common to many indigenous groups around the world. Ravilochan has documented what Maslow (of ‘hierarchy of needs’ fame) discovered in his encounters with the Blackfoot. He quotes a member of the Navajo tribe, Arviso, who said:

‘They told me they don’t have a word for poverty...The closest thing that they had as an explanation for poverty was ‘to be without family.’ Which is basically unheard of. They were saying it was a foreign concept to them that someone could be just so isolated and so without any sort of a safety net or a family or a sense of kinship that they would be suffering from poverty.’<sup>171</sup>

This is what the church fathers are suggesting should be the standard for us as the household community of Christ.

The key theological idea is that the abundance of the earth belongs to everyone, including the other species on this earth. Catholic Social Teaching codifies this concept as the Universal Destination of Goods. It speaks volumes that we do not have such a well-established protestant equivalent. In a speech in 2015, Pope Francis explains it thus:

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<sup>170</sup> Salvatierra (2019) p102

<sup>171</sup> Ravilochan (2021)

‘Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church’s social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples. And those needs are not restricted to consumption. It is not enough to let a few drops fall whenever the poor shake a cup which never runs over by itself. Welfare programs geared to certain emergencies can only be considered temporary responses. They will never be able to replace true inclusion.’<sup>172</sup>

It is for this reason that we should be cautious in thinking of the Jubilee principles (at least in their 50 year, Leviticus 25 form) as the solution to poverty.<sup>173</sup> Rather, they are more akin to emergency humanitarian assistance, a necessary measure we must enact precisely because the solution God provided has been ignored, namely the automatic sharing of the abundance God has given us.<sup>174</sup> The danger of thinking of Jubilee as a solution is that it enables us to leave the fundamentals of our economic systems in place. God’s economy works in a different frame entirely.

The foundations of this thinking lie in the fact that resources and wealth are never owned absolutely by anyone. The earth has been provided to be a blessing to everyone. Therefore, if we ever find ourselves in a situation in which some do not have sufficient resources to thrive (and not just survive) then that can only be because someone or some people have stolen more than they require. The language of stealing is not accidental. Basil, Chrysostom, Ambrose and Pope Francis have all made the same point. They begin with this assumption that the resources the earth produces belong to us all. They are the property of our common home; they exist for the common good. This is not to deny entirely the idea of private property, but within a grace economy it is to relativise it. It is to say that as Christians we never actually own anything absolutely; everything we have has been given to us by God, and therefore when the call of God upon our lives is to share that resource we are merely living up to who we are meant to be in the economy of God. What the church fathers add to this understanding is that in the context of poverty, God’s call will always be that we share. In the book of Timothy, we read this:

‘As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. (1 Timothy 6:17–19)

Just as the fundamental problem with our approach to the environment is that we have forgotten to live in obedience to God, so the fundamental problem with typical economic thinking is that God is left out of the picture. When we live as practical atheists then it is very easy to believe that any resource I acquire has been the product of my own effort and ingenuity but, as we noted previously, Deuteronomy 8:17 tells us, ‘it is [God] who gives you power to get wealth’, and if it God who does that, then it is also God who can command us what to do with it.

This approach to possessions though is a long way away from the typical Global North response in which goods belong to no-one until they have been seized by force or industry (the so-called doctrine of discovery

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<sup>172</sup> Francis (2015) speech available at <https://www.catholicvoices.org.uk/blog/2015/07/10/francis-in-bolivia-spells-out-vision-of-true-revolution>

<sup>173</sup> If we widen the concept of Jubilee from its Leviticus 25 root, combine it with sabbath provisions and other Old Testament principles around economic justice – such as leaving the gleanings – then it can be argued that it is the *solution* to poverty, but this is to extend it well beyond its original meaning in Leviticus 25.

<sup>174</sup> The phrase ‘automatic sharing’ is not implying that such generosity somehow originates within our own fallen nature. To the extent that it occurs, it does so because God by the Spirit has worked in us to sanctify us. The use of the term ‘automatic’ is simply to distinguish it from the practice of charitable giving which is often exceptional, unusual and takes a deliberate act of will. Automatic sharing is intended to indicate that we share just as a matter of course as we live up to who we are meant to be in Christ.



and myth of meritocracy), and as a result of that force or industry then become the private property of that individual. This is not how the ancient fathers thought; it is not how the theology of an abundant community works; and it is not how many other cultures work. There is a wonderful episode in Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *The Poisonwood Bible* which illustrates this clash of worldviews. The novel tells the story of a Western missionary family who travel out to central Africa in 1959. They struggle to adapt to Congolese life in numerous ways but repeatedly throughout the novel one of the aspects that they find odd is the way in which the villagers routinely share their excess with one another. 'Whenever you have plenty of something, you have to share it' declares one character and the following exchange occurs between one of the missionary children and a Congolese teacher:

"When one of the fishermen, let's say Tata Boanda, has good luck on the river and comes home with his boat loaded with fish, what does he do?" ...

"He sings at the top of his lungs and everyone comes and he gives it all away."

"Even to his enemies?"

"I guess. Yeah. I know Tata Boanda doesn't like Tata Zinsana very much, and he gives Tata Zinsana's wives the most... That is just how a Congolese person thinks about money."

"But if you keep on giving away every bit of extra you have, you're never going to be rich."

"That is probably true."

"And everybody wants to be rich."

"Is that so?"<sup>175</sup>

In saying all this, we are not denying the reality that a failure to share is hugely problematic within the Global South as well as between the Global North and South. Indeed, some of the most extreme inequality takes place in Global South capitals where gated communities surrounded by barbed wire exist next to urban slums. This plea for a household ethos of sharing is not merely from North to South, but also applies within the Global South, especially within the church. At the same time, we are also not suggesting that redistribution is the sole solution that should be employed in abundance thinking. As noted earlier, a mindset of scarcity is evident both in selfish hoarding and in a lack of agency, a failure to innovate, a belief that the solutions to one's problems are always external. An abundant community does not just share generously, but also believes in itself and so charts its own path out of poverty.

This section will finish by reflecting on another biblical passage in which these themes of abundance and scarcity are also prominent. This report has already mentioned the episode where Jesus declares that the poor will always be with us and noted its Deuteronomic background. That statement occurs in Bethany when Jesus is visited by a woman (Mary in John's account) who breaks a jar of expensive perfume on his feet and wipes his feet with her hair (John 12:3 see also Mark 14:7; Matthew 26:11). In the passage, Judas objects calling it a waste of money, but in response Jesus says, 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.' (John 12:10–11)

In many ways, Judas and Mary represent the two poles of scarcity and abundance thinking. Judas appears to think with a zero-sum mentality in which there are scarce resources, and if those resources (in this case costly perfume) are 'wasted' by being poured on Jesus' feet then they are not available to be spent on the poor. It does not matter what Judas's personal motivation was for this response, what is being suggested is that his language and behaviour (and according to Mark and Matthew's versions, that of other disciples) was the response of someone beset by a scarcity mindset. In contrast, Mary (or the woman) was happy to

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<sup>175</sup> Kingsolver (1998)

pour out the perfume in this way because by doing so she was both reflecting and deepening her relational capital. Her actions may not have invested in the economically poor that day, but they did represent an investment in her relationship with Jesus. That is why she, not Judas, is praised.<sup>176</sup>

