

“THE EARTH REMAINS FOREVER”: ECCLESIASTES 1: 1-18 AS A BASIS FOR A
CHRISTIAN, THEOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC AS AN ANTIDOTE TO
THE MODERN EMPHASIS OF CONTROL AND AS A NEW PERSPECTIVE
WITHIN POSTMODERNISM.

by

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Abstract

Currently the world is in the midst of a major ecological crisis, of which climate change is a key element. It is contended that this ecological destruction is largely a result of the underlying values controlling ethics and the controlling instinct of the modern worldview, which has been dominant for the past three centuries. The most recent and still emerging worldview, postmodernism, is examined and contrasted as a rebuttal to the modernistic tendencies and ethics. Utilising Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18, the ethical themes that the author of Ecclesiastes used are explored and paralleled to similar views found in postmodernism. Together, these biblical and postmodern thoughts illustrate how a strong environmental ethic can be formed that counters the modernistic worldview of controlling creation. The outcome of this research is to integrate aspects of postmodern thought with the book of Ecclesiastes to present a theological ethical basis from which a Christian can view and act towards creation.

Key Words:

Environmental Ethics, Modernism, Postmodernism, Nature, Environmental Crisis, Climate Change, Control, Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18, Cosmic Christ, Worldviews.

Declaration

Student number: 42868777

I declare that *“The earth remains forever”*: *Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18 as a basis for a Christian, theological environmental ethic as an antidote to the modern emphasis of control and as a new perspective within postmodernism*, is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references

SIGNED: _____ DATE: _____
Jonathan Alexander Smith

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Table of Contents

Title Page

Summary and Key Words

Declaration

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	8
Introduction.....	8
1.1 The Aim of the Study.....	9
1.2 Global Warming.....	9
1.3 The Christian Response.....	11
1.4 “Modern” and “Postmodern” worldviews.....	12
1.5 Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18 and a New Ethic.....	15
1.6 Methodology: Approach and Strategy	16
1.7 An Outline of the Study	18
Chapter 2.....	21
Global Warming—a Case in Point	21
2.1 The Current Environmental Crisis	21
2.2 Figures and Facts.....	22
2.3 The Effects of Pollution, Climate Change and Global Warming Globally and Locally	26
2.3.1 Animal and Plant Life and Changing Landscapes	28
2.3.2 The Oceans and Marine Life.....	30
2.3.3 South African Impacts	32
Chapter 3.....	35
The Modern Worldview.....	35
3.1 The Development of the Modern Worldview	35
3.1.1 Plato’s Influence	38
3.1.2 Aquinas’s Influence	42
3.1.3 The Renaissance.....	44
3.1.4 The Enlightenment.....	46
3.1.5 The Modern Worldview Emerges.....	48
3.1.6 A “Story”	50
3.2 Definition and Characteristics.....	52
3.3 Modernism’s Emphasis on Control.....	55
3.4 Christian Thought and Ethics Impacted by Modernity’s Quest for Control	61
3.4.1 Response to the Above Arguments.....	69
CHAPTER 4	77
The Postmodern Worldview	77
4.1 The Development of the Postmodern Worldview.....	77
4.2 Defining Postmodernism.....	82

4.3	Characteristics, Functions and Ethics of Post Modernism	85
4.3.1	Deconstruction: An antidote to control	86
4.3.2	Challenging the Modern Worldview	89
4.3.3	Intensifications of the Modern Worldview	90
4.3.4	Inversion of the Modern Worldview	93
4.3.5	Unmaskings of the Modern Worldview	97
4.4	The Christian Responses to Postmodernism and the Ethical Implications	98
CHAPTER 5		104
Ecclesiastes, Postmodernism and Environmental Ethics		104
5.1	Approaching Scripture	104
5.2	Wisdom Literature.....	110
5.2.1	Characteristics of Wisdom Spirituality within the Old Testament	111
5.3	Ecclesiastes.....	117
5.3.1	Author	118
5.3.2	Date and Historical setting.....	121
5.3.3	Literary Expression and Structure	124
5.4	Postmodernism and Ecclesiastes: Vapour and the Earth Remaining Forever .	129
5.4.1	Vapour.....	129
5.4.2	Ecclesiastes 1:1-18, The Earth Remains Forever	134
5.4.3	Qohelet speaking to Postmoderns	138
CHAPTER 6		144
Developing an alternative postmodern environmental ethic		144
6.1	God and Creation: Transcendence and Immanence and Cosmic Christ	147
6.1.1	The Cosmic Christ	147
6.1.2	Countering Dualism	153
6.2	Humanity and Creation: Living together in Community	157
6.3	A ‘New’ Vision and Ethic	161
CHAPTER 7		169
Conclusion		169
Bibliography		173

Chapter 1

Introduction

Currently, the earth is facing an environmental crisis. Across the globe, the impact of human activity is affecting creation. From the destruction of forests, like the Amazon, to the killing to near extinction of various species, such as whales and Rhino's and the major over fishing occurring in the oceans, to the scourge of pollution being pumped into the waters and the air of the planet, the earth is strongly feeling the effects of human expansion, growth and consumption¹.

