

Introducing the ecological crisis

A Global Crisis

We are already in trouble. The stability we all depend on is breaking. This story is one of inequality, as well as instability. Today, those who've done the least to cause this problem, are being the hardest hit. Ultimately, all of us will feel the impact, some of which are now unavoidable.¹

These words of Sir David Attenborough, to open the COP 26 Summit in Autumn 2021, offer a stark reminder that the scale of today's global ecological crisis is both unprecedented and well documented. The size of the challenge, facing the international community, in offering an adequate response, for the wellbeing of both current and future generations, cannot be underestimated. We have now entered what scientists have labelled, 'The Anthropocene', the age in which human activity is understood to be dominant over the earth. This seismic shift has resulted in a loss of species and ecosystems at rates over the last 50 years that are, until now, unknown to humankind.² Yet, this catastrophic loss of biodiversity has occurred at a time when the world has also seen substantial global economic growth, and the number of people living in extreme poverty worldwide, has been halved.³ This correlation is an important one to highlight, since much global economic growth over the latter half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium has, and continues to be, driven by high consumption lifestyles in both the established "West" and among emerging economies, such as China and Brazil. This consumerist-driven economy places immense strain on the finite resources and environmental systems that sustain life on this planet. Thus, we can note that the ecological crisis facing the world today is also a crisis that is being accelerated by, and raises serious questions regarding, our current linear economic model, which relies on a continuous, ever-increasing, and unsustainable extraction of new resources, such as oil, gas, minerals and more, for human consumption.⁴

Furthermore, it has been increasingly recognised, and highlighted, in recent years that changes to the climate not only affect non-human life forms on this planet *and* future generations of humanity; but that

¹ David Attenborough, *Not Fear, But Hope* [Video Speech]. (COP26, 1st November 2021). Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/science-environment-59121615> [accessed 28 August 2022].

² Johan Rockström and others, 'Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity', *Ecology and Society*, 14.2 (2009), art32. [article does not have page numbers]

³ Branko Milanovic, *Global Income Inequality by The Numbers: In History and Now - An Overview*, Policy Research Working Paper; No. WPS 6259 (Washington DC: World Bank, 2012), pp. 7-8. <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/959251468176687085/Global-income-inequality-by-the-numbers-in-history-and-now-an-overview>> [Accessed 2 May 2022].

⁴ Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist*, (London: Random House Business Books, 2017), pp. 211-213.

the impacts are felt, overwhelmingly, by those living in poverty in the here and now.⁵ Indeed, it is this growing realization that lies at the heart of my own journey within the field of climate justice. As a young Christian, in the early 2000s, I became convinced by, and convicted of, the biblical and theological imperative to care for those living in poverty and to seek justice for those who were oppressed. Yet in these early years of my Christian faith, like much of the wider UK church, I was not only naïve to conversations around climate justice but unaware of its deep interconnectedness with global poverty. However, my exposure to global communities living in poverty through my work at the international evangelical relief and development NGO, Tearfund, over 16 years offered clear and undeniable evidence of this growing humanitarian *and* environmental disaster.

There exist countless think tanks, organisations and scientific bodies working on issues of climate change and sustainability across the globe, and certainly too many to acknowledge here. Consequently, I have chosen to draw particularly on The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which represents a recognised global body, monitoring issues of Climate Change, comprising governments who are members of either the UN or the World Meteorological Organisation, in order to highlight the situation in which we find ourselves as a planet. Rather than undertaking its own research, The IPCC assesses and evaluates papers published by the international scientific community, in order to inform national governments and policymakers of the ever-increasing body of scientific evidence related to climate change and what can be done in order to address the significant risks posed. In its 2018 Special Report, the IPCC offered its starkest warning yet, to the global community, stating that net zero on anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions needed to be achieved by ‘around 2050’ if the rise in global temperature is to remain below 1.5°C.⁶ If this is not achieved the impacts of such climatic changes will be catastrophic for the planet. Although current models suggest that there remains time to achieve this goal, many global action agreements, such as those made by governments at multiple COP events, including the recent COP 26, in 2021, are simply not being implemented quickly enough. Nevertheless, we can note the rise in global attention towards the perilous predicament of Climate Change as encouraging, especially with international acceptance of this issue becoming far less contentious or debated in recent years and discussion subsequently shifting to focus, largely, on mitigation.

Crossing (Planetary) Boundaries

Climate Change is not the only ecological crisis facing this world, however. Planetary Boundaries is a concept that was developed in 2009 by the Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC) - an international

⁵ Tearfund, *The Restorative Economy: Completing our Unfinished Millennium Jubilee*. (London: Tearfund, 2015), pp. 11-16.

⁶ IPCC, *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C*, 2018, p. 95. <<https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>> [Accessed 6 May 2022].

research centre focused on resilience and sustainability science. Their ground-breaking research has identified nine, quantitative planetary boundaries that humanity must live within, in order to ensure survival and an ability to thrive for generations to come. The SRC state that ‘crossing these boundaries increases the risk of generating large-scale abrupt or irreversible environmental changes.’⁷ Yet, Climate Change serves as just one of nine boundaries that must be monitored, with the others comprising; ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, biogeochemical flows (nitrogen and phosphorus cycles), global freshwater use, land system change, the erosion of biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss), chemical pollution (or novel entities), and atmospheric aerosol loading.

When these boundaries were first introduced, proposed quantifications were provided for the first seven mentioned, with the final two (chemical pollution and atmospheric aerosol loading), at the time of writing, still unquantified.⁸ With these initially proposed quantifications, it was determined that three boundaries had already been crossed, namely; climate change; biodiversity loss (which later became ‘biosphere integrity’); and changes in the global nitrogen cycle.⁹ These were updated in a review in 2015, when it was also discovered that the land use boundary had also been crossed.¹⁰ (see *Figure 1*.)

*Figure 1*¹¹

⁷ Stockholm Resilience Centre, *Planetary Boundaries*

<<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>> [accessed 15 May 2022].

⁸ Rockström and others, 'Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity', [article does not have page numbers]

⁹ Rockström and others, 'Planetary Boundaries', [article does not have page numbers]

¹⁰ Will Steffen and others, 'Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet', *Science*, 347.6223 (2015) <DOI: 10.1126/science.1259855>.

¹¹ J. Lokrantz/Azote, *The planetary boundaries framework* [diagram]. (2015)

<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html> [accessed 10 June 2022]



Furthermore, a paper published in January 2022 declared that the boundary for chemical pollution, (*novel entities*), entering the environment, has now been crossed.¹² This paper pays particular attention to plastics, in part due to their ubiquitous nature, but also due to the resource use all through the production cycle, the management of end of use and the harmful impacts on biodiversity when not disposed of properly, including marine life.¹³ In June 2022, a further paper was published declaring that the boundary for freshwater use has now, also, been breached.¹⁴ This is, in large part, due to a focus on, and inclusion of green water – water available to plants. Green water shortages have implications for vegetation mortality, forest resilience and more with further subsequent effects on successful harvest, biodiversity and climate change.¹⁵ Figure 2, thus, shows the evolving planetary boundary knowledge over recent years and the serious situation in which we find ourselves today, having broken six of those boundaries.¹⁶

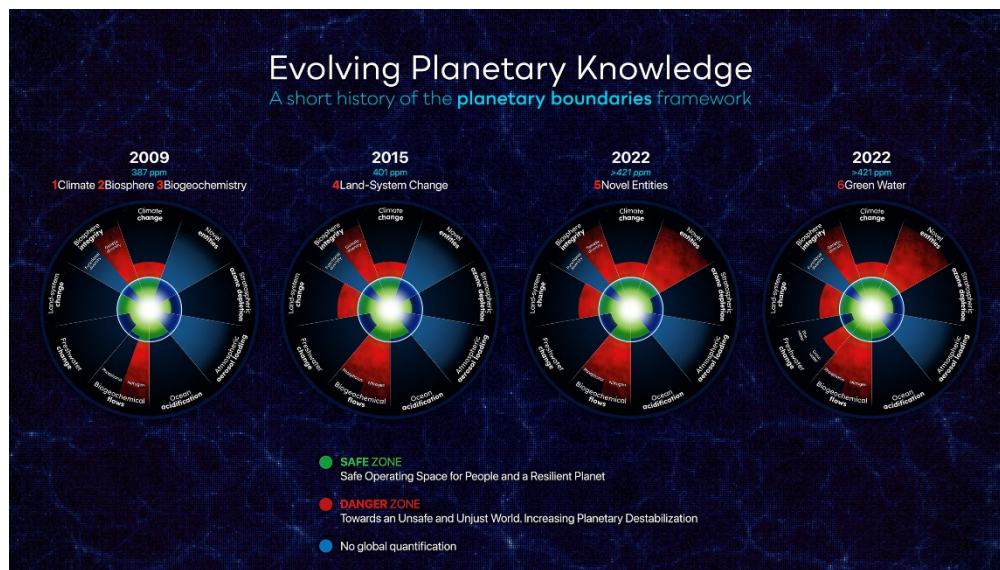
¹² Linn Persson and others, 'Outside the Safe Operating Space of the Planetary Boundary for Novel Entities', *Environmental Science & Technology*, 56.3 (2022), 1510–21 <doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.1c04158>. As noted earlier, the boundary for novel entities has not yet been quantified, however, this paper deemed the boundary to have been crossed, due to the speed at which new toxins and chemicals were being produced outstripping the ability to assess their safety and long term impact. P. 1510.