This contrast might make us wonder how different our environment and the global economy would be if we had followed Mary's example and relational capital had received the same kind of investment as material capital. Certainly, many of us, who have visited families who have little, will have experienced a similar kind of abundance thinking when food which really is needed is shared generously. It is a generosity that makes no sense to 'Homo economicus', but one which makes total sense within the framework of an abundant community. Jesus said, 'life is more than food and the body more than clothing' (Matthew 6:25). It is about relationships and the abundance framework prioritises them above all else. As St Ambrose said in his commentary *On Naboth*,

'Let me show you a better place to store your grain, where you can keep it safe so that thieves will be unable to take it from you. Enclose it in the heart of the poor, where no worm will eat it, where it will not get stale with age. As storerooms you have the breasts of the needy, as storerooms you have the homes of widows, as storerooms you have the mouths of infants, so that it may be said of you: 'Out of the mouth of infants and sucklings you have perfected praise' (Psalm 8:1–2). Those are the storerooms that abide forever, those are the granaries that future abundance will not destroy.'<sup>177</sup>

In the next final part to this theology of an abundant community we will begin to outline what all of this might mean in practice.

### 3.5 An abundant community – the practical implications

What might an abundance framework look like when applied in our lives? At an individual level, it could mean that we no longer think of our income and possessions as ours by right. Rather we hold all of it so lightly that we share instinctively, automatically and generously whenever God calls us to do so. The Theos *Wholly Living* report rightly draws attention to Paul's emphasis on individual work and creativity, but they also highlight what Paul goes on to say, 'so as to have something to share with the needy.' (Ephesians 4:28)<sup>178</sup> It is as if Paul is saying that industry matters, but the reason it matters is not so that we can accumulate for ourselves, but so that we can share. Theos comment:

'Our commission is to live in such a way as to exercise our human gifts of creativity and productivity in order that all may participate in and contribute fully towards our common good, thereby sharing in God's plans and purposes and responding to his love and generosity. The end of our productive work is not just creativity and productivity but generosity. We should use our hands usefully in order that we can give away what we create. We are made not to have but to give.'<sup>179</sup>

Of course, we see this approach enacted in the early church when, 'No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had,' and when they sold their possessions in order to meet the needs of everyone in the community (Acts 2:42–47; 4:32–35).<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> It is interesting to note that this passage is also an example of a man telling a woman what to do with her finances illustrating the intimate connections between patriarchy and some economic thinking.

<sup>177</sup> Ambrose 7.37

<sup>178</sup> Theos (2010) p27

<sup>179</sup> Theos (2010) p27

<sup>180</sup> Longenecker has drawn attention to the fact that this practice of generosity and sharing did not end with the apostolic church but continued into the first few centuries. Writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Lucian of Samosata, a critic of Christianity stated, 'The earnestness with which the people of this religion [Christianity] help one another in their need is incredible. They spare themselves nothing to this end. Apparently, their first law-maker [Jesus] has put it into their heads that they all somehow ought to be regarded as brothers and sisters.' Similarly, Aristides of Athens, another critic, said, 'If anyone among them is poor or comes into want while they themselves have nothing to spare, they fast two or three days for him. In this way they can supply the poor man with the food he needs.' Both cited in Longenecker (2019) p45

The first point to note in respect of these passages is that such sharing took place in the context of teaching and worship. It was as they understood themselves as part of this new community of Christ that the natural response was simply to share. Secondly, such sharing involved all that they had. Crucially, both passages make reference to the sale of possessions. Standard practice among Global North Christians is that we give away a proportion of our income and believe ourselves to be generous in doing so. The really generous among us give away relatively high proportions of our income. However, what is almost totally absent is the kind of property and possession divestment that seems to have been the norm in the early church. Thirdly, such sharing was not an act of charity. It is noteworthy that the reason ‘there were no needy persons among them’ was not because they ran fantastic fundraising campaigns, but because as a matter of routine these new Christians understood their self-identity to be one in which they shared what they had with whoever needed it. The emphasis lies not on those who are poor and on their needs, but rather on the wealthy and their attitude to sharing.

We can see a similar dynamic in Paul’s ‘fundraising’ appeal in 2 Corinthians 8:9. If Paul had been a contemporary fundraiser, the focus of his appeal would have been the need of the Jerusalem church perhaps accompanied by emotive stories of orphans in distress. Paul certainly knew how to make such appeals in regard to himself (2 Corinthians 6:4–10; 11:23–29).<sup>181</sup> However, in this passage where Paul is clearly encouraging the Corinthian church to give the basis of his appeal seems somewhat different. In the whole of his exhortation, Paul’s emphasis lies not on the needs of the Jerusalemites but on the virtues of the Corinthians. He is in effect saying to them that they should give, not so much because others need it, but because that is how they can live up to the values of their new found faith. ‘Be better Christians’ is a shorthand for what he is saying. So he appeals to their desire to ‘excel in everything’ (2 Corinthians 8:7), he talks about ‘testing the sincerity’ of their love (8:8), he draws on the example of Jesus (8:9), he mentions what is ‘best’ for them (8:10), he calls on them ‘to finish the work’ (8:11), he asks for ‘proof’ of their love and seeks ‘pride’ in them, (8:24), concluding with his ‘boasting’ (2 Corinthians 9:3) about their efforts and that in this way they will have ‘proved’ (9:13) themselves and so ‘others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession’ (9:13).

In commenting on this passage, Barclay points out how it depicts a superabundant God who has blessed them, and so they in turn should now be a conduit of that blessing to others. In this way, the Corinthians are not actually giving their wealth to the Jerusalemites, they are merely passing on the wealth that properly belongs to God, and that for now is theirs on loan. He draws attention to 2 Corinthians 8:9 and the way in which it is frequently translated and interpreted as if Christ renounces his wealth for our sake: ‘though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor’. According to Barclay, this is a misunderstanding of both the Greek and the theology and instead we should understand the verse to be saying, ‘Because he was rich, for our sakes he became poor.’ In other words:

‘Jesus’ poverty (his becoming human) is not a renunciation of his wealth, but an expression of it, his ‘richness’ being not something he once had and gave up, but his wealth of generosity. Hence, it was because of his richness (*plousios ōn*) that he became poor (in the incarnation) so that by his poverty we might become rich, that is, rich in the same, in gift and generosity.’<sup>182</sup>

As such, God’s generosity in Christ flows through us (or should do so as we live up to who we are meant to be) as we show generosity to others. This is what was happening in the Acts church, and this is the appeal Paul makes in 2 Corinthians. The significance of this is that it reframes the power dynamics in funding relationships. If we think of our money or possessions as our own which we charitably give to others then this places the recipients in a position where they are beneficiaries who owe us their gratitude. In contrast, as Barclay points out, if we are merely channels of God’s generosity then in the first place, we (those who give) are the ones who should be grateful – firstly for being in receipt of God’s generosity, but secondly for being given the privilege of being a means of grace to others. This is what is meant in 2 Corinthians 9:8 where it refers to ‘every blessing in abundance’. At the same time, and secondly, those who are in receipt of

<sup>181</sup> Barclay (2019) p92

<sup>182</sup> Barclay (2019) p94

God's gift through us are not under any obligation to us at all, but rather are under an obligation (like us) to give thanks to God for God's generosity to them. In other words, and to use traditional aid terminology, both donor and recipient are on the same level, neither owes a debt of gratitude to the other, but both owe a debt of gratitude to God – the ultimate source of everything. 'Rather than one side being permanently the patron, and the other the ever-grateful client, each is a patron to the other or, better, each is equally the client of a surplus-providing patron (God), who gives in order that grace be circulated between them.'<sup>183</sup> If this presents a model for us of Christian fundraising then what is clear is that the problem that is presented is not one of poverty elsewhere to which we must respond, but the problem (if there is one), or at the least the appeal, is that we must live up to who we are meant to be in Christ, live up to the new anthropology that is ours in Christ, live as the abundant community to which we are called.