And the consequence of this environmental degradation and destruction, is already being felt, and if left unchecked could lead to catastrophic consequences for the planet. The effects are far-reaching and can be devastating; from the destruction of forests and the eco-systems related to them, to rising sea levels and drastic climate change on the back of global warming, to mass extinctions within the plant and animal world, to over-fishing and the destruction of marine reefs and livelihood (cf. Socolow 2005:50; (Zdanow 2009).

This current environmental crisis obviously raises serious questions and challenges for Christian theology and ethics. The question needs to be asked as to why this crisis has developed, and if the Christian church has been party to this crisis. It also raises questions around how one understands their relation to creation and to God, and how this understanding will lead to an ethic that can be destructive. The challenge is also

¹ See www.wwf.com and www.greenpeace.com for descriptions of the huge challenges currently facing the planet and all creatures that reside on it.

presented as to what response needs to be forth-coming from the church and in what form that ethical response should take. And it is the author's opinion that every Christian should ask these questions and seek response to these challenges, as the Christian needs to relate justice and mercy at the crises that determine the future of the earth.

1.1 The Aim of the Study

It is the goal of this research is, in light of the environmental crisis facing the planet, to investigate the worldview that has influenced Christian theology negatively regarding the environment, and by using scripture (specifically Ecclesiastes), to present a different environmental ethic based on the postmodern worldview, which is presented as being compatible with a Christian ethic in relation to creation. This research comes at a key moment in time as the need for the re-formulation of an ethic of environmental care is becoming a necessity.

1.2 Global Warming

One area in which the environmental crisis is being experienced is the issue of global warming and global climate change as a result of air pollution and carbon emissions. There are many environmental problems and issues currently facing the world currently, so it was decided to focus on one major issue, that of global warming and climate change. It was decided to focus on this as this is a very topical issue at the moment, as the press and politicians and the general population are well aware of this and the current arguments going around. Global warming is also a very serious problem, as if some

estimates (as discussed in Chapter 2) are taken as fact, the fate of life on the planet as it is known may be drastically affected. It is thus very relevant to focus on this issue and see if and how an ethical response can be developed.

The global warming crisis is largely a result of human activity in the production of Carbon Dioxide, which is produced as an emission from the burning of fossil fuels within industries, electrical usage and vehicle usage. Global warming theory states that the earth's atmosphere, which regulates the flow of solar energy, has increased drastically in warmth due to an increase in levels of Greenhouse Gasses (primarily Carbon Dioxide), whose increase is largely a result of human activity (cf. Mather 1997:159-160). Radiation from the sun is reflected off the earth into the atmosphere, where most of the radiation escapes the atmosphere, and only some of it is reflected back to the earth, enabling the atmosphere to regulate the earth's temperature. An increase in Greenhouse Gasses as a result of human activity results in more out-going radiation being trapped, as it does not sufficiently escape the earth's atmosphere. This leads to a heating of the earth's temperature, which plays havoc on climatic conditions, as well as impacting human, marine and animal life (cf. Mather 1997:160).. This is a problem that the entire planet is facing, and its effects are being felt across the globe, from plant and animal extinctions, to marine and ocean life and reefs disappearing, to the changing landscapes as a result of the changing climate. Even within South Africa the effects of these global changes are impacting upon the lives of all people.²

² These thoughts will be further discussed in Chapter 2

This crisis has manifested in many ways but along with the economic meltdown and recession that is being experienced all over the world, the need to provide strong, ethical solutions to the problems facing the world had become a stronger priority. At every global leaders summit or meeting (such as the G8, G20 yearly Meetings, the upcoming Copenhagen Climate Change Meeting and during the UN Assemblies discussions) , the issues of climate change has become a priority on the agenda, with many solutions being offered, and many differences in opinion as to what the causes are and if it is anyone's fault.

1.3 The Christian Response

The Christian church unfortunately has been silent³ for too long on environmental issues, and at times has gone as far as to allow a secular worldview to determine their reading and understanding of Scripture as far as environmental care is concerned. In fact, throughout its history, Christianity at times has been influenced by the dominant worldview of that time. One such worldview, Modernity, has strongly influenced Western Christianities' thoughts and ideals and an unfortunate part of this influence is reliance on dualism to understand the world. This has led to a situation at times when the environment has been perceived to be there to serve humanity, to be abused for the sake of profit (Santrime 2000:1). In this religious worldview, the environment is only the background for the personalised faith in which God only deals with humanity (cf. Davis 2002:268-269).

³ This is obviously a generalisation that true of 'the church' in general, but it does need to be noted that there have been churches that have spoken out on this issue and which have statements on environmental care. For example, see www.trinitylinden.org as a church that takes environmental care seriously.