¹³ Persson and others, 'Outside the Safe Operating Space' (p. 1511, 1514, 1517).

¹⁴ Lan Wang- Erlandsson and others, 'A Planetary Boundary for Green Water', *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 3.6 (2022), 380-392.

¹⁵ Wang-Erlandsson, 'A Planetary Boundary for Green Water', (p. 383, 387).

¹⁶ The Ozone Depletion boundary was previously crossed in the 1990's, however the banning of CFC's and the work the global community did to counter this has since brought us to within the safe boundary zone.

Figure 2¹⁷

A Matter of Economics

In 2017, economist Kate Raworth, published her groundbreaking, book, *Doughnut Economics*,¹⁸ and a journal article proposing, ‘The Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries’ as an answer to the challenges presented by the planetary boundaries research, and envisioning ‘local and global economies that ensure that no one falls short of life’s essentials...while safeguarding Earth’s life-giving systems’¹⁹. Raworth explains that the centre of this doughnut model represents the space in which people fall short of the basic necessities needed in order to live, while the outer ring denotes the limits of these aforementioned, planetary boundaries. Consequently, through her model, Raworth argues that we need to lift people out of this innermost circle and into the doughnut which represents the place where basic needs are met, yet without going beyond the environmental ceiling (or outer ring), thus breaking Planetary Boundaries. See Figure 3. In the diagram, she calls this central zone, ‘the safe and just space for humanity’, which will only be achieved by ‘inclusive and sustainable economic development’.²⁰ Raworth’s doughnut model represents a radical rethink of how global economics currently works, yet one which is increasingly gaining traction within the international community, at both national and local

¹⁷ Globaia, ‘Planetary Boundaries 2009-2022 | From 3 to 6 boundaries crossed — The evolution of this influential scientific framework over time’ [diagram]. (2022) <https://globaia.org/planetary-boundaries> [accessed 22 August 2022]

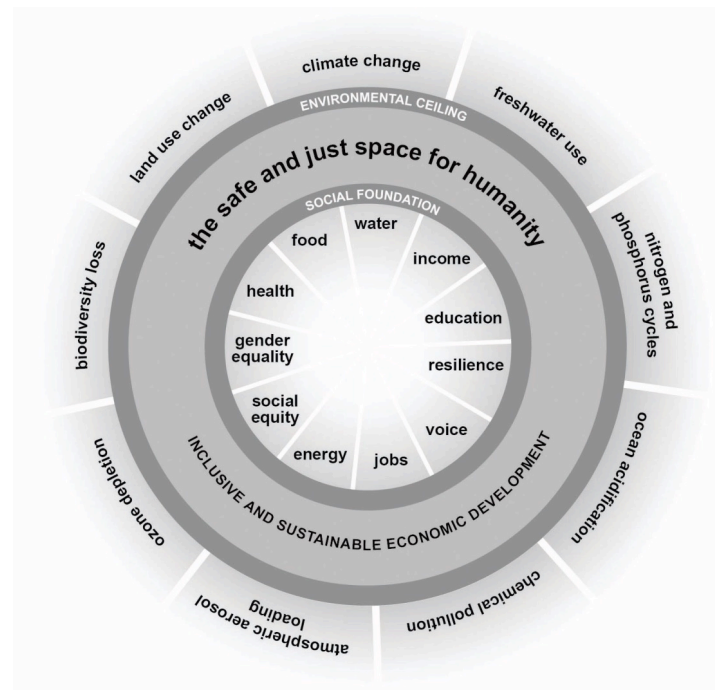
¹⁸ Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*.

¹⁹ Kate Raworth, ‘Why it’s time for Doughnut Economics’, *IPPR Progressive Review*, 24.3 (2017), 216-222 (p. 219).

²⁰ For a longer explanation, see Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*, pp. 43-45.

level²¹, and one that she proposes should serve as the new goal and measure of how our economies are doing, rather than the longstanding measure of GDP.²²

Figure 3²³



In her book, Raworth also promotes the key concept of a ‘circular economy’²⁴, which she describes an economy that is ‘regenerative by design’, reusing replacing the old linear model of extract, use and discard.²⁵

Challenging Consumerism

²¹ Jon Richardson and the Futureonauts. *Season 2 Episode 1 – The Future of Economics with Kate Raworth*, [podcast], Apple Podcasts, Jon Richardson and the Futureonauts – The Book of Revelations, 18 November 2020, <<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/jon-richardson-and-the-futureonauts-the-book-of-revelations/id1508061420>> [accessed 27 August 2022].

²² Raworth, ‘Why it’s time’, p. 219. For a fuller explanation see Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*, pp. 31-60.

²³ ‘Ibid.’, p. 218.

²⁴ ‘The circular economy is based on three principles, driven by design: Eliminate waste and pollution, Circulate products and materials (at their highest value), Regenerate nature. It is underpinned by a transition to renewable energy and materials. A circular economy decouples economic activity from the consumption of finite resources. It is a resilient system that is good for business, people and the environment.’ See Ellen MacArthur Foundation <<https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/circular-economy-introduction/overview>>

²⁵ Raworth, ‘Why it’s time’, p. 221.

In proposing her model, Raworth offers a critical challenge to the consumerist culture in which 21st century, western society finds itself. It is no exaggeration to state that, the UK, along with the wider western world has, through the course of the twentieth century, and continuing into the 21st century, become a society that is profoundly formed by the narrative of consumerism along with its aligning values, rhythms and practices. We might look to those such as Australian author, Kerryn Higgs, as just one among many contemporary writers who offer to chart the roots and journey of consumerist culture, in Western society, from a sociological and historical perspective.²⁶ However, for a more data-informed analysis there is also an overwhelming amount of material to draw upon. Within the UK context alone, it was estimated in 2015 by the British government that consumers were responsible for spending £1.15 trillion on goods and services alone, and in doing so, ‘accounting for over 60% of the UK economy’. This refers specifically to individuals and households and does not include business or the public sector. Furthermore, this figure was double the amount spent just thirty years previously, in 1985.²⁷ Furthermore, a YouGov poll undertaken in 2014 suggests the British public itself recognised the pervasive nature of consumerism with 8 in 10 people believing consumerism serves as a ‘feature of national life’ and over half of the population believing British culture to be ‘very consumerist’. According to the same survey, younger people, in particular, were recognised to be those ‘likely to have bought something they didn’t need, just because it was on sale’.²⁸ This reveals another key dimension to our contemporary, consumerist culture, a lifestyle of waste. *The World Counts* is a website dedicated to highlighting the global issue of waste, offering real time data not simply on what we consume as a global community but on what we discard, with the stark headline that as a human population, we annually throw away over two billion tonnes of waste, the majority of this, by those living in the West.

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As seen in the recent breach of the *novel entities* boundary, plastics pose a particular, and significant, problem in everyday consumerism, especially in the area of packaging. In 2017, packaging made up 42% of all plastic production³⁰, much of this single use, whether that be food, personal care products, gift packaging, protective films on books or electronics, toys or other items. Following on from

²⁶ Kerryn Higgs, *Collision Course: Endless Growth On A Finite Planet*, (London: MIT Press, 2014).

²⁷ Harari, Daniel, *Consumer Spending: 10 Ways It’s Changed In 30 Years* (2016)

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/consumer-spending-10-ways-its-changed-in-30-years/> [Accessed 28 August 2022].