This understanding also reframes where we think the 'problem' to be addressed lies. Under an individualistic, scarcity model, the problem to be addressed is a problem of poverty and ecological destruction. The solutions offered are solutions to that problem. In contrast, under a theology of abundant communities, the problem to be addressed is not so much a problem of poverty, but a problem of selfishness and greed. In his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe tells the following folk tale:

'Once upon a time all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were very happy and began to prepare themselves for the great day. They painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew beautiful patterns on them. Tortoise saw all these preparations and his throat began to itch at the very thought. There was a famine in those days and Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for two moons. So Tortoise went to the birds and asked to be allowed to go with them.

"We know you too well," said the birds. "You are full of cunning and you are ungrateful. If we allow you to come with us you will soon begin your mischief."

"I am a changed man," said Tortoise. "I have learned that a man who makes trouble for others is also making it for himself." Tortoise had a sweet tongue, and within a short time all the birds agreed that he was a changed man, and they each gave him a feather, with which he made two wings so he could fly to the feast. When people are invited to a great feast like this, they take new names so when all the birds had taken one, Tortoise also took one. He was to be called All of you.

After kola nuts had been presented and eaten, the people of the sky set before their guests the most delectable dishes Tortoise had ever seen or dreamed of. The soup was brought out hot from the fire and in the very pot in which it had been cooked. It was full of meat and fish. There was pounded yam and also pottage cooked with palm-oil and fresh fish. There were also pots of palm-wine. When everything had been set before the guests, one of the people of the sky invited the birds to eat. But Tortoise jumped on his feet and asked,

"For whom have you prepared this feast?"

"For all of you," replied the man. Tortoise turned to the birds and said,

"You remember my name, All of you. They will serve you when I have eaten." He began to eat and the birds grumbled angrily. The Tortoise ate the best part of the food and then drank two pots of palm-wine, so that he was full of food and drink and his body filled out of his shell. The birds flew home on an empty stomach. But before they left each took back the feather he had lent to Tortoise. And so Tortoise stood in his hard shell full of food and wine but without any wings to fly home. Tortoise looked down from the sky and fell and fell. And then like the sound of his cannon he

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<sup>183</sup> Barclay (2019) p96

crashed on the compound. His shell broke into pieces. All the bits of shell were gathered and stuck together and that is why Tortoise's shell is not smooth today.<sup>184</sup>

It is interesting to note that many folk tales from indigenous communities present the villain as an individual who in pursuit of personal gain causes harm to the community. In contrast, the folk tales told in the Global North (ie animated movies) often present the hero/heroine as an individual who leaves their community in pursuit of some noble quest, including that of discovering themselves.<sup>185</sup> And so the Africa paper states, 'The theological problem to be addressed is not scarcity in relation to the economy and environment but greed. Greed makes people poor. Greed destroys the environment.'<sup>186</sup> As Paul put it, 'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6:10, see also Proverbs 15:27; Proverbs 22:9; Proverbs 28:25; Matthew 6:24; Luke 12:15; 1 Timothy 6:17–19). Unsurprisingly, for the Biblical authors, the issue of greed represents the flipside of a theology of enough. In Hebrews, we are encouraged, 'Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have.' (Hebrews 13:5) This call to be satisfied with sufficient (enough), not excess, represents a radical departure from the prevailing mindset in Global North societies, a mindset that is at the root of our problems with poverty, inequality and environmental exploitation.

According to the Africa report, it is the assumption of scarcity that causes us to think the problem is poverty, not greed. It is interesting to note that hitherto there has been a series of Tearfund publications entitled *Overcoming Poverty, Understanding Poverty, Jubilee: God's Answer to Poverty*, but not, so far, 'Overcoming Greed', 'Understanding Greed', 'Jubilee: God's answer to Greed' and so on. One of the unfortunate consequences of framing the problem as poverty is that it easily transitions into a modernisation thesis in which the solution is for poorer nations to follow the path of economic progress that has been pursued by wealthier nations. It establishes wealthier nations as the norm to which the rest of the world needs to catch up. However, as has repeatedly been pointed out, if the whole world really did join the West in its levels of consumption and carbonisation then collectively we would destroy all life on this planet many times over. This does not contradict the point made earlier that our planet has sufficient resources for everyone to survive, if not thrive. The point is that it is only possible for all of us to thrive if we change our economic system to that of a circular economy in which redistribution and re-use are the norm. In those circumstances, the planet has more than enough for everyone but not if we continue with the current carbon intense modes of production. *The Restorative Economy* report is excellent in spelling out some of the details of what such a circular economy might look like in practice.

To recognise that the problem is greed, not poverty, is to recognise that while economic development is, of course, required for some nations, degrowth, or at the very least, decarbonisation is required for many others. At the same time, to say that the problem is greed not poverty is not to claim that the problem only exists in the Global North. Selfish accumulation and rampant inequality occur frequently in many poor countries as they do in many wealthy ones. It is a problem of human hearts, not a problem of particular countries or regions.

If we return to the church fathers for a moment we see a very different paradigm at play. It is noteworthy that in St Ambrose's treatise *On Naboth*, which is essentially a discussion of wealth and poverty, his primary focus is not on the challenge of poverty, but on the idolatry of greed. In a reversal of how we might think of the liberation paradigm, Ambrose states that it is the wealthy who are held captive; it is the poor who are free.<sup>187</sup> A similar emphasis on the dangers of wealth is evident in John Wesley who, like Ambrose, was deeply concerned about the poverty that surrounded him, but understood the problem as lying with the wealthy, not the poor. As Jennings notes, 'In sermon after sermon (with titles like "On Riches", "The Danger of Riches," and "On the Danger of Increasing Riches") Wesley hammers home the theme that the increase

<sup>184</sup> Adapted and abridged version of the story told in Achebe (2001) pp71–73

<sup>185</sup> Consider for instance Mulan, Antz, Brave, Frozen, Tangled. Mulan is especially interesting in that it flopped in China partly because audiences didn't resonate with the individualism that was at the heart of the story.