This has led to some proponents to claim that Christianity as a religion is ‘anti’ the environment (Santrime 2000:17). One proponent of this view, Matthew Fox, goes as far to state that Christianity is ecologically bankrupt. For Fox this destruction is based in the concept of original sin (of which Augustine is the main perpetrator), and it has tainted Christianity with a theological dualism which subsequently allows humans to abuse nature. (Santrime 2000:18-20). However, this type of reasoning is not instructive to the issues at hand⁴, and so one can contend that Christianity is not ecologically bankrupt. Rather, it was more an adoption of a modern, western dualistic worldview that has resulted, in part, with Christianity having a poor ecological record. And subsequently, there is an alternative Christian worldview that views creation, God and humanity with respect and love.

This study will therefore present an important perspective to the Christian theology and ethical scene. By examining the roles that worldviews play on how theology is believed and lived, it will be able to see those areas which are more a result of culture than true Christian belief. This study will also enable a practical ethic to be lived out in the care and relation that one can develop towards the earth.

1.4 “Modern” and “Postmodern” worldviews

This alternative Christian worldview is one that views creation with care and it relies on postmodern thought in a quest to rethink and redo Christianity in a way that does the

⁴ Fox’s argument fails in many aspects; his concepts only speak to elite, as they do not offer hope to poor and oppressed. They fail to tackle the problem of radical evil, the reality of original sin, and the cornerstones of traditional Christian doctrine. Thus there is no reality of struggle, no truth of a fall-redemption motif, and paradoxically, no hope available to the entire cosmos (cf. Santrime 2000:15-25).

message of Christ justice. This new form of Christianity, often referred to as emergent Christian thought⁵, argues that the ethical implications and structures that the Western world function one are in fact a result of Modernity interpreting scripture to try and develop an ethic of control⁶. Even though humanity always lives times of change, these current times in which modernism and postmodernism are meeting, seem to be more transitional than others (Leithart 2008:13).

And thus, to correctly comprehend these thoughts, the modern and postmodern worldview need to be examined in depth⁷. Modernism emerged out of the enlightenment; and its philosophers were the scientific disciples who were hoping for a brave new world and utilizing technology and mathematics in their design, and science was seen as their way of hope. Reason, objectivity, observation and the belief began to develop that everything could be explained became the cornerstones of correct thought. Naturalism, humanism, reductionism were all elevated as key features, and certainty and determinism were seen as humanity's prime goal. Individualism was the model used to understand life, and any eternal authority (especially any concept of God) was seen as folly in light of human reason⁸. One of the core elements of modernity is the need to erect walls and boundaries that will keep the world neatly controlled and divided. Modernity is overly confident in its ability to control—and thereby virtually eradicate— nature, among other

⁵ For a good introduction refer to Rob Bell's Book, *Velvet Elvis*

⁶ These ideas are further developed in Section 3.4 and Section 4.4

⁷ See Chapters 3 and 4 for the in-depth discussions.

⁸ This is especially true of 'later' modern thought. To avoid oversimplifying the matter, it must be noted that many early Enlightenment thinkers held to deism, which means they acknowledge the existence of a far away, transcendent God. In this current age, deism does not have many followers.

things (O'Brien 2004:297). This controlling thought is discussed as one of the key foundations to the root of modernistic tendencies to treat creation as a secondary object.

Consequently, postmodernism emerged as a protest movement within Modernism to highlight these tendencies. As Modernism was reaching the crux of its progress, certain elements of society began to question and wonder if the true goal of modernity was good and the ideal quest after all. The movement and belief that had promised freedom, progress, peace and rational understanding of the world appeared to be missing many elements that were redeemable. Postmodernism itself is extremely challenging to define, but at its core is a changing worldview in the Western world is causing a questioning of previous ethical assumptions that were held. And this is especially true regarding the environmental crisis. It is as Gare (1995:1) argued, the "Reflection of the postmodern condition and reflection on the environmental crisis have much in common as both attempt to understand the condition of the modern world and how it came to be this way". This paper will contend that this ecological problem is largely a result of the underlying values and the controlling instinct of the modern worldview, which has been dominant for the past three centuries. This worldview and dominant ethic will be contrasted with the more recent and still emerging worldview, postmodernism, which presents a rebuttal to the modernistic tendencies and modernistic ethics, is accepted as a promising worldview to help and deal with the Environmental crises.⁹

⁹ Chapters 3 and 4 investigate these worldviews in much more detail

1.5 Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18 and a New Ethic

The modernistic quest for control and its success in controlling life in general, and creation in particular, has partly resulted in the postmodern worldview. In this worldview, which is against modernity, the view is presented that life is a liquid, a vapour, a mist. And this view, so often shied away from by Christians, can be reflected in the writings of Ecclesiastes. Within the context that the biblical text was written, social and political circumstances were at play, and these in many ways reflect a world that is similar to current age that humanity finds itself in. And from this basis, Ecclesiastes flips wisdom tradition on its head, by questioning and this and many other observed life experiences. This reflection on humanity's plight before God in a time that was full of uncertainty is a message that is echoed in many ways by the postmodern mind today.