²⁸ Will Dahlgreen, *Consumer Britain: Young People Most Likely To Buy Things They Don’t Need* (2014)

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/12/02/consumer-britain> [Accessed 28 August 2022]

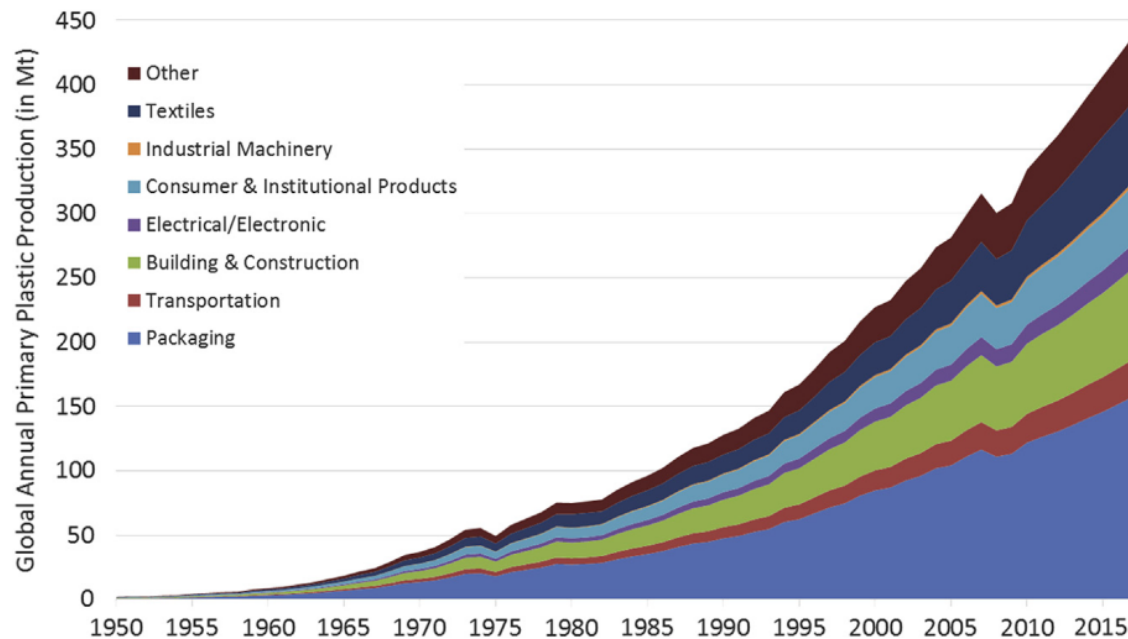
²⁹ The World Counts, *Waste From Households* (2022)

<https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/waste/waste-from-households> [Accessed 28 August 2022]

³⁰ Roland Geyer, ‘Production, Use, and Fate of Synthetic Polymers’, in *Plastic Waste and Recycling*, ed. by Trevor M. Letcher (Stratton on the Fosse: Elsevier, 2020), p. 18 < doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-817880-5.00002-5 >.

packaging is the construction industry, which consumes 16% of total production, and then textiles, consuming 14%. (See *Figure 4*.) It has been highlighted that ‘in 2016, 83% of all synthetic fiber production was polyester, and about 86% of textile sector output was apparel.’³¹ If these current rates of plastic production are continued, ‘global annual primary plastic production would reach 1.1 billion tonnes in 2050’.³²

*Figure 4*³³



With this continuous stream of waste, the movement towards a circular economy, offers a long and much-needed change, in how production and consumption are to be thought about, if we are to stay within the planetary boundaries and return our world to the ‘safe zone’, described by Raworth, in those areas that have already been breached.

A Challenge to the UK Evangelical Church

As previously stated, today, it is the many communities around the world who live in poverty, and especially those determined as living in extreme poverty, who find themselves on the front end of increased natural disasters, increased food insecurity due to erratic rains or frequent droughts and mass migration in search of water sources, fertile land and more – and thus, located outside of this ‘safe zone’.

³¹ Geyer, ‘Production, Use and Fate’ p. 18.

³² Geyer, ‘Production, Use and Fate’ p. 17.

³³ Geyer, ‘Production, Use and Fate’ p. 18.

Few NGOs, and other bodies working within the field of International Development, would fail to identify environmental sustainability as a significant threat to human development. Tearfund, a large, UK-based evangelical NGO, working with local churches at the global level, can be recognised as one of the first UK NGOs, in the late 1990s, to not only identify climate change as a serious threat but begin carrying out research into its impact upon the communities in which they worked, and most at risk from its effects. By its own admission, the scale of this widespread impact, revealed in its 2005 report *Dried Up Drowned Out*,³⁴ prompted an increased focus on, and change of strategy in how the organisation undertook its development work. This recognition would also result in a significant increase in its focus on engaging the UK evangelical church on the issue of climate change and wider issues of sustainability.

Building on their environmental work of the previous decade, Tearfund published a discussion paper in 2015 titled, *The Restorative Economy: Completing Our Unfinished Millennium Jubilee*. The report proposes working towards what they call, a ‘restorative economy’ which should 1. ‘Ensure we live within environmental limits’, 2, Ensure everyone is able to meet their basic needs’, 3, ‘Keep inequality within reasonable limits’.³⁵ Within the paper was the acknowledged need for change at government levels, changes in business models, policies, and regulations. However, the organisation also called for a movement of people, demanding these changes, and living lifestyles that reflect these values, citing past civil movements that have brought about significant change. Drawing on the concept of Jubilee, from within the Biblical tradition, was a call upon individuals and churches to be a part of this movement, stating ‘Change starts with our lifestyles’.³⁶ The report goes on to discuss five areas for individuals to consider for their own lives: 1. Live within our fair share of the world’s resources and environmental limits, 2. Respond to poverty and inequality with radical generosity, 3. Speak out prophetically, 4. Use our power as a voter, a citizen and a consumer, 5. Live restoratively and prioritise relationships.³⁷ Within this first point, discussion focussed on consumer habits such as; food consumption, travel, life in the home and, the stuff that we buy. This call to lifestyle change, Tearfund highlights, would represent a radical departure away from what western society sets up as the ideal lifestyle. Yet, Tearfund’s call for movements of local people to live as agents of change, could be said to parallel the belief of Raworth and others, who believe that local and community action is crucial to witnessing change at societal and systemic levels.³⁸

³⁴ Tearfund, *Dried Up, Drowned Out*, (2005), p. 5 < https://nanopdf.com/download/dried-up-drowned-out-voices-from-the-developing-world_pdf > [accessed 2 August 2022]

³⁵ Tearfund, *The Restorative Economy*, p. 8.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 33-36.

³⁸ Doughnut Economics Action Labs, *About DEAL*, (2022) <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about> [Accessed 28 August 2022].

Again, Tearfund's report, points to past movements of change stating that 'government policies and social norms only reflect fresh values when these are exemplified in the demands – and lifestyles – of a passionate movement.'³⁹ This is written neither to allocate all blame, or responsibility to act, upon individuals and households. It is evident that significant responsibility also lies at the macro-level, and thus, radical change is required at every level of society if the pressing and unescapable challenge of responding to climate change, and living within our planetary boundaries, will ever be achieved. Further work is needed within the scientific world to continue to develop understanding into the impact of humans upon the environment, a rethinking of global economic models that better consider the environment, business models must be re-thought and governments reimagined to deal with such monumental challenges. It can be noted that weak environmental policies *and* lack of political will and accountability on this issue has, and continues to, help create an uncertain and apathetic environment that churches and individuals live within.

Nevertheless, this does not absolve individuals and communities from being catalysts for change at levels, and in ways, they can make a difference. The western church represents a significant community within wider civil society, and if they could be galvanised into a movement of people ready to take seriously the challenge of climate change and living within the planetary boundaries safe zones, However, it is this engagement with the UK, and the wider western church, that this project will focus on. To do so, it is imperative we first survey evangelical theological literature and engagement with issues concerning the environment over recent decades.

Reviewing the Literature

The 'Roots' of the Modern Conversation

With others, I propose we can trace discussion regarding the 20th century environmental crisis and its relationship with Christian tradition, teaching and practice to a paper published by Lynn White in 1967. White, a medieval historian, who was also a committed Christian and lay preacher, wrote and published his seminal paper 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis' in the journal *Science*⁴⁰. His article has subsequently become one of the most widely quoted papers in historical analysis of eco-theology and described as 'one of the most significant articles to appear in environmental studies in the second

³⁹ Tearfund, *The Restorative Economy*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science*, 155.3767 (1967), 1203–7 <<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203>>.

half of the 20th century.⁴¹ Elspeth Whitney has argued that this paper ‘earned Lynn White the reputation of being one of the Key environmental thinkers of the 20th century.’⁴² At the heart of White’s paper he argues that Christianity ‘...is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen.’⁴³ Grounded in a theological interpretation of Genesis 1:28, (God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”). White claimed Christian tradition has ultimately created ‘a dualism of man and nature’ with the insistence that it is ‘God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.’⁴⁴ As such, according to White, modern science and technology were founded on medieval Christian principles, which continued to hold onto the belief that God created mankind to be dominant over nature. Therefore, whilst modern science and technology continue to operate out of these principles, they remain unable to solve the climate crisis. White’s paper has drawn widespread responses since its publication, now over fifty years ago, and across many different disciplines, including medieval history, theology, social science/psychology, including many who have sought to critique and argue against his claims.⁴⁵ I do not set out here to add to this critique of White’s arguments. Neither do I suggest there was no academic theological contribution to environmental studies prior to White’s paper. However, I include his paper as, as it is commonly held as a significant moment and in many ways a catalyst for the birth of the ecotheology movement in the second half of the twentieth century.