<sup>186</sup> Anderson and McGeoch (2020) p45

<sup>187</sup> Ambrose 15:63. See also John Chrysostom, in regard to whom one contemporary author states, 'his sermons are conspicuous for their repeated and tireless exhortations against wealth'. Margaret Mitchell (2004) p89.



in possessions leads naturally to the death of religion.’<sup>188</sup> There exists a challenging anecdote in which Wesley goes to speak at a particular location and finds himself to his surprise in a room full of wealthy individuals. Instead of praising these individuals for their industry and then making a fundraising appeal, he instead expounds the story of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16.<sup>189</sup>

In light of this, a distinction can also be drawn between a theology of abundant community and the Jubilee framework that has often been used in Tearfund writings. The essence of the Jubilee framework is a recognition that the world is a very unequal place and that God has put in place a mechanism to address that inequality.<sup>190</sup> In the Hebrew scriptures the way this was done was through sabbath rests for both the people and the land, through debt cancellation, freeing slaves, tithing and returning land to its original owners (Leviticus 25). In the contemporary era, these practices are often similarly translated into a program of debt cancellation and aid budgets. Such practices would also be encouraged in an abundance paradigm. The distinction then between abundant community theology and a jubilee framework is not so much in the practical outworking of these two frameworks. In both cases, the policy implication is far greater redistribution from the wealthy to the poor, no doubt using some of the precise mechanisms that Restorative Economy advocates. The difference lies in what we think is happening as we engage in that redistribution. For under a theology of abundant community, we redistribute not because people are poor, but because people are rich! We distribute not out of our own wealth, but in an effort to return theirs. Or, to repeat the point that St Ambrose made in his commentary on the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21):

‘It is not anything of yours that you are bestowing on the poor; rather, you are giving back something of his... You are giving back something that is owed, then, and not bestowing something that is not owed.’<sup>191</sup>

This example of automatic sharing (rather than charitable giving) by the early church is one that is common across many indigenous Global South communities, at least among those not infected by the philosophy of scarcity that dominates Global North thinking. At a familial level, it remains the norm for many relatives from the Global South. One of the least explored issues by the development community is the huge role that remittances play in sustaining economies in low-income countries. According to the United Nations, remittances amount to over three times the size of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) combined. Moreover, they frequently are far better targeted than either of those mechanisms at reaching the poorest of the poor.<sup>192</sup> While much of these funds are directed at immediate, nuclear family members, it is also the case that the concept of ‘family’ in the Global South is often much wider than is the case in the Global North. ‘Family’ often includes aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and even more distant relationships. The assumption is that to a large extent resources are shared among such family members. In the Global North, we have much to learn from such models of sharing.

In addition, abundance thinking also means that we take seriously the ethical credentials of our consumer choices. This is not just about ‘buying green’, though it does include that, but it also includes paying attention to fair treatment of workers, supply chains, protection of human rights, the tax policy of the companies we purchase from and so on.<sup>193</sup> It means we no longer purchase goods simply because they are great value for money or because we are trying to prop up our social status; we purchase them because those who made them have been treated with value. At the same time, it also means – at least for those of us in carbon intensive societies – that we hugely reduce our overall levels of consumption. There is no point purchasing the most ethically sourced brands if we purchase without need huge quantities of the product. We need to tread lightly on the earth and so reduce and recycle to a far greater extent than is currently the

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<sup>188</sup> Jennings (1990) p35

<sup>189</sup> Jennings (1990) p35. See also Bretherton who suggests our first response to poverty should be repentance, not philanthropy. Bretherton (2015) p459

<sup>190</sup> Evans and Gower (2015) p27

<sup>191</sup> Ambrose 12:53

<sup>192</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/remittances-matter.html>

<sup>193</sup> Ethical Consumer ([www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org)) is an excellent resource to help in this.



case. Such thinking also applies to our investments. St Ambrose challenged us to store our wealth ‘in the heart of the poor’. For those of us fortunate to have savings, investments or pensions it means we do not simply ask which bank or which product will generate the greatest financial return for me, we ask which bank/product will generate the greatest social and environmental return for all. Like the woman who anointed Jesus, such a decision might mean we apparently lose in financial terms so that we gain so much more in relational and spiritual capital. That is abundance thinking.

Turning to the individual business unit, we need to recognise at the outset the enormous contribution that businesses make to economic wellbeing. *The Restorative Economy* report is correct to point out that, ‘In developing countries, 90 per cent of jobs are created by the private sector.’<sup>194</sup> As we pointed out in section 2.2.3, there are many pro-business policies that should indeed be pursued, not least support for entrepreneurs and a stable macroeconomic environment. Having said that, the overwhelming consensus of the regional reports was that businesses do need to change how they operate, and of course many of them are doing so. For many of them, this will mean replacing greenwashing with a business model that genuinely contributes to the environment. For others, it will be about embracing mutual and cooperative models of business where profit is more equitably shared across all those involved in the company. The *Wholly Living* report points to the role of government in supporting this kind of approach arguing that it should prioritise companies who ‘subordinate their profits to the welfare of their workers, and decision-making is based on mutual forms of partnerships.’<sup>195</sup> The Global North regional paper goes further by drawing on Tanner who argues that there is a particular role for the church not just in advocating for such alternative business models, but in funding them directly as well.<sup>196</sup> She particularly believes that the church can play a role in this by establishing ‘communal gardens or farms, as well as alternative banking facilities, like micro-lending, and alternative housing arrangements. But, crucially, without a profit motive attached.’<sup>197</sup> Indeed, if we recognise that businesses are partners with creation too, then a truly holistic partnership model would include the debts owed to the environment through our business activities, whether internal or external.

The *Live Justly* course gives an example of the difference such a cooperative approach to business can make:

‘Makandianfing Keita is a cotton farmer from Mali. Before joining a cooperative his family struggled to survive because cotton prices were going down and down until they were below the cost of production. Because of this, the community struggled...In 2005 the village farmers joined a cotton cooperative. This means that their cotton would now be bought at fair trade prices that were significantly higher than the artificially low market rates, and that the farmers would together decide how to invest their income. After joining the cooperative, they were able to make immense progress. Within the first three years:

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<sup>194</sup> Evans and Gower (2015) p11

<sup>195</sup> Theos (2010) p41

<sup>196</sup> Theos (2021) p40

<sup>197</sup> Theos (2021) p40

- They built a school in the community.
- They built a maternity centre.
- They installed a pump for drinking water.
- They built a new road, enabling farmers to travel further than 5km outside of the village without difficulty.<sup>198</sup>

The fundamental distinction between cooperative/mutual approaches to business ownership and the standard model is that maximising profit no longer becomes the primary purpose. Instead, such businesses shift their focus to the so-called triple bottom line of profit, people and planet. Under this maxim, profit still matters, but its purpose is not large dividends for shareholders, but rather reinvestment in the business or the community it serves. Under people, the business pays attention to how it treats its staff and suppliers, the wages they receive, the conditions under which they work or supply goods. Finally, under planet, the business intentionally decarbonises, fully pays for the environmental externalities they incur and intentionally pursues a circular rather than linear economic model.<sup>199</sup>

Of course, all of these principles are thoroughly biblical. Regarding the profit motive in general, the Bible says much to indicate that an exclusive desire to make as much money as possible is not within God's will. We see this evident in the gleanings laws where the landowner was instructed: 'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.' (Leviticus 23:22)<sup>200</sup> This injunction was not just about provision for the poor – if it had been, the instruction might have been to gather it all in then distribute to those you deem worthy. Instead, it was about the idolatry of profit maximisation (see also Amos 8:5).