The emerging and changing worldview is discussed in detail by examining Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18, as in these verses one gains the understating of how the author of Ecclesiastes rejected any forms to control; a theme that is similarly felt within the postmodern mind. And so the ethical themes that the author of Ecclesiastes explored can be paralleled to similar views found in postmodernism. Together, these biblical and postmodern ideas will illustrate how a strong environmental ethic can be formed that counters the modernistic worldview of seeking to control creation.¹⁰

The final outcome of this research is done by integrating the aspects of postmodern thought with the book of Ecclesiastes to present a theological ethical basis from which a

¹⁰ This is explored in more detail in Chapter 5

Christian can develop an ethic as to how to view and act towards creation. The relationship between God and Creation as well as the Transcendence and Immanence of God is explored; as well as the concept of a Cosmic Christ. These discussions are used to create an ethic which counters Dualism and creates a harmonious picture of humanity and creation living together in community.

1.6 Methodology: Approach and Strategy

The research approach followed for this paper is that which is generally followed in research dissertations; recent, relevant and necessary material was gathered (largely from journals, books, papers, and the latest and trusted internet articles). Well know and trusted blogs, and at times newspaper article and scholarly on-line dictionaries were also utilised at certain instances. These were then read, analysed, researched and presented as widely as possible in order to gain a good understanding of the scope, the topic and the arguments involved. One or two interviews were also conducted where needed, and a conference was attended to ensure that the most relevant and cutting edge data was utilised. Opportunity was also utilised for practical experience to be incorporated at a more foundational level, as my current career is involved in monitoring and suggesting improvements within Air Quality Management.

In a dissertation such as this, not every item or argument or debatable issue is discussed in depth due to the scope of the paper and space constraints; where necessary, footnotes are utilised to indicate further study or information that can be pursued. At times certain books or articles are referred to as a source for this further information, and they are

detailed within the Bibliography. The Bibliography reflects all sources used within the paper, but it is a select Bibliography as not all the reading done for this dissertation was included.

A project such as this one requires much planning, research and investigation to determine to ensure that all views are correctly understood and that the latest data is utilised. Throughout the process, two difficulties had to always be managed. Firstly, since the scientific research regarding climate change is a current problem, there is continual new research that is being generated and presented. The challenge was to ensure that the most up to date articles, journals, meetings were included, while also ensuring that the paper was able to be written within a time-frame (that is, it is not an open ended dialogue). As much as is possible the most recent data between 2007 and 2009 has been included; obviously not all the data nor the most recent findings can be included, but this is in no way to discount them.

The second difficulty encountered, especially when it came to discussions on worldviews and the Christian church, was the continual danger of generalising. Research of this type cannot be done without allow for some generalisation, and wherever these were picked up on, they were mentioned as generalisations. Yet, this paper is not attempting to present a generalised solution, it is hoped that real, practical and particular aspects of the discussion can be applied into the situation that is currently faced.

1.7 An Outline of the Study

Chapter one will present the problem that will be studied. The aim of the study will be investigated, as well as an outline for what will be discussed is presented. The background to the research which is done is highlighted, as well as the approach and methodology that was used is briefly discussed.

Chapter two deals with the current environmental crisis, specifically focusing on the figures, facts and influences of global warming and climate change. The effects of this on animal and plant life, changing landscapes, oceans and marine life and the impact on a South African situation is examined.

Chapter three discusses the modern worldview. The development of the modern worldview is discussed, specifically Plato's and Aquinas's influence, as well the renaissance and the enlightenment within the emergence of the Modernistic worldview. A "story" of Modernism's influence is used to offer an interesting perspective to help and understand the roots of this worldview. This chapter also explores the definition and characteristics, highlights modernism's emphasis on control. It is concluded with a discussion on how Christian thought and ethics have been impacted by modernity's quest for control; as well as a response to these modernistic ideas.

Following the same structure as chapter three, chapter four explores the postmodern worldview. The development of the postmodern worldview is offered, and then a

definition, as well as characteristics, functions and ethics of postmodernism are discussed. The concept of deconstruction as an antidote to control, as well as three challenges (intensifications, inversions and unmaskings) to the modern worldview is presented. Finally, the Christian responses to postmodernism and the ethical implications is examined.

Having established the worldviews at play today, Chapter five turns to examine scripture, especially Wisdom Literature as found in the book of Ecclesiastes. The author, date and historical setting, literary expression and structure is laid as a foundation from which to explore the key text. Parallels between postmodernism and Ecclesiastes are drawn, especially regarding the vaporous nature of life and the concept of *The Earth Remaining Forever*. This chapter concludes with how the author of Ecclesiastes could be speaking to a postmodern worldview

In light of the above chapter, Chapter six lays a foundation from which an alternative postmodern environmental ethic can emerge. God, creation and humanity are examined; the concept of the ‘Cosmic Christ’ as a counter to modernistic dualism is presented. The role and need for humanity and creation to live together in community as part of a ‘new’ vision and ethic within the postmodern worldview is presented.

Chapter seven is the final chapter in which concluding remarks and statements about the research and findings of the research are made. And a conclusion is drawn based on the discussions and arguments that have been presented.