The Emergence of Ecotheology

In this paper the term *ecotheology* is used to describe the work of those seeking to reflect on issues relating to the environment through a theological, and specifically Christian, framework. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this term has not been systematically or consistently employed by all those within this field during the latter years of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In the 1970’s and 80’s the term *Green Theology* was commonly employed, and since then, the broad terms of *Religion and Environment* and *Theology and Ecology* are also used. Furthermore, ecotheology has frequently been associated with the ecofeminist theological movement, yet I would contend, along with others, that this remains a genre or stream of theological engagement, within its own right. For the purpose of this paper, therefore, and as stated above, I will use the term ecotheology to serve as an umbrella term which describes all theological reflection and exploration undertaken in relation to the environment, to climate change *and* to wider issues of sustainability. With that in mind, through the course of this review

⁴¹ Ben A. Minteer and Robert E. Manning 'An Appraisal of the Critique of the Anthropocentrism and three lesser known themes in Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis"', *Organization and Environment*, 18.2 (2005) 163-176 (p. 166).

⁴² Elspeth Whitney, 'Lynn White Jr's 'The Historical Roots Of Our Ecologic Crisis' After 50 Years', *History Compass*, 13.8 (2015), 396-410 (p. 397) <DOI: 10.1111/hic3.12254>

⁴³ White, 'The Historical Roots' p. 1205.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 1205.

⁴⁵ Whitney, 'Lynn White Jr's' p. 397.

I will set out to identify, and describe work within this larger field of study, deemed of particular relevance to my research. Encouragingly, from the time of Lynn White's seminal paper, mentioned above, we might note that this field of literature, thus defined as ecotheology, has grown significantly and to a point where it would be impossible to mention all that has been explored. As such, I have limited the following literature review primarily, though not purely, to the Christian tradition within which I find myself. As previously mentioned, I locate my own expression of Christian faith within the British evangelical church tradition, whom this project is ultimately intended to engage with, and thus much of what follows is located within this field. The work considered is drawn primarily from the British context, though some space is also afforded to publications within other global contexts, deemed of relevance and interest to my own research.

Evangelical is for many a slippery term, one that has become increasingly difficult to define and for some, evermore contentious. It is important to acknowledge the large theological and cultural differences present within global evangelicalism and, of note for this paper, between the British and American evangelical contexts. Once again, time and space do not afford the opportunity to explore these differences, but it is nonetheless an important point to acknowledge. Consequently, efforts will be made through the course of this paper, to identify the contexts within which authors write, to afford greater appreciation for their work. Despite these challenges and highlighted differences, it is helpful, and appropriate, to offer something of a working definition for how I understand evangelicalism for the purposes of this paper. Whilst a variety of sources might be drawn upon for such a task, the British historian David W. Bebbington in his widely regarded work, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, offers arguably one of the most widely recognised and accepted descriptions of this tradition. Charting the origins of this tradition to the early eighteenth century Bebbington has famously proposed that evangelical identity be distinguished through four key features. These are identified as; *conversionism*, which describes a clear and decisive conviction of personal belief; *activism*, highlighting not simply a change in belief but a resultant outward manifestation of behaviour and purposeful witness; *biblicism*, that holds a sincere regard for the authority and centrality of the Holy Bible and; *crucicentrism*, that locates a belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross as the means by which humans are reconciled to God.⁴⁶ Whilst the authors highlighted throughout the following review might draw from differing contexts and can be located at different points from within the evangelical spectrum, it could be said they nonetheless share these key, broad, distinguishing characteristics offered by Bebbington, as will be evident. Yet, having located my primary focus of reflection as rooted within the evangelical tradition, it would be short-sighted to not offer passing mention to some key thinkers from other traditions on this subject. Not least, we must note that many

⁴⁶ David, W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989) pp.2-17.

ecotheologies from within the different Christian traditions, have emerged alongside each other and have been informed and shaped, either explicitly or implicitly, by one another.

There are an increasing number of books that survey the field of ecotheology in recent years. Celia Deane-Drummond, a British Catholic Theologian, and author and editor of many books may, arguably, be recognised as one of the foremost chroniclers within this field. A Catholic, with Anglican roots, Deane-Drummond offers valuable resources in mapping the wide-ranging, traditions engaging in this conversation. Her first publication of note, *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology*⁴⁷ can be dated to 1996 with later contributions including *Eco-Theology*⁴⁸, in 2008, and *A Primer in Ecotheology*⁴⁹ published in 2017. She has also co-edited, with Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser, *Theology and Ecology Across the Disciplines*⁵⁰ in 2018, *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere*⁵¹ in 2011 with Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, and *Religion in the Anthropocene*⁵² in 2017, with Sigurd Bergmann and Markus Vogt. In these volumes Deane-Drummond highlights the growth of the field, as well as the speed of changes and new scientific knowledge to emerge within this subject, which in turn has required fresh theological engagement, making a comprehensive mapping of the field in its entirety, too large a task.⁵³

Furthermore, whilst we have already mentioned Deane-Drummond as a key voice from within Catholic tradition, she has most recently served as director of the *Laudato Si' Research Institute* and thus, furthered the influence of the Pope's encyclical through multi-disciplinary research, and cross-collaboration in order to maximise impact.⁵⁴ On this note, we might highlight Pope Francis' dedication of his second encyclical, in 2015, to issues of the environment, titled *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. In this particular encyclical, Pope Francis distinguishes from other writings in which he addresses 'all the members of the church', and switches to address 'every person living on this planet,' and inviting anybody to engage with the words, 'I would like to enter dialogue with all people about

⁴⁷ Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology*, (London, SCM Press, 1996).

⁴⁸ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008).

⁴⁹ Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (Eugene, Cascade Books, 2017).

⁵⁰ Deane-Drummond, Celia, and Artinian-Kaiser, Rebecca, [editors] *Theology and Ecology Across The Disciplines: Our Care For Our Common Home* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)

⁵¹ Deane-Drummond, Celia and Bedford-Strohm, Henrich, [editors] *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011)

⁵² Celia Deane-Drummond, Sigurd Bergmann, and Markus Vogt [editors] *Religion in the Anthropocene*, (Cambridge: Wipf & Stock, 2017).

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⁵³ Other collections of note at this juncture include; Anne Marie Dalton, and Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope*, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2010); Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, [editors] *T&T Clark Handbook Of Christian Theology of Climate Change* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott, [editors], *Systematic Theology and Climate Change* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris, [editors], *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁵⁴ Laudato Si' Research Institute (2022) <https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/about> [accessed 25 August 2022]

our common home.’⁵⁵ In doing this, Pope Francis elevates the issue of caring for environment to a global issue facing all faiths and none, and although offering his theological and practical reflections from his own Christian perspective, nonetheless invites all people to engage in this conversation. We should note Deane-Drummond’s reflection on the lack of Christology found within this encyclical, concluding that perhaps this was a deliberate effort to engage a wider audience who may not share the Pope’s Christian faith.⁵⁶ On this note, we can also note Pope Francis efforts to pay special reference to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, referencing addresses given between 2003-2012.⁵⁷ Quoting the Patriarch could be seen as another strong, yet humble, statement which once again elevates the issue of concern for the environment as bigger than any one part of the global church.