Arguably, however, a similar paradigm of abundance could, at least in theory, operate at national and international levels. At the governmental level, the Global North needs to take seriously both its legacy of carbonisation and its commitments to help poorer nations with climate change adaptations. Of course, the whole world needs to transition to net zero, but the moral responsibility lies with those countries who have done the most to cause the problem. The UK makes much of the fact that it no longer burns as much coal as India and China. Yet the fact remains that in terms of cumulative emissions per capita, the UK has still contributed far more than either of those nations.<sup>201</sup> At the same time, the \$100billion per year that was promised in 2009 to help poorer nations transition to a low carbon economy and cope with the impact of climate change has still not materialised. The injustice of this is not just that the Global North is primarily responsible for global warming, but that the reason the Global North is wealthy is precisely because it has spent the last 200 years extracting wealth from the natural environment God gave us. Its wealth is built not just on the shoulders of the colonised, but also on the earth that it was meant to care for. Hence, the Global North failure in climate finance represents a triple injustice: to the colonised it enslaved, to the world it has ravaged and to contemporary generations who are dying from climate change.

In addition to the specific mechanisms of climate financing, we need national governments to consider again both forms of redistribution within their borders, and redistribution (from North to South) across borders. Within a country, such redistribution sometimes does take the form of direct cash benefits (eg welfare payments) and at other times it can take the form of the provision of public services, especially infrastructure, health and education. In order to be genuinely redistributive, the source of funds would need to be directed from those who are the wealthiest and incorporate their assets and their income. *The Restorative Economy* report offers a series of recommendations for a fairer global tax system, one which ensures that multinational companies no longer hide their funds in tax havens but distribute them to

<sup>198</sup> Jason Fileta (2017) pp67–68

<sup>199</sup> Townsend argues that this different purpose, rather than different ownership structures, is actually what defines alternatives to 'capitalism'. In the process, he helpfully provides a map of alternate legal forms for businesses in which such social and ecological purposes can be legally pursued. Townsend (2015) pp199–218

<sup>200</sup> See also Deuteronomy 24:19–21

<sup>201</sup> <https://onclimatechange.org.uk/2018/11/26/cumulative-emissions-under-the-unfccc/>

national governments in the way that they should.<sup>202</sup> Sadly, at the time of writing, the G20 have just agreed a new global tax deal that remains deeply unjust. It does tackle multinationals to some extent, but the vast bulk of the profits go to richer countries, not to the poorest ones to whom it is owed.<sup>203</sup> In addition, we need to continue to put pressure on both state and private institutions to forgive many of the debts that have been incurred in low-income regions. It remains a scandal that many African countries spend more on debt servicing than they do on health or education.<sup>204</sup>

Finally, for Tearfund as a development organisation, there are also potentially a series of potential implications. At an educational level among its supporters, Tearfund might consider more frequently framing the problem as one of individualism and greed rather than one of poverty. As has been noted, the emphasis in previous Tearfund reports has usually been the problem of poverty. This furnishes a mindset in the Global North in which the problem is ‘over there’ and we wealthy citizens in the North are, if anything, the solution. Instead, those of us in the Global North need to start recognising that we are part of the problem – through our lifestyles and acquisitiveness – and if anything the solution is ‘over there’ in the way many communities in the Global South hold up for us a different model of relationship and of care for the planet. This is not to deny that there exist huge problems of inequality and government corruption in the Global South, but it is to suggest that the Global North should stop thinking that it has the solution to problems in the Global South, for it does not.

Of course, to advocate along these lines represents a significant challenge to Tearfund’s funders. Many of these funders like to think that they are the solution to the problem, not a contributor to the problem. One would imagine that from a fundraising point of view, such a message would not go down well. Nevertheless, there is ample biblical material for Tearfund to explore which could introduce this framing, probably alongside the traditional narrative that the problem is poverty. In this way, Tearfund’s evangelical supporters would at the very least recognise the scriptural basis for the argument that is being made. As part of this, we also need to shift the narrative from one of generous benefactors giving out of charity to one in which we understand ourselves as returning to God, and through God to those who are poor, what actually belongs to them. This after all is what it means to recognise ourselves as members of one shared home.

At a local level, within lower income countries, one of the great strengths of the community mobilisation model is the holistic approach it brings which recognises that communities are not merely a collection of potential entrepreneurs, but that part of their strength is precisely in their community relationships. In saying this, we need to accept that at times in practice the need to accumulate sufficient capital in order to start a business can be hampered by the economic demands of relations. A frequent story in poorer communities is that one cannot save to invest because there is always someone’s school fees or medical bills that require support. Hence, it is sometimes said that in order to facilitate entrepreneurship we need to encourage the severing of familial ties.<sup>205</sup> To do so, though, would be to go against the grain of the Ubuntu thinking we have been advocating.

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<sup>202</sup> Evans and Gower (2015) p41

<sup>203</sup> <https://www.globaltaxjustice.org/en/latest/g20-global-south-members-uphold-g77-tax-interests-%E2%80%93-not-those-g7>

<sup>204</sup> UNICEF (2021); Jubilee Debt Campaign (2020), ‘Sixty-four countries spend more on debt payments than health’. Available at: <https://jubileedebt.org.uk/press-release/sixty-four-countries-spend-more-on-debt-payments-than-health>.

<sup>205</sup> Certainly, Weber argued along these lines. Max Weber (1958) pp21–22; Weber (1978) pp376–379

Perhaps the solution to this is to recognise that capital accumulation is only a problem because of the overall shortage of capital in the first place. And this problem can be addressed by far more generous provision of cash grants. There is now a large corpus of literature supporting the use of cash transfers (both conditional and unconditional) not just in humanitarian situations, but also for development. In his recent book, Wydick suggests that cash grants are one of the most effective forms of aid that can be given,<sup>206</sup> and a recent policy analysis by the World Bank continued to advocate for their use.<sup>207</sup> Such an approach is not just sound practice from a development point of view, it also reflects the kind of abundance thinking we have been discussing. If the church fathers are correct to argue that the wealth of the rich really does belong to the poor then to share that wealth in the form of cash grants is one way to bring life to that theology. Moreover, as Zamagni has argued (one of the authors spotlighted in the Global North paper) cash distribution is a mechanism which builds the agency of the recipient. It does not merely address the conditions of their poverty, but also their capability and power to act. It represents a far more holistic response to poverty.<sup>208</sup>

The point of all this is that at an individual, national, international and organisational level we have in theory the opportunity to live out a theology of abundant communities. The problem is simply that we do not do it frequently enough. We do not do it because we are trapped by the mindset and habits of individualism, competition and scarcity, and that is what needs to change.

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<sup>206</sup> Wydick (2019) Chapter 7

<sup>207</sup> Artuc et al (2020). This is not to suggest that cash transfers are problem free. They raise all kinds of issues about dependency, misuse of funds and gender equity. Nevertheless, the evidence is that they are at least as good as other forms of 'aid', and possibly better.