This Chapter has dealt with a general overview of what will be discussed, as well as presenting the modes and means by which the research was conducted. As per the above, the environmental crisis that is facing the earth is serious, and is presenting very serious challenges to how humanity ethically responds to these issues. Before one discusses the worldviews that are play within the crises, and before any response can be presented, it is worth exploring in detail what is actually occurring within the environment, and what destruction could occur over the next few decades.

Chapter 2

Global Warming—a Case in Point

This chapter will explore the current environmental crisis, specifically focusing on the figures, facts and influences of global warming and climate change. The effects of these on animal and plant life, changing landscapes, oceans and marine life will be examined, and the impact on a South African situation is explored.

2.1 The Current Environmental Crisis

The world is in the midst of an environmental crisis and South Africa, at the southern tip of the African continent, is feeling the effect as these global changes impact upon the lives of all people. Of all the challenges facing the world today, “...it is the environmental crisis which is the most significant...” (Gare 1995:5). One such area in which this environmental crisis is seen is that of global warming and global climate change as a result of air pollution and carbon emissions. One has to concur with Laaksol (2009:1) that the “effects of climate change and regional air pollution constitute a serious threat for the ecosystem and human well-being in Southern Africa”. Global warming theory states that the earth’s atmosphere, which regulates the flow of solar energy, has increased drastically in warmth due to an increase in levels of greenhouse gasses (primarily Carbon Dioxide), whose increase is primarily a result of human activity (cf. Mather 1997:159-160). And this climate change and global warming is no longer a theory but is now a reality (cf. Laurier 2009). Radiation from the sun is reflected off the earth into the atmosphere,

where most of the radiation escapes the atmosphere, and only some of it is reflected back to the earth, enabling the atmosphere to regulate the earth's temperature. An increase in Greenhouse Gasses as a result of human activity results in more out-going radiation being trapped, as it does not sufficiently escape the earth's atmosphere. This radiation is then reflected back again to the earth, which results in rising temperatures. Thus the more greenhouse gasses that are evident in the atmosphere; the more radiation will be trapped in the atmosphere, ultimately creating a situation by which the earth's temperature is rising. This leads to drastic climatic change, melting ice at the polar caps and rising sea levels (cf. Mather 1997:160). A recent study by Bridget Wade and her team is the first study to provide "a direct link between the establishment of an ice sheet on Antarctica and atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and therefore confirms the relationship between carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere and global climate." (Cardiff University 2009). This study adds further proof to climate change and highlights the need for urgent action.

2.2 Figures and Facts

To be able to effectively respond to a problem, one needs to be aware of the causes and the range of the crisis. By far the biggest cause of global warming is the emission of greenhouse gasses. Chief among these is Carbon Dioxide (CO₂), which is a major by-product of the burning of fossil fuels (cf. Mills 2009). The global economy is currently powered by the burning of fossil fuel, whether it be the power stations that are fuelled by coal, or the automobile industry that is fuelled by oil. Within the world, more than three billion people depend on solid fuels for cooking and heating, and these fuels are largely biomass (wood, dung and crop residues) and coal (cf. Petzer 2009:1). Fossil fuel

produces huge amounts of Carbon Dioxide. A new 1000 Mega-Watt coal power station produces six million tons of CO₂ per year, the identical amount as two million cars over the same time period (cf. Socolow 2005:51). Not only do these fuels affect the climate and temperate, but an “exposure to indoor air pollution (IAP) from solid fuels has been linked to many different diseases, including acute and chronic respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, asthma, cardiovascular diseases and perinatal health outcomes” (Petzer 2009:1). One can conclude that air pollution is a serious environmental health threat to humans (cf. Wright 2009:1).

There is vast evidence available in many scientific journals and studies that prove that the amount of Carbon Dioxide gas in the atmosphere has increased over the years (cf. Aucamp 2009). By looking at the rising annual temperatures, as well as analysing the effect of pollution and the general composition of the air, it is evident that there has been a change over the last hundred years. Between 1970 and 2004, Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions have grown by 7 % when compared to pre-industrial times (cf. IPCC 2007:3; Mills 2009). Of these gasses, Carbon Dioxide emissions have grown by 80% during the same era. The sources of these growths come from growth in the energy sector (by 145%), from transport (by 120 %), agriculture and buildings (around 27% respectively). During the same time, ozone depleting substances, after being controlled by the Montreal Protocol, have decreased substantially and are only at 20% of their 1990 level (cf. IPCC 2007:3; Aucamp 2009).

It can thus be concluded that when one takes a breath, around 380 molecules per million consist of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂). In the 16th century, the quantity was 280 molecules per million. CO₂ is continuing to increase by around 2 molecules per million per year (cf. Socolow 2005:50). If the current environmental legislation, climate change mitigation policies and sustainable development practises remain in place, GHG emissions will continue to grow substantially over the next decades (cf. Laurier 2009). In certain scenarios, GHG emissions will increase by at least 25 % up to 90 % in between 2004 and 2030. This scenario is

this baseline projection of the emissions is called the Growth Without Constraints (GWC). GWC represents a scenario where there is no damage to the economy resulting from climate change, no significant oil supply constraints, where choices to supply energy to the economy are made purely on least-cost grounds, without internalizing external costs. GWC assumes that not even existing policy is implemented (Letete 2009:10).