Thomas Berry, (1914-2009), provides another highly influential voice for the field of ecotheology, in the second half of the twentieth century, that deserves to be mentioned. Berry, a catholic theologian and priest, whose ideas moved beyond the influence of his own tradition, agreed with Lynn White’s critique that the Christian narrative of human domination over the earth might be understood as a key reason behind historical, ecological breakdown.⁵⁸ Berry strongly condemned Western cultures and their prevailing narratives throughout his writing ‘in its disregard for and even hostility toward nature.’⁵⁹ His solution was that humans needed a ‘New Story’ to better understand their relationship with the Earth. In the words of Dalton and Simmons, ‘the ecological crisis is, he claims, primarily a cultural and religious crisis that will not be solved by technological fix-its. [Rather], what is needed is a new way of understanding the place of the human in the cosmos – what he calls, a new story’⁶⁰. In his important essay, *The New Story* (1970), Berry accuses the religious community of being afraid of the Earth, proposing; ‘There is a fear, a distrust, even a profound aversion to the Earth and all its processes.’⁶¹ For Berry, the ‘New Story’ that already is, and needs to emerge further, is one where humans see themselves as both a part of the wider creation and in relationship with it. ‘Human persons bear the universe in their being as the universe bears them in its being. The two have a total presence to each other.’⁶² Berry frames this relationship as a communion with the earth, an important theme is subsequently picked up on, and developed by Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*’⁶³

⁵⁵ Pope Francis, ‘*Laudato Si’: On Caring for our Common Home, Encyclical Letter*’, (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015). p. 7.

⁵⁶ Deane-Drummond, ‘A Primer’, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Francis, ‘*Laudato Si*’, p. 9-10.

⁵⁸ Deane-Drummond, ‘*Eco-Theology*’ p. 41.

⁵⁹ Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons, ‘*Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope*’, (Albany, State University of New York Press, 2010), p. 45.

⁶⁰ Dalton and Simmons, ‘*Ecotheology and the Practice*’, p. 45.

⁶¹ Thomas Berry, “The New Story.” In *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth*, eds. Arthur Fabel and Donald St. John, pp. 77-88. (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2003) p. 84.

⁶² Berry, ‘The New Story’, p. 83-84.

⁶³ Francis, ‘*Laudato Si*’, p. 47.

We also cannot ignore the significant contribution to ecotheology made by those from within the liberation tradition, itself deeply connected to the Catholic tradition. Leonardo Boff is, perhaps, the theologian who is both most consistent, and best known, for the drawing together of liberation theology with ecological issues.⁶⁴ He first wrote *Ecology and Liberation* in 1995⁶⁵ and went on to clarify his thoughts further in *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* in 1997⁶⁶. In his work, Boff states that both the poor and the earth start from a place of suffering, thus ‘liberation theology and ecological discourse have something in common: they start from two bleeding wounds....The other wound, systematic assault on the Earth, breaks down the balance of the planet, which is under threat from the of development as practised by global societies.’⁶⁷ The influence of Boff can also be found in *Laudato Si’* where Pope Francis quotes his book title *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, whilst determining that an ecological approach and a social approach cannot be separated.⁶⁸ Ecofeminism is a large and growing body of literature within ecotheology, also finding it’s roots in the liberationist traditions. Many ecofeminists determine that the oppression of the earth, like the oppression of women, can find it’s origin in the patriarchy. However, there are considerably varied political positions that exist within ecofeminism, too many to explore here.⁶⁹

A Growing Concern in the Evangelical Community

As has already been mentioned, in the broad landscape that we might describe as evangelicalism, there are a range of opinions on, and approaches to, ecological issues.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as highlighted earlier, we might note this as particularly evident within the north American evangelical church context, where, as with more broadly across society, climate change remains a hugely divisive and politicised issue. Relative to this, the discussion regarding climate change within the British evangelical church context is far less contentious, though that is not to say the UK church has fully embraced ecological issues or, indeed, are suitably engaged in seeking to address or resolve these. Nevertheless, we might observe an increasingly, steady and growing engagement over recent decades in matters concerning the environment.

Dave Bookless, a respected Anglican priest, activist and theologian offers a particularly useful narrative of recent, UK church evangelical engagement with issues of ecology in his paper *The Evolution of*

⁶⁴ Deane Drummond, ‘Eco-Theology’, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995).

⁶⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, (Maryknoll New York, Orbis Books, 1997).

⁶⁷ Boff, ‘Cry of the Earth,’ p. 104.

⁶⁸ Francis, ‘*Laudato Si’*’, p. 27.

⁶⁹ See further Heather Eaton, ‘*Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*’ Series: Introductions in Feminist Theology 12 (London, T&T Clark, 2005), p. 3.

⁷⁰ See a longer discussion of this in Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler and A. J. Swoboda, ‘*Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*’ (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 17-18.

*Evangelical Environmental Engagement*⁷¹ in 2017. In his paper Bookless presents the journey of the British evangelical, community in relation to conversations of ecology and climate over the past 30 years with the author contending that we might observe an identifiable shift within the evangelical world around the early 1990s, regarding environmental concerns. We will turn to consider the wider context of, and key thinkers related to, this shift, shortly. However, prior to this it is important to acknowledge several, key voices, earlier in the twentieth century that undoubtedly laid a foundation that later theologians would be shaped, and influenced, by. Whilst these individuals may not be recognised, primarily, as ecotheologians, or given explicit mention in texts mentioned previously, (with the exception of Jürgen Moltmann), they nonetheless have been, and remain, of significant theological influence, specifically for the evangelical church and how it understands its relationship with God's creation.

Jürgen Moltmann

Deane-Drummond cites Jürgen Moltmann's, *God in Creation: An Ecological Theology*,⁷² published in 1985, as a seminal text in twentieth century protestant theology, in helping the church to better understand its relationship to God and His creation, that subsequently paved a way for a whole stream of articles, books and resources influenced by Moltmann's writing.⁷³ Elsewhere, Moltmann would express the conviction that both society and the church need an 'ecological reformation'⁷⁴ and in order to achieve this, a 'new theological architecture'⁷⁵ is required. In a critique similar to that of White, Moltmann also calls for a change to the 'dominating and exploitative mentality which has prevailed'⁷⁶ within the Christian tradition and offers his own work as a contribution towards this new architecture⁷⁷. We might note Moltmann's work as vitally important in offering a substantial theological contribution, and trusted voice for evangelicals, in the argument that honouring creation, rather than ignoring or even worse damaging it, is ultimately a means by which we honour the God of creation.

We might also note the importance of the Christological emphasis in Moltmann's work and the implications for his concerns relating to ecology, with Deane-Drummond, writing:

⁷¹ Dave Bookless, 'The Evolution of Evangelical Environmental Engagement 1990-2016', *Crucible*, April (2017), pp.38-53.

⁷² Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

⁷³ Deane-Drummond, 'A Primer', p. 10.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, 'God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology', (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 21-22.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 22.

⁷⁷ Ben Dare, *Foundations of 'Ecological Reformation': A Critical Study Of Jürgen Moltmann's Contributions Towards A 'New Theological Architecture' For Environment Care* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2012) pp. 1-2.

Moltmann believes that a recovery of cosmic Christology is essential in relation to ecological concern, but it also needs to draw in those elements of historical Christology as well. Exactly how this might take place seems to be through a thoroughgoing eschatological interpretation of Christology. He insisted that Christology that was not also cosmic in scope was incomplete...⁷⁸

John Stott

John Stott, is widely recognised as one of the most influential Anglican ministers of the 20th century,⁷⁹ and undoubtedly represents a key voice for UK, and global evangelicalism, continuing to shape theological conversation despite his passing in 2011. Serving for many years as minister of All Souls, Langham Place, Stott not only profoundly informed church theology and practice within the British context but, it has been demonstrated, had significant influence on the life and theology of Billy Graham⁸⁰, perhaps the most famous and influential evangelical of the 20th century, and was a key part of the Lausanne Movement. Alongside this, he would establish the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC), an organisation created to equip church leaders and congregants, particularly in the evangelical tradition, around issues of concern for contemporary society. In addition, Stott was famously known to be an avid bird watcher, a passion to develop earlier in his own student years. His theology on creation grew over time, alongside his growing theology on social responsibility. Stott, undoubtedly, serves as one of the most significant voices in British evangelical theology in the second half of the twentieth century in connecting evangelism and mission with social concern and engagement, calling the British evangelical community to recognise that the gospel message, and by implication the church's mission in the world, did, in fact, have social implications.⁸¹ As concern for social, and consequently ecological, issues as part of Christian mission grew, within the evangelical tradition, through the second half of the twentieth century, Stott would choose to dedicate a chapter on the subject in his first edition of *Issues Facing Christians Today* in 1984, titled 'Our Human Environment'⁸² which had changed to 'Caring for Creation'⁸³ by the 4th and latest, 2006 edition. This was Stott's first published piece on the topic and significantly, in this chapter Stott consequently elevates ecological issues to be held alongside chapters focussed on such issues as war, human rights, gender relations, abortion and inequality. In the original chapter Stott presents some of the ecological issues of the time, which he would go on to update in later editions as other issues came to the fore, such as waste disposal and sustainable development, revealing a developing progression of thought and reflection. In this chapter

⁷⁸ Deane-Drummond, 'Eco-Theology', p. 106.