<sup>208</sup> Zamagni (2008) p495

## 4. Conclusion

One of the primary tasks for this report was that it articulated a theology of EES in a spirit of inclusion and decolonisation. Specifically, this meant paying greater attention to the voices from the so-called Global South. This report has done this, firstly by reading and analysing those voices first, but also and more importantly by laying greater emphasis on their contributions. It is for this reason that quotations from the Global South reports far outstrip those from the so-called Global North, and it is for this reason that the concept of an abundant community occupied the main constructive section of this report. As the report shows, this idea originated in the contributions from the Global South. This fact alone demonstrates why it was important that Tearfund followed the path it did in consulting widely on its EES theology. If those regional consultations had not been pursued then it is unlikely that this report would have adopted abundance thinking as its central dynamic. Moreover, if Tearfund adopts this framework then it will have very clearly originated in the Global South, especially in its adoption of an Ubuntu-relational anthropology. As such, the report embodies the spirit of decolonisation which is sought. While the nucleus of abundant community theology is to be found in the reports from the Global South, Section 3 expands, expounds and integrates that thinking with other aspects of Tearfund's work. It has done this in a number of ways.

Firstly, this report shows the roots of scarcity thinking in the so-called European enlightenment. Secondly, the report integrates Ubuntu thinking with its biblical and theological foundations. Ubuntu is such an old (in the good sense) way of thinking that its precise origins are impossible to discern. Nevertheless, what we have shown is its complete compatibility with the biblical account of our identity in God. Thirdly, this report draws out some of the potential practical implications of abundance thinking. In Section 3.5 we showed how an abundance anthropology impacts our lives as individuals, as businesses, as national governments and potentially for Tearfund as a development organisation. To repeat what has been said earlier, it is not being suggested that a theology of abundant communities is the only way in which Tearfund can frame its theology of EES. There are other, compatible, ways to do so, not least the relational paradigm. Nevertheless, what we have tried to show is that there are some crucial features of the abundance approach that are important to add to any other descriptions of EES theology that might be used.

Hence, it is proposed that Tearfund adopts the findings of this report as its global framework for EES theology especially in regard to abundance thinking. Such a theology can be summed up in the idea that our identity in Christ is that of an abundant community formed in relation to God, one another and the rest of creation. This is not a vague pantheism but a relational dynamic in which what matters is not just how we relate, but who we are in that relating. It is about a different understanding of me, an expanded version of us, that leads me to conduct myself within our shared home according to a household, rather than competitive market, mindset. This means we share abundantly, not just our wealth, but also our power, voices and lives, for we store our riches in the lives and wellbeing of our global neighbour and the planetary home God has provided. As such, it is more about an abundance of love, hope and trust than an abundance of goods. It means we care for creation because in service of God that is the responsibility God has given me as one whose identity is formed as part of the community of creation, and so one who joins in creation's praise. We call all of this 'abundance thinking'.

In embracing this approach, we intentionally reject the view that we should live as competitive individuals in a sparse environment in which the only rational response (at least for my own survival) is to selfishly consume and accumulate. We have seen where that path of destruction leads: rampant inequality, environmental devastation, conflict and violence.

Yet, in conclusion it is worth remembering what Jayakumar Christian said in *God of the Empty Handed*, namely that there is not one single solution to poverty. In the same way, there is not one single solution to environmental and economic sustainability, including the theology thereof. There is no magic bullet that if only we believed it, or only it was implemented, would solve the challenges that the world faces. Previously, this report highlighted the fact that theology cannot answer every possible policy question that comes before us. Oftentimes, it can only point in the direction we should travel. In the same way, this report is not claiming that a theology of abundant communities is the solution to world poverty and environmental degradation. One of the many reasons why this is the case is that we must accept the reality that we live in a fallen world, populated by fallen beings. Even if we have described an approach that is helpful, it will inevitably be implemented in a less than perfect way. Hence, the claims of this report are modest. It recognises that Tearfund is but one development agency, that the road to sin is wide and that Tearfund cannot fix this world, nor is it called to.<sup>209</sup> What it can do is help foster beacons of light that point in the right direction for those willing to look. Those beacons are abundant communities who love one another and love the planet. They may be real, physical communities or they may be virtual; they may be global, or they may be local, but like the bioluminescent fungi which some indigenous communities follow in tropical forests, they chart a path showing us the way we should go.

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<sup>209</sup> See Wigg-Stevenson (2013)



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This report uses the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible for quotations, unless otherwise stated.

Some of the sources cited are Tearfund documents which have not been published. To request these please email [publications@tearfund.org](mailto:publications@tearfund.org)

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## 5.2 Annotated bibliography of key works

### 5.2.1 Books and articles

Alokwu, Cyprian Obiora (2015) '[Constructing a Fourth Generation of Christian Ecological Motifs and the Need for African Traditional Ecological Knowledge as the Fifth Generation](#)', *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*, vol 7 pp141–158

*An exploration of five categories of eco-theology: dominion thinking, stewardship, eco-theology, Oiko-theology, and the fifth generation African traditional ecological knowledge, which involves the use of the indigenous cultural knowledge.*

Bauckham, Richard (2011) *Living with Other Creatures*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press

*A collection of essays which effectively critiques dominion theology and makes a strong case for our creatureliness in which we live within a community of creation. If there is any hierarchy within creation, it is one in which we 'rule' as those who care, rather than exploit, the rest of creation.*

Beltran, Benigno P. (2012) *Faith and Struggle on Smokey Mountain: Hope for a Planet in Peril*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books

*In solidarity with the most marginalised poor living on a dumpsite in Manila, Beltran uses the lens of Filipino Theology of Struggle to reflect on the interconnection between environmental and economic injustices worldwide in the light of our faith.*

Berman, Sidney, Paul Leshota, Ericka Dunbar, Musa Dube, Melebogo Kgalemang (eds) (2021), *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical Studies*, Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press

*A collection of essays from the Circle of Concerned Africa Women which uses a biblical approach to explores African indigenous thinking as it relates to questions of ecology, feminism and empire.*

Berry, Wendell (2011) *What I Stand For is What I Stand On*, London: Penguin

*A collection of essays which make the case, amongst other topics, for the importance of place – and in particular soil – in constructing our identity.*

Blomberg, Craig (1999), *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*, Leicester: Apollos  
Blomberg, Craig L. (2012) 'Neither capitalism nor socialism: A biblical theology of economics', *Journal of Markets and Morality*, vol 15 (1)

*The earlier book is a biblical exploration of wealth and possessions in which a middle ground of contentment is advocated; in the second journal article Blomberg applies the theological principles outlined in his book to economic systems and again concludes with a both/and synthesis.*

Boff, Leonardo (1986) *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company

Boff, Leonardo (1995) *Ecology and liberation: a new paradigm*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

*The first of these books is a trenchant critique of the institutional Roman Catholic church which made it the subject of a Vatican enquiry. In its stead, what is required is a laical, pneumatological church characterised by radical equality and community. The same constructive theme is taken up in the second of these books which again argues for the interrelatedness of all things, including our response to the earth and to the poor, both of which require liberation.*

Brueggemann, Walter (1999) 'The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity', *Christian Century* (24–31 March)

Brueggemann, Walter (2014) *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press

*The 1999 article is a biblical exposition of the abundance versus scarcity dynamic in which Brueggemann firmly champions abundance thinking against secular notions of scarcity. In his book, he provides further ammunition for this argument by discussing the theology of sabbath as a counter to the prevailing notions of accumulation, consumption and greed.*