Since fossil fuels are set to remain the key energy source up until 2030, CO₂ emissions will increase between 40 and 100% during that period (cf. IPCC 2007:4; Letete 2009:10).

The International Energy Agency gives the following predictions of growth in emissions from the sources of CO₂ (cf. Laurier 2009). These figures show that the cumulative CO₂ for 252 years is comparable to the CO₂ emissions for 28 years (measured in billions of tons of CO₂).

Sources of Carbon Dioxide	Past	Future (Projected)
	1751-2002 (252 Years)	2003-2030 (28 Years)
Coal	542	501

Gas	142	226
Oil	386	8
Total	1, 070	735

(Socolow 2005:53).

Hansen, a scientist from NASA's Goddard Institute, agrees with these figures, and he places the dangerous level of CO₂ at about 450 molecules per million. Therefore, even if there are no further increase in CO₂, Hansen's target will be reached in 35 years. Unfortunately, emissions *are* increasing, especially from emerging powers like China and India (cf. Grant 2007:2).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) most recent report reveals the worrying fact that the world is well on track to achieve the target of 450 ppm concentration level for Carbon Dioxide. The growth of CO₂ increased from 1.1 % in 1990-1999 to 3% from 2000-2004 (cf. IPCC 2007) as determined using the Kaya identity, which is an equation to determine levels of emission¹¹.

Basically, all four components of the Kaya identity are rising steadily (cf. Grant 2007:2; Aucamp 2009). The strong global driven fossil fuel emission growth since 2002 is driven not only by population growth and GDP, but also by the negation of energy saving means (cf. Mills 2009). Thus, developing countries, like China, India and South Africa emissions have steadily risen over the past 30 years, and since 2004 they have accounted

¹¹This equation is: $F = P * G/P * E/G * F/E$, Where F – Global emission Flux P- Population, G-GDP E-Energy use, F- Fossil fuel use (Grant 2007:3).

for a 73% growth in global emissions (cf. Grant 2007:7). South Africa is rated as the highest emitter of annual CO₂ emissions from energy used in the production of cement between the period of 1990 and 2000 (Letete 2009:14).

A recent study¹² revealed that Carbon Dioxide levels in the atmosphere are increasing faster and will be harder to control than scientists have previously thought (cf. Mills 2009). Researchers have found that the level of CO₂ being released into the atmosphere is 35 percent more than most models allow for (cf. Smith 2007:1). This places the findings of the IPCC in a very optimistic light –an extremely worrying factor. Mitigation will be harder and more expensive than at first thought. The rising numbers of coal, power stations in China and India have played a role in this increase (cf. Smith 2007:1).

2.3 The Effects of Pollution, Climate Change and Global Warming Globally and Locally

All these figures of emissions and pollutants highlight the fast rising levels of emissions and pollutants, which will lead to an impact on humanity and creation. Even if all emissions stopped immediately, a 0.6 degree increase in ambient temperature will still have occurred by 2100 (cf. Grant 2007:2). This is due to the composition and degradation nature of Carbon (cf. Mills 2009). Energy and fossil fuel use of developed countries have levelled out and are no longer declining; while the emissions of GHG from developing countries is rising steadily (cf. Grant 2007:5)¹³. Subsequently, even if all human activity

¹² Hall, JV and Brajer, V 2008. The benefits of meeting federal clean air standards in the South Coasts and San Joaquin Air Basins. Inst for Environmental and Economic Studies. California State University

¹³ See Grant (2007:4-6) for detailed graphs highlighting these trends.

were to stop, the temperature would continue to rise for more than 50 years, impacting sea-levels and the climate in general (cf. Grant 2007:1). Already, atmospheric temperature has increased over this last century in the range of half a degree to one degree Celsius, depending where it is measured¹⁴ (cf. Grant 2007:1; Aucamp 2009). Hansen argues that if there is a further warming of more than one degree beyond the level recorded in the year 2000, it would result in ‘highly disruptive’ effects, especially on species extinction, rising sea levels and general climatic change (cf Grant 2007:2). The cause of this would be “dangerous human interference with the climate” (Grant 2007:2). The IPCC argued that temperatures would rise by up to 6.4 degrees Celsius over the next century (cf. Smith 2007:1).

As yet, no one knows the exact consequences of this increase in CO₂ and temperature levels. Scientists have argued and proved that Carbon Dioxide is warming the atmosphere, causing sea-levels to rise, and that the CO₂ being absorbed by the oceans is acidifying the water (cf. Socolow 2005:50). Yet there is still an uncertainty as to how drastically the climate will alter, how high the sea levels will rise, what a more acidic ocean means and how these and other developments will affect human life (cf. Socolow 2005:50). What is known is that climate change will affect water supplies, climatic conditions marine and animal life, agricultural activities and human health and lifestyle (cf. Laurier 2009).

¹⁴ The closer to the North and South poles one gets, the higher the temperature increase.

And the results of this pollution and changing climate are already being felt. I will briefly explore three areas in which these change are already affecting the world we live in.