⁷⁹ R. J. (Sam) Berry with Laura S. Meitzner Yoder, *John Stott on Creation Care* (London: IVP, 2022) quoting *The Times* 2011, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 5.

⁸¹ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, (London, Church Pastoral Aid Society, 1975).

⁸² John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1984) pp. 109-121.

⁸³ Stott, John, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 4th edn. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). pp.135-160.

Stott would also explore biblical perspectives on ecology, significantly posing the question, ‘to whom does the earth belong?’⁸⁴ Drawing on Psalm 24:1, Stott reminds his readers that ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it’, along with the exhortation in Psalm 115 that ‘the highest heavens belong to the Lord; but the earth he has given to man’, concluding that this offers the balanced answer that ‘the earth belongs to both God and man’.⁸⁵ Reflecting on Genesis 3, Stott asserts man’s ‘dominion’ over the earth, however, he argues that humankind’s dominion is called to be ‘co-operative’ and ‘delegated’, likening it to a King’s relationship to viceroys, or landowners and bailiffs – concluding God has not abdicated His throne, that the earth is still His, but that human are called to care for it.⁸⁶

Whilst this chapter certainly marks an important step in the growing concern toward ecological issues, within British evangelical theological discourse, it is fair to propose that Stott’s greatest influence in these earlier years was through his involvement in the Lausanne movement. In 1974, the International Congress on World Evangelisation, held in Lausanne, Switzerland, under the influence of Latin American theologians, especially René Padilla and Samuel Escobar, would represent a significant shift in global evangelical theology of mission, calling for a much more holistic understanding of mission, which led to the drafting of the Lausanne Covenant and early understandings of Integral Mission, or *Misión Integral*.

The events leading up to and surrounding the publishing of the Lausanne Covenant have been well documented, not least by Padilla himself,⁸⁷ and represent a significant moment in global evangelical missional discourse, particularly in relation to issues of social concern. The Congress witnessed a coming together of theologians from both the global north and south, to reflect together theologically on the pressing issues of poverty experienced in many countries in the Majority World. The core concept underpinning the theology of Integral Mission, birthed in this moment, was a rejection of the dualism inherent within much mission discourse at the time separating or prioritising either evangelism or social action, and instead articulating that the mission of God be seen in a more holistic light, concerned with every aspect of people’s lives, both spiritual as well as material and physical. Consequently, a degrading global environment, adding to the poverty of millions, was seen as unacceptable within the framework of a holistic, integrated mission, and the themes of environmental justice, or eco-justice began to grow within this framework of social justice and mission.

A Shift in Perspective

⁸⁴ Stott, *Issues*, p. 111.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 111.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 113-114.

⁸⁷ C René, Padilla, ‘Integral Mission And Its Historical Development’, in *Justice, Mercy And Humility*, ed. Tim Chester (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp.42-58.

It should be mentioned that Tearfund, as an organisation, were also deeply involved in this growing awareness and growing narrative shaped toward integral mission throughout the 1970's and 80's. As far back as 1968, the organisation's Chief Executive, George Hoffman, presented a paper at the National Assembly of Evangelicals focussed on global responsibility, which resulted in a resolution being drafted where a commitment was made, 'to redress the imbalance in our total ministry to meet the social/physical needs of men, believing that compassionate service cannot be detached.'⁸⁸ As such we might consider this, and other contributions of Tearfund in these years, as representing an important undercurrent towards the theological shift to occur in the 1990s, observed by Bookless in his paper. Indeed, Bookless notes that the *Whose Earth?* campaign carried out by Tearfund, British Youth for Christ and Spring Harvest (at that time the largest evangelical conference in the UK), in 1992⁸⁹, accompanied by Chris Seaton's book of the same name⁹⁰ was a crucial moment for navigating an issue that was still a controversial one with the UK church. Echoing the words of John Stott, the answer to the overarching question posed by *Whose Earth?* was declared to be found in Psalm 24:1 and Bookless notes that what the campaign set out to achieve was to appeal to the UK evangelical community that adopting a *theocentric* approach to pressing ecological issues, rather than either *anthropocentric* or *ecocentric* strategy, was to remain most faithful to Biblical teaching⁹¹

A Renewed Emphasis in Biblical Narrative

Yet, despite this emergence of a theology and language of Integral Mission at the global and academic levels in these latter years of the twentieth century, evidenced through a multitude of publications produced by such bodies as the Lausanne Movement, Anglican Communion and World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission (WEFTC), many local churches in the UK continued, either in word or practice, to give primacy to evangelism over social concern, including issues related to the environment. During these years Christopher J. H. Wright, John Stott's successor at the Langham Partnership,⁹² would begin offering significant contributions in both Old Testament studies and Missiology, offering a key voice within British evangelical theology in developing a biblical narrative for holistic mission, which would include God's plan for wider creation.⁹³ In his *Old Testament Ethics*

⁸⁸ Quoted in Mike Holloway, *A Future and A Hope: The Story Of Tearfund And Why God Wants The Church To Change The World*, (Oxford, Monarch Books, 2008), pp. 40-41.

⁸⁹ Bookless, *The Evolution*, p. 40. Holloway, *A Future*, p. 178.

⁹⁰ Chris Seaton, *Whose Earth?* (Leicester, Crossway Books, 1992).

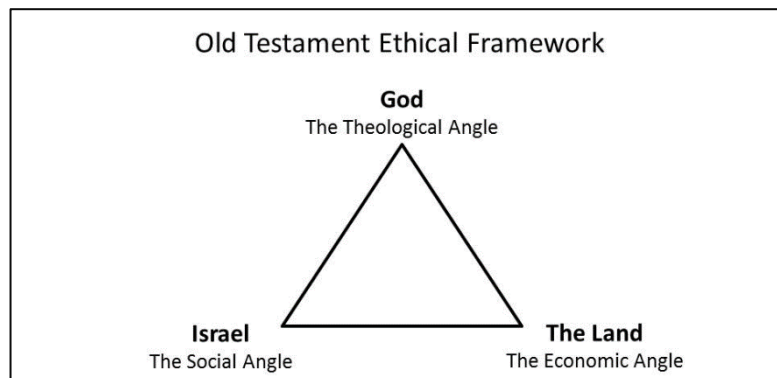
⁹¹ Bookless, *The Evolution*, p. 39.

⁹² A ministry created by John Stott in 1969 with a vision of funding scholarships for young Majority World theologians to train in British universities before returning to their home countries – these are now known as Langham Scholars. The ministry has now grown to Langham Literature and Langham Preaching. [<https://uk.langham.org/history/>]

⁹³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (London: IVP, 2004); *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (London: IVP, 2006).

for the *People of God*, Wright states in the opening pages, that to understand ethics in the Old Testament, one must first understand the Israelite's worldview, which Wright says is crucial to understanding all other ethics within the Old Testament. To this end, we might observe in the Old Testament, three pillars; namely God, which Wright calls *the theological angle*, Israel, *the social angle* and The Land, *the economic angle*. Wright conceptualizes these three pillars as a triangle of relationships (see *Figure 5*). Consequently, the land might be understood as a character within the Old Testament narrative, yet, Wright says, two major complementary ideas to this are the land as a 'divine gift', and the theme of 'divine ownership' made clear throughout the Old Testament.⁹⁴ Within this theme of divine gift, Wright also notes 'since the earth was given to all humankind, its resources were meant to be shared and be available to all...[thus the earth's resources are] the legacy bequeathed to the whole human race.'⁹⁵

*Figure 5*⁹⁶



In a later publication, *The Mission of God*, Wright uses this same triangle to frame the book. Yet, Wright further maps to the triangle, *The God of Mission*, to Israel he maps *The People of Mission*, and to the land he maps, *The Arena of Mission*⁹⁷. He then widens the triangle to explain what he proposes Paul uses to explain the doctrine of creation to the gentiles in Athens, who did not work from the basis of an Old Testament worldview.⁹⁸ (See *Figure 6*)

*Figure 6*⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Wright, 'OT Ethics', p. 77.