Bruni, Luigino and Stefano Zamagni (2016) *Civil Economy: Another Idea of the Market*, translated by N. Michael Brennen, Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing Limited

*An alternative view of market economics which takes seriously our identity as relational beings, and so calls for a market in which those relational values are recognised to a far greater extent than is the case in the existing neoliberal mindset.*

Christian, Jayakumar (1999) *God of the Empty-Handed*, Monrovia, CA: MARC

*A wide-ranging analysis of the causes and nature of poverty which lays great emphasis on the importance of disparities in power, and the need for a spiritual solution to poverty. The author chastises those who claim we are making great progress in defeating poverty, for inequality is increasing and not being addressed.*

Cone, James H. (1986) *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

*Written in 1969, this classic work introduces many of the main tenets of black liberation theology including black theology as a survival theology, Jesus' identification with the poor, the concept of white supremacy and the idea, fleshed out in later works, of a black Jesus as the archetype of those who suffer oppression.*

Conradie, Ernst M. (2005) *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing

*A comprehensive theological reflection embracing African and Reformed perspectives on being human and challenging the roots of anthropocentric theology.*

Duchrow, Ulrich and Franz Hinkelammert (2004), *Property for People, Not for Profit: Alternatives to the Global Tyranny*, London: Zed Books

*A critique of global capitalism and, in particular, its abuses of private property and a proposal for a reformulation of how we think about property as provision for life and the common good.*

Freeman, Dena (ed) (2012) *Pentecostalism and Development, Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

*A collection of essays which explore the contribution of Pentecostalism to economic development, with a particular focus on Africa. It adopts an anthropological approach in which a range of specific localities/groups are analysed in depth.*

Ela, Jean-Marc (1986) *African Cry*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

*An indictment on an inherited Western model of faith that ignores the needs of African people, especially those in poor and rural communities. Appeals to the Gospel's liberatory call to restoration of dignity to marginalised people. A beautiful reflection on Christianity and culture and "shade-tree theology" as a model for contextual, grassroots theological reflection.*

Gebara, Ivone (1999) *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press

*An exploration of the intertwined oppression and subjugation of women, the poor and the environment, this book adopts an urban ecofeminist perspective which challenges the reigning ideologies of the capitalist patriarchy.*

Gnanadason, Aruna (2005) *Listen to the Women: Listen to the Earth*, Geneva: WCC Publications

*A theological reflection that begins with women's and indigenous perspectives, and then draws together liberation theology and eco-theologies through those perspectives.*

Gnanakan, Ken (2004) *Responsible Stewardship of God's Creation*. World Evangelical Alliance

*A biblical and theological reflection which suggests that stewardship is the best model with which to approach and understand questions of the environment and God's creation.*

Golo, B.W.K. (2012) 'Redeemed from the earth? Environmental and salvation theology in African Christianity.' *Scriptura*, vol 111 (3) pp 348–361

*Deeply rooted in the evangelical tradition and West African theology, this is a pioneering article that reframes 'salvation theology' in a cosmological perspective.*

Golo, B.W.K. (2014) 'The groaning earth and the greening of Neo-Pentecostalism in twenty-first century Ghana', *PentecoStudies*, vol 13 (2) pp197–216

*Tracing the involvement of West African Pentecostalism in environmental sustainability.*

Gutiérrez, Gustavo (1974) *A Theology of Liberation*, London: SCM Press

*A classic book which articulates the core features of Latin American liberation theology including the preferential option for the poor, theology from below, the discourse of liberation, the inadequacy of capitalism, reformism and developmentalism, and the church as sign and sacrament.*

Jennings, Willie James (2010) *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press

*An exploration of theological anthropology in which Jennings makes the case that we are embedded creatures. Part of the problem with both neo-colonialism and colonialism is its displaced anthropology which allows us to believe that our identity is not formed by the locations we inhabit.*

Kagama, D. (2016) 'Towards an African Oikotheology', *Journal of educational policy and entrepreneurial research*, (3)11, 85-100

*Exploration of African Oikotheology which goes beyond the double crisis of poverty and environmental degradation, and emphasises the need for justice, peace and reconciliation in the Oikos.*

Kim, Grace Ji-Sun (2015) *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Kim, Grace Ji-Sun (2019) *Reimagining spirit: wind, breath and vibration*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

*Two books in which the author argues for the role of the Spirit, recharacterised as Spirit-God, in bringing about reconciliation, healing and restorative justice. She shows the central importance of pneumatology as we address issues of racial, economic and climate justice.*

Kim, Grace Ji-Sun and Hilda Koster (eds) (2017) *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

*The compilation creatively engages Christian doctrine, addressing the myriad ways climate change impacts the health and livelihood of women around the globe.*

Ko, Lawrence (2020) *From the Desert to the City: Christians in Creation Care* (Ethos Institute Engagement Series), Singapore: The Bible Society Singapore

*An exploration of Cross-centric Christian hope alongside the devastated earth and harassed humanity. A challenge to our vision of discipleship and mission.*

Kwok, Pui-lan (2015) 'Sustainability, Earth care and mission' in Kapya J. Kaoma (ed) *Creation Care in Christian Mission*, Oxford: Regnum.

*A succinct article from a leading Asian feminist theologian which traces the roots of the sustainability paradigm and which critiques Western epistemologies, including Western Christian epistemologies.*

Longchar, A. Wati (2012) *Returning to Mother Earth: Theology, Christian Witness and Theological Education: an Indigenous Perspective*, Kolkata: Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia.

*A decolonial approach to theology from an indigenous perspective. It is sensitive to the different cosmologies with which Christians and Christian theology engage.*

Lowe, Benjamin and Rachel L. Lamb, Ruth Padilla DeBorst (2021) 'Reconciling conservation and development in an era of global environmental change: A theocentric approach', *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy*, vol 2 (2)

*An important article which critiques both anthropocentric and biocentric frameworks for creation care, and in the process makes the case for a theocentric model in which our relationship to the rest of creation is situated within our relationship to God.*

Malcolm, Hannah (2020) *Words for a Dying World*, London: SCM Press

*A series of essays from around the globe which explores, among other themes, how we process climate grief without it becoming narcissistic despair.*

Mante, Joseph Obiri Yeboah (2004) *Africa: The Theological and Philosophical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Accra: SonLife Press

*Through exploring the theological and philosophical roots of our crisis, Mante makes the case for an indigenous theology that sees humans not just in relation with other humans but with the entirety of creation.*

Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia D. (2013) *Resisting Structural Evil*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press

*A beautiful integration of feminist, ecological and economic justice which interweaves a series of case studies and stories with deep theological reflection.*

Mshana, Rogate R. and Athena Peralta (eds) (2015) *Economy of Life: Linking Poverty, Wealth and Ecology*, Geneva: WCC Publications

*An edited volume documenting the theology of the economy of life throughout the ecumenical movement.*

Mugambi, J. N. Kanyua (1989) *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Kenya: Heinemann

*An introduction to the early thoughts and principles of one of Africa's most influential theologians, and to African theology in general.*

Myers, Bryant (1999) *Walking with the Poor*, Maryknoll: Orbis books

*A foundational textbook for the theology of international development in which Myers surveys multiple approaches before articulating his own relational theology.*