2.3.1 Animal and Plant Life and Changing Landscapes

Climate change severely affects the developmental growth of many forms of animal and plant life. It also contributes to an increase in the extinction rate of animals and plants. Amphibians' numbers are decreasing at an alarming rate – and, although these decreases have many reasons, the changing environment and weather patterns that come about from climate change are definitely playing a role (cf. Grula 2008:162). Some estimates have gone as far as to argue that every twenty minutes, a species is going extinct and that in 300 years, half the bird and mammal population will be gone (cf. Baez 2006). Other scientists argue for more conservative figures. Lomborg, for example, argues that 0.7 percent of species will become extinct over the next 50 years. But even these figures are massive, Lomborg himself states that the current extinction rate is about 1500 times the natural background rate (cf. Baez 2006). “In short, despite plenty of bickering, there seems to be agreement that humans are causing a vastly elevated extinction rate” Baez (2006) comments. Geologists point to five previous mass extinction events that have occurred in geological history, and they argue that a key element in each one was the carbon cycle, of which carbon dioxide is the primary currency (cf. Pope 2009). And currently, the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere is higher than it has been for 20 million years (cf. Pope 2009). Climate change is playing a leading role in influencing

these extinctions; rare and exotic creatures are being forced to the brink as their habitats are destroyed.

Climate Change is even affecting the way that animals are growing and developing. In a 25 year study of sheep on the Outer Hebrides Islands, “the Soay sheep on the island of Hirta in the Outer Hebrides had shrunk by about 2cm (0.8in) or 81g (2.9oz) per year, amounting to about 5 per cent of their body mass.” (Devlin 2009). These changes are attributed to changes in the climate, and not to natural selection, as if natural selection was playing a role, the changes would be for bigger, stronger offspring. Smaller lambs, that previously would have perished in the colder weather, are surviving and passing on their genes to their descendants (cf. Devlin 2009). This again illustrates the far reaching consequences of a changing climate.

Within the plant world and vegetative regions, certain lush areas are slowly becoming deserts, deserts are receiving more rain and sea and ocean currents and levels, which affect rainfall patterns, are changing. These changing rainfall patterns and seasonal trends are currently being witnessed and recorded over various regions. In 2007, spring arrived two weeks earlier in the Arctic than it did a decade ago. Animals and plants are affected dramatically by these changes and increase in temperature, especially in the Arctic, where temperatures are rising almost twice as fast as in the rest of the world (cf. Sunday Times 24th June,2007:17). On September 10 2007, scientists studying satellite images reported that sea ice covered 4.32 million square kilometres of the North Ice shelf; and compared with the 2005 figure of 5.34 million square kilometres, one can grasp the changing

landscapes of the world that climate change is bringing about (cf. McKibben 2007:1). The Arctic has lost almost a third of its ice since satellite measurements began about 30 years ago. At the moment, an area the size of the United Kingdom is melting away every week (cf. McKibben 2007:1). New projections and new models are presenting even more disturbing facts. Within 30 years, and not 90 years as argues, an Arctic Ocean with drastically less ice may occur during the summer months (cf. University of Washington 2009).

New research says the Arctic might lose most of its ice cover in summer in as few as 30 years instead of the end of the century. The amount of the Arctic Ocean covered by ice at the end of summer by then could be only about 1 million square kilometers, or about 620,000 square miles. That's compared to today's ice extent of 4.6 million square kilometers, or 2.8 million square miles.

From the above, one can conclude that animal and plant life faces changes and possible extinction on a mass scale, and landscapes could be altered dramatically. Ultimately, one must conclude that as the human species increases, there is a gradual depletion of other species and habitats as resources are used to sustain human life (cf. Coghlan 2007:44). The future effects of global warming and climate change cannot be accurately measured, but there is an urgent need for action to prevent catastrophe.

2.3.2 The Oceans and Marine Life

And when one turns to the oceans, the effects of pollution and a changing climate are as pronounced. In all these previous mass extinctions discussed above, tropical marine life was the hardest hit (cf. Pope 2009). And currently, the world's largest living organism—Australia's Great Barrier Reef—is under grave threat from climate change, global

warming as well as coastal development (cf. Australian Institute of Marine Science 2009).

The Australian Institute of Marine Science five-yearly reef outlook report, “aimed at benchmarking the health of the reef, found climate change, declining water quality from coastal runoff, development and illegal fishing were the biggest dangers to the reef.” (Reuters 2009). Charlie Vernon (Pope 2009), a former chief scientist of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, argued in an interview with *The Times* that

There is no way out, no loopholes. The Great Barrier Reef will be over within 20 years or so. Once carbon dioxide had hit the levels predicted for between 2030 and 2060, all coral reefs were doomed to extinction, he said. “They would be the world’s first global ecosystem to collapse. I have the backing of every coral reef scientist, every research organisation. I’ve spoken to them all. This is critical. This is reality

These words came as governments and the IPCC met about the future of coral reefs as fears rose globally that by the middle of the current century, most of the world’s reef would cease, along with the diversity of life that they sustain (cf. Pope 2009). This is especially worrying, as there is a fine line of temperature increase before the loss becomes catastrophic; “Summer sea temperature increases of just 2-3°C for a week or two, or 1-2°C for a month or two, are enough to kill sensitive corals.” (Australian Institute of Marine Science 2009)

As soon as carbon dioxide concentrations reach between 480 and 500 parts per million, the warm water which serves to protect the corals will no longer serve as a barrier to

acidification, and since by then the pH in equatorial regions will have dropped drastically, coral reef growth becomes impossible anywhere in the ocean (cf. Pope 2009).