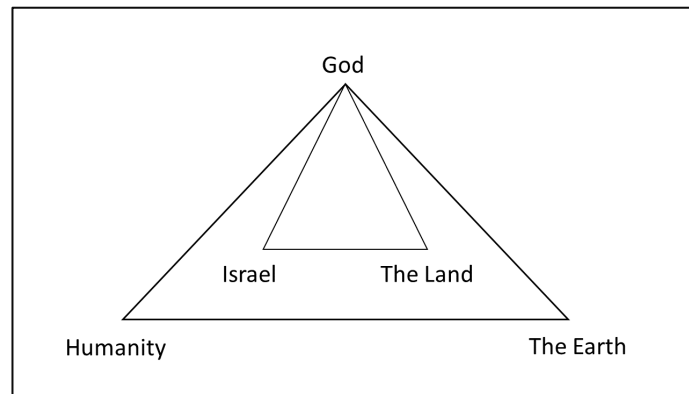
⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 147.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Wright, 'The Mission of God', p. 28.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 394.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 395.



For Wright, the land, the arena of God's mission, is fundamental to a complete understanding of mission. He says that all throughout the Old Testament the land is discussed '*in relation to God*'¹⁰⁰ who created it, and therefore pointedly says, 'If the earth has a sanctity derived from its relation to the Creator, then our treatment of the earth will be a reflex and a measure of our own relationship with the creator.'¹⁰¹ We can note that Wright also played a key role in Lausanne's 2010 Cape Town Commitment, another important gathering for evangelicals, globally, serving as the editor and chief author of the published commitment, which has an express commitment to love God's world. It reads:

We love the world of God's creation. This love is not mere sentimental affection for nature (which the Bible nowhere commands), still less is it pantheistic worship of nature (which the Bible expressly forbids). Rather it is the logical outworking of our love for God by caring for what belongs to him... We care for the earth, most simply, because it belongs to the one whom we call Lord.¹⁰²

The Commitment continues, expressing a conviction in the ultimate redemption of the earth and through this, we see the connected relationship, between humankind's relationship with the earth as an expression of relationship with the Creator.

The earth is created, sustained and redeemed by Christ. We cannot claim to love God while abusing what belongs to Christ by right of creation, redemption and inheritance. We care for the earth and responsibly use its abundant resources, not according to the rationale of the secular world, but for the Lord's sake... For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 402.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 403.

¹⁰² Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment, 7.1.A (2010)*
<https://lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p1-7> [accessed 28 August 2022].

Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.¹⁰³

This last declaration, that care of God's creation is in fact a 'gospel issue' offers a clear challenge to any notion of a dualistic theology, seeking to separate evangelism from social action and creation care. Furthermore, Bookless notes the 'catalytic' impact of this conference and the birth of what is now a joint initiative between the Lausanne Movement and the World Evangelical Alliance for a Creation Care Network.¹⁰⁴

Along with this significant influence brought by both Wright and Stott, not least through a reshaped and redeveloped biblical narrative for holistic, integral mission and its implications for evangelical conceptions of God's created world, are several other key theological voices within the UK context. These have crucially shaped evangelical theology over recent decades which, similarly has informed understandings towards the environment. In particular, it is important to highlight the work of the renowned, New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, N. T. Wright. Wright's publications are extensive and too many to consider here. Nevertheless, we might note several key publications, including *New Heavens and New Earth* (1999)¹⁰⁵, *The Last Word* (2005)¹⁰⁶ and *Surprised By Hope* (2008)¹⁰⁷, as demonstrating Wright's impact in a reading of Scripture through a five-act narrative, a renewed emphasis on the cosmic dimensions of Christian soteriology and the eschatological implications, and a Kingdom theology that presents challenging ethical considerations for disciples of Jesus in the present world. All of these dimensions to the theology of Wright could be considered to have crucial meaning for how Christians view and engage with the world around them, including our approach to challenges raised by the climate crisis. Similarly, we cannot ignore the important contribution of Richard Bauckham, another well respected New Testament theologian, and in particular his publications, *Bible and Ecology* (2010)¹⁰⁸ and, *Living with other Creatures* (2011)¹⁰⁹. In the work of Bauckham we might truly observe the significant developments to occur in recent decades in the

¹⁰³ *The Cape Town Commitment*, 7.1.A

¹⁰⁴ Bookless, 'The Evolution', p. 43. See also: <http://lwccn.com/> [accessed 30 August 2022]

¹⁰⁵ N.T. Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture Of The Christian Hope*, (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond The Bible Wars To A New Understanding Of The Authority Of Scripture*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Tom Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, (London: SPCK, 2007)

¹⁰⁸ Richard Bauckham, *Bible And Ecology: Rediscovering The Community Of Creation*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Richard Bauckham, *Living With Other Creatures: Green Exegesis And Theology*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).

presence of ecotheology, as a serious and considered field of discipline within the contemporary evangelical tradition.

The Contemporary (Multi-disciplinary) Conversation

Having tracked some of that narrative change within the evangelical church, through theological literature, and the growing engagement of the tradition with ecological issues over recent decades, when surveying the contemporary landscape of evangelical discourse on issues relating to the environment, I have chosen to identify three broad and emerging typologies of literature. There are; published material which seeks to engage those in the evangelical tradition on issues at a deeper, academic level and offering theological exploration and reflection on a variety of interrelated ecological subjects and themes; more popular writings aimed at the wider Christian community in an attempt to encourage them to engage either initially, or perhaps further, with the issues relevant to the climate crisis and finally; those reports and resources, produced primarily by concerned denominational bodies as well as wider Christian organisations and networks aimed at both raising awareness and encouraging activism on environmental issues through a range of means and methods. It is helpful to consider these different typologies along a spectrum rather than in isolation from one another, with some authors and publishers spanning several types.

Theological reflections on issues

As proposed, for the first of these typologies, we might note a small, but increasingly growing body of theological reflection and exploration on specific ecological issues from self-professed evangelical perspectives. Again, in returning to my earlier comments we might recognise the evangelical tradition as quite broad, and hard to define, but I refer to literature proposed by theological voices that could be largely defined as finding themselves located within the tradition of features identified by Bebbington. Perhaps one of the most established writers in this area, offering a substantial body of work is Michael Northcott. Northcott might, arguably, be described as the foremost Christian environmental ethicist in the UK today and has written extensively in this field. Some key works of note include; *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (1996),¹¹⁰ *A Moral Climate, The Ethics of Global Warming* (2007)¹¹¹ and *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (2014)¹¹². Northcott has written on an array of political and ethical issues in relation to climate change, including, carbon markets¹¹³, air pollution¹¹⁴ ecological

¹¹⁰ Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment And Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹¹¹ Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics Of Global Warming*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007).

¹¹² Michael S. Northcott, *A Political Theology Of Climate Change* (London: SPCK, 2014), pp. 119-160.

¹¹³ Michael S. Northcott, 'The concealments of carbon markets and the publicity of love in a time of climate change', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 4:3 (2010) 294-313. <doi.org/10.1163/156973210X510866>

¹¹⁴ Northcott, 'A Political Theology', pp. 85-118.

debt¹¹⁵ and biofuel¹¹⁶. Norman Wirzba, stands as another Christian theologian and ethicist and also offers a growing body of work particularly on issues of the land, food and eating. Mick Pope, an Australian ecotheologian and lecturer in Meteorology, offers another voice within wider, global evangelicalism and who has published many papers in areas of meteorology and theology, and in 2018, published *The Sea is Eating the Ground: A Theology of Sea Level Rise*¹¹⁷ in the Anglican Theological Review. The title of the paper is powerfully drawn from a quote given by a thirteen-year-old girl, living on the Carteret Islands, in the south-western Pacific, after watching storms and sea-level rises, take away parts of their islands.¹¹⁸ Pope has also written two more accessible books for *The Justice Conference, Australia*, relating to climate justice¹¹⁹ and eschatology¹²⁰, encouraging an already warm audience on the topics of climate justice and social justice more widely, into a deeper theological conversation on this issue.

These contributions mentioned, are representative of an encouraging, growing body of work helping people to engage theologically with scientific literature and greater understanding of what is happening in our world. Nevertheless, we might consider this literature, described here as contemporary ecotheological reflection and exploration, as remaining relatively small in relation to the scope of the conversation and challenges being faced and it remains possible to point to other traditions where we witness a greater breadth of theologians tackling issues such as bio-diversity loss, climate and technology, agrarianism.

Popular Writing

In his paper, mentioned earlier, Dave Bookless, also makes note of the rise of more popular, and accessible writing, in the area of ecotheology and sustainability issues within the evangelical space over recent decades.¹²¹ Some of these publications have been written by academically recognised theologians, trying to reach a wider audience, and other pieces could be considered to have been written by thoughtful practitioners, activists, poets and clergy. Some of these have already been mentioned earlier in this chapter and we might consider them to occupy blurred boundaries between what may be

¹¹⁵ Northcott, 'A Political Theology', pp. 119-160.