Myers, Ched (2001) *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*, Washington, DC: Tell the Word, Church of the Saviour

*A popular description of what it means to reframe our economics within a sabbath mindset in which accumulation and excessive consumption are replaced with generosity and sharing.*

Nalwamba, Kuzipa and Teddy Sakupapa (2016) 'Ecology and fellowship (koinonia): a community of life' in Clive W. Ayre and Ernst M Conradie (eds) *The Church in God's Household: Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp75–93

*Examines koinonia as a way to understand humans as living as members of the wider community of creation, with a special vocation.*

Perumalla, Praveen, P. S (2015) 'Dalit theology and Economy of Life', *The Ecumenical Review*, July 2015

*Dalit theology engages with Economy of Life bringing forth themes of collaboration and sharing, and ground care.*

Ramachandra, Vinoth ['What is Integral Mission?'](#), Micah Network Integral Mission Initiative,

*An important article which reframes integral mission as less about a partnership between two ways of acting, and more as an integrated single way of being in which evangelism and social justice flow from us as holistic disciples.*



Ruether, Rosemary Radford (ed) (1996) *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, Maryknoll: NY: Orbis Books

*Still a ground-breaking publication drawing together voices of women theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America to reflect on eco-theology in each of their contexts.*

Swoboda, A.J. (ed) (2014) *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology, and the Groans of Creation*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

*A collection of essays on eco-theology from Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars.*

Tanner, Kathryn (2019) *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Yale University Press

*A challenge to global capitalism in which the author argues for an economy of gift and grace.*

Villafane, Eldin (1993) *The Liberating Spirit: Toward an Hispanic American Pentecostal Social Ethic*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

*A book which develops a socially conscious pneumatology that is relevant and recognised by the Hispanic American church, and which is a challenge and offer to us all.*

Volf, Miroslav (1996) *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press

*An important discussion of the nature of reconciliation in the context of conflict.*

White, Lynn (1967) '[The historical roots of our ecological crisis](#)', *Science*, vol 155 pp1203–1207

*The classic article which laid the blame for our environmental crisis at the feet of Christianity, in particular through its rejection of pagan animism.*

Woodley, Randy (2012) *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

*Introduces the concept of the Native American 'harmony way' and draws parallels with the Judeo-Christian concept of Shalom.*

Wright, Christopher (2004) *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Leicester: Intervarsity Press

*Important text which, amongst other things, introduces us to the threefold framework of God, land and people which governs the ethics of the nation of Israel, and has ongoing lessons for us today.*

### 5.2.2 Online sources

Benedict XVI (2009) '[Caritas in Veritate](#)', Encyclical letter, Rome

*Provides a set of moral and theological principles that can govern our approach to issues of economic and social justice. It is not a suite of detailed policy proposals, but sets the framework in which policy prescriptions might be found.*

Francis (2015) '[Laudato Si'](#)', Encyclical letter, Rome

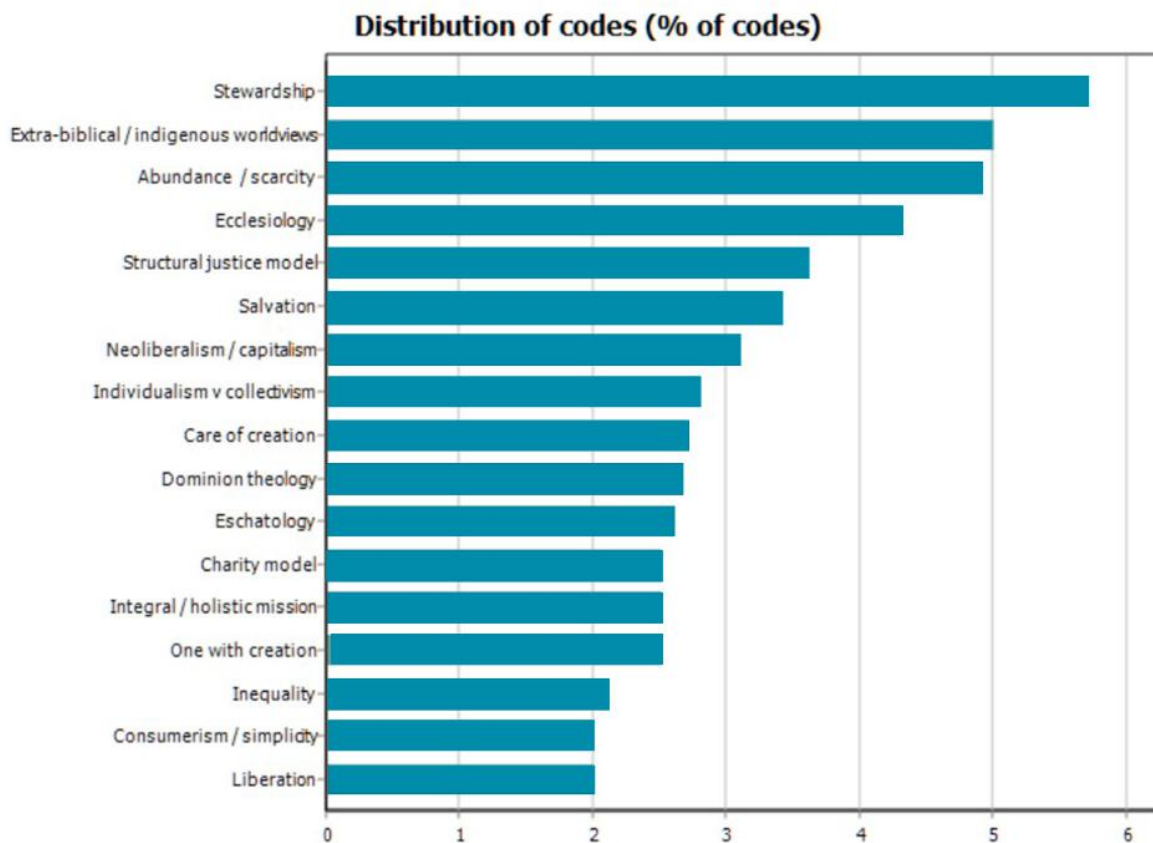
*The first full length encyclical on the environment develops the idea of 'integral ecology', that the economic and the social and the ecological are all intimately related. In proposing a solution, the Pope articulates a more integral anthropology in which we find ourselves at home in relation to one another, the planet and God.*

## 6. Appendices

### Appendix A: Documents and coding

The initial research method for this report was a qualitative coding process which, in light of the terms of reference, began with the consultation responses from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the Africa regional notes. Only after this was the Global North paper as well as a series of internal and external Tearfund publications and books read and coded in the same way.

All of these texts were analysed using a qualitative software package to code recurrent themes that appeared in the publications. All of the regional reports were the subject of a second coding sweep in case any codes later used had been missed in the original review. In the process, 97 separate codes covering a range of economic, environmental and theological issues were identified. The most common codes across all domains are represented graphically below:



It would be inappropriate to put too much weight on the numerical values indicated in the chart above as the primary purpose of the coding exercise was not to weight different issues in terms of their frequency of occurrence, but to ensure that all issues that occurred in more than one regional report were addressed to some extent in this report.