¹¹⁶ Michael S. Northcott, 'Biofuel Energy, Ancestral Time and the Destruction of Borneo: An Ethical Perspective.' In M. Ozawa, J. Chaplin, M. Pollitt, D. Reiner, & P. Warde (Eds.), *'In Search of Good Energy Policy: Cambridge Studies on Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Governance'*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 237-256., <doi:10.1017/9781108639439.017>

¹¹⁷ Mick Pope, 'The Sea Is Eating the Ground: A Theology of Sea Level Rise', *Anglican Theological Review*, 100:1, (2018), 79-92.

¹¹⁸ Pope, 'The Sea Is Eating the Ground: A Theology of Sea Level Rise' pp. 79-80.

¹¹⁹ Mick Pope, *A Climate Of Justice: Loving Your Neighbour In A Warming World* (Victoria: Morning Star Publishing, 2017).

¹²⁰ Mick Pope, *All Things New: God's Plan To Renew Our World* (Victoria, Morning Star Publishing, 2018)

¹²¹ Bookless, 'The Evolution', pp. 46-47, 49.

considered theological exploration or more, popular writing. As mentioned, in the UK context, we cannot underestimate the continued influence and reach of John Stott. Along with several of his more substantial texts, Stott spent a lifetime preaching many sermons, editing Bible commentaries and producing other materials relating to holistic mission and care of creation.¹²² We might also note his continued legacy through the aforementioned, LICC and its publications related to whole life worship and discipleship which includes consideration towards God's creation.¹²³

Beyond this, Wendell Berry is an American based poet, essayist, novelist, farmer and has written extensively in the areas of the ecological crisis related to land use, industrial farming, consumerism, food, economics, feminism, technology, culture, energy use and more.¹²⁴ His life and accessible writing style, including poems have led him to capture the imagination of many on issues relating to the environment. A significant voice in the UK context is that of Ruth Valerio. Her book *L is for Lifestyle*¹²⁵, first published in 2004 offers a deeply practical resource, presenting a different area of sustainable living to correspond with every letter of the alphabet. This book offers a useful guide and a reference book for people looking to grow in their understanding of environmental issues whilst simultaneously offering ideas for ways of living more sustainably, thus mixing reflection and practice. In 2019 this publication was more fully updated, reflecting the lifestyle and societal changes even over the space of 15 years.¹²⁶ After completing her own PhD in 2013¹²⁷, Valerio adapted this research into the publication *Just Living*¹²⁸ in 2016 where she expanded further, her theological reflection on living simply and sustainably in a globalised and consumerist world. The release of this book coincided with an observable growing interest, within the UK evangelical church, on the subject of living sustainably and a desire for more theologically rooted literature to inform this. Finally, we might note that Valerio authored The Archbishop of Canterbury's 2020 Lenten book, in which she reflects on the different days of creation found in Genesis 1, and the different themes of light, water, land and so on.¹²⁹ Space does

¹²² John Stott, *The Message of Romans: The Bible Speaks Today Series* (London: IVP, 1994); *Favourite Psalms*, (Milton Keynes, Word Publishing, 1988); For a fuller list, see Berry & Yoder, *John Stott on Creation Care*, pp. 12-14.

¹²³ London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, (2022) <https://licc.org.uk/> [Accessed 28 August 2022].

¹²⁴ With close to 80 publications, there is not space to list them all here, however some significant works are: Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, (Berkeley, Counterpoint, 1977), a collection of some key essays can be found in Paul Kingsnorth, *The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry* (St Ives, Allen Lane, 2017), Wendell Berry *Our Only World: 10 Essays* (Berkeley, Counterpoint, 2015), Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, Counterpoint, 2013)

¹²⁵ Ruth Valerio, *L Is For Lifestyle: Christian Living That Doesn't Cost The Earth*, 1st edn. (London: IVP Press, 2004)

¹²⁶ Ruth Valerio, *L Is For Lifestyle: Christian Living That Doesn't Cost The Earth*, Rev and Updated edn. (London: IVP Press, 2019).

¹²⁷ Ruth Valerio, *Koinonia And Anachoresis: An Exploration of the Concept and Practice of Simple Living as a Christian Response to Consumerism* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Kings College London, 2013).

¹²⁸ Ruth Valerio, *Just Living*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2016).

¹²⁹ Ruth Valerio *Saying Yes to Life: The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2020* (London, SPCK, 2019).

not allow a mention of many other authors, but these publications have undoubtedly, helped to bring the discussion of climate change and sustainable living into Christian households, bible study groups, churches, and student groups in ever-increasingly, accessible ways.

Reports and Resources (For Theological Reflection and Activism)

Finally, we might note a third typology in the form of reports and resources produced by organisations and networks, as well as denominational bodies, some collaboratively to further discussion and raise awareness or to intentionally equip evangelicals into activism.

A few of Tearfund's reports and initiatives have already been mentioned, and space does not permit an exhaustive list to be offered here, but further publications of note include, *Why Advocate On Climate Change?*¹³⁰, aimed at the global church, including those in the Majority World, explaining the key issues behind climate change along with some of the relevant scientific information, and the role governments can play in protecting their citizens. *No Time to Waste*¹³¹ published in 2019, looks specifically at plastic pollution and the impact of this on the world's poorest, linking lifestyle and poverty issues together. Beyond Tearfund, A Rocha UK annually produce resource packs for churches as part of 'Environment Sunday'¹³² and their hugely successful initiative, *Eco Church* an award scheme where churches work their way through Bronze, Silver, and Gold status' as they take practical steps towards sustainability, has attracted participation from churches across the country. In addition, the organisation offers a range of resources suitable for theological reflection and discipleship that can be used in sermons as well as small group settings. We might also note The John Ray Institute (JRI), whose past president, Sir John Houghton who died in 2020, was an evangelical Christian and internationally recognised climate scientist, who worked with the IPCC and won numerous international awards, 'including a share in the Nobel Peace Prize (with the IPCC and Al Gore) and the Japan Prize.'¹³³ JRI has also provided many invaluable resources for evangelical Christians to draw upon. Including running influential conferences for evangelical leaders, JRI have over 40 briefing papers on issues related to climate change, sustainability and a Christian response. They also jointly run, with A Rocha UK, a distance-learning course titled Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES).

¹³⁰ Tearfund, *Why Advocate On Climate Change?* (2011) <https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/series/why-advocate/why-advocate-on-climate-change> [Accessed on 28 August 2022].

¹³¹ Tearfund, *'No Time To Waste'*, (Teddington, Tearfund, 2019). <https://res.cloudinary.com/tearfund/image/fetch/https://learn.tearfund.org/-/media/learn/resources/reports/2019-tearfund-consortium-no-time-to-waste-en.pdf> [Accessed 28 August 2022].

¹³² Bookless, 'An Evolution', pp. 46-47.

¹³³ The John Ray Institute (2022) <https://jri.org.uk/sir-john-houghton-1931-2020/> [accessed 30 August 2022]

Conclusion

What is observable is that there are clear negative impacts of overconsumption on the environment. Many of the authors mentioned have discussed consumerism, and even offered well researched practical ways for people to change their lifestyles, yet there is limited attention paid to understanding consumerism itself and the effects and holds it can have over people. The exception to this is Ruth Valerio's *Just Living*, where she dedicates a chapter to better understanding consumerism from both the side of the producer and the side of the consumer.¹³⁴ However, even here, little or no attention is paid to the concept of *desire* that drives a person to consume - desire being an important aspect of spirituality. This is not to say there isn't writing around the connection of consumerism, desire and spirituality within Christian theology, as evidenced by authors such as Vincent Miller¹³⁵ and Tom Beaudoin¹³⁶ both Catholic theologians, or James K.A. Smith¹³⁷, an evangelical theologian, yet these writers do not explicitly connect this to the ecological crisis.

In order to preserve and prioritize the environment, therefore, the church needs re-engagement and fresh theological reflection on its understanding of desire as a driver to consume, our relationship to things, our engagement with a consumer economy and ultimately, I would argue, our relationship with God. This would, consequently, create the frameworks necessary for modern Christian living within a consumer culture, and in an era of climate breakdown, to combat such degradation.

¹³⁴ Valerio, *Just Living*, pp. 57-83.

¹³⁵ Vincent J Miller, '*Consuming religion: Christian faith and practice in a consumer Religion*' (London, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005).

¹³⁶ Tom Beaudoin, '*Consuming faith: Integrating who we are with what we Buy*' (United States, National Book Network, 2003).

¹³⁷ James K. A. Smith, '*You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*', (Grand Rapids, Brazos Press, 2016).

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