Alex Rogers (Pope 2009), the scientific director of IPSO, argues that

Coral reefs are the most sensitive of marine ecosystems...Increased temperature and decreased pH will have a double-whammy effect. Reefs were safe at CO₂ levels of 350 parts per million. We are at 387ppm today. Beyond 450 the fate of corals is sealed.

During the last mass extinction, it took reef-building corals up to ten million years to return (cf. Pope 2009).

Other changes and effects that climate change will have on the marine life and reefs are an increase in the acidification of the ocean, as well as increased intensity of tropical cyclones, a gradual sea-level rise and changes in ocean circulation and up-welling patterns (cf. Australian Institute of Marine Science 2009). These are major changes that threaten much of the life on earth. Climate Change is a serious challenge that needs to be acknowledge and addressed.

2.3.3 South African Impacts

These climate changes and the pollution of the planet will have an impact locally in South Africa. A changing rainfall pattern could have devastating effects for a country which already has a very unstable and limited amount of quality drinking water. Already, the environmental degradation of human activity is influencing South Africa's water. As Morgan (2008) states, "A combination of polluted water sources and poor management of dams, sewerage works and treatment plants has led to a situation where our water supply is under serious threat." Such an example is found in South Africa's second

largest river: “Pollution in the Vaal River as a result of ongoing sewerage spills has been a problem for over a decade” (Morgan 2008). As the climate and rain patterns change, further worries and long term problems will impact on the quality of human life. And as the environmental degradation increases, the affect will be felt on the poor and the most vulnerable in society. In the North West state of the environment report for 2008, it was stated that unemployment and poverty in the North West Province are major factors affecting the state of the environment. The statement argued that “Overcrowding in urban and semi-urban areas and rapidly increasing informal settlements, where people live in congested dwellings with inadequate ventilation, have a major impact on air quality in these areas and on human health.” (Petzer 2009:4).

Furthermore, as mentioned above, these environmental changes as well as the pollution do and will have a major effect on the human and animal population. “Adverse effects range from nausea, difficulty in breathing and skin irritations, to birth defects, immunosuppression and cancer.” (Wright 2009:1). This severity of health outcomes associated with air pollution exposure is not uniform within populations. For example, within the South Africa, the problem is exacerbated since vulnerable, poor and uneducated communities reside on land in close proximity to pollution sources (cf. Wright 2009:1).

Accordingly, the logical step is to stop all forms of gasses and all emissions of any pollutant impact on the climate. The problem is that the global world functions on these gasses, and this is seen as inconceivable and unrealistic by certain parties. One needs to

conclude that fixing the environmental degradation is not easy – a stimulus package cannot be developed for Mother Nature (cf. Hazelhurst 2009).

So in conclusion of this chapter, the problems the challenge and the extreme extent of the environmental degradation have been presented. This leads to an urgent call for action to be taken—that is, for a new ethic to be developed. With this knowledge in mind, one can proceed to a discussion about the worldviews that are behind this destruction. There are widely divergent views as to what the cause is, as to what possible solutions there are, and what a proper ethical response should look like. Within these convergences of ideas and worldviews, two very different response and ethical frameworks are predominant, one which appears to have been involved in causing the problem, and one which appears to want a drastic solution. These worldviews are at play beyond just the scientific environment; in theology, in politics, in culture the proponents of each view are clashing heads. And the Theological and Christian responses are rapidly growing apart as these worldviews are influencing the outcomes. Yet, in the midst of this, is it possible to apply ancient scripture into a contemporary situation? Before that question can be properly answered, a deeper investigation is required into these two worldviews, their developments, their characteristics, and their ethical consideration and impact on the environment. Firstly, the modern worldview, whose controlling nature has impacted this destruction will be examined.

Chapter 3

The Modern Worldview

3.1 The Development of the Modern Worldview

In light of the environmental crisis and destruction discussed in Chapter 2, it is now necessary to move onto a discussion regarding the worldviews behind these; and the first worldview to be discussed is the modern worldview. This will be done by exploring the development of this worldview, by defining it and listing its key characteristics and exploring some of these in greater detail. Then the influence of Modernity on Christianity will be examined, as well as some response to a 'modern Christianity'.

To even begin to comprehend the development of modernism and post modernism, the predominate worldviews in Western culture, one must go back in history to examine the epochs from which it emerged. Obviously this runs the risk of generalising culture and time, however, a general overview is needed to gain a grasp of the fuller picture. Any process like this is clearly relying on generalisation; and to avoid the radical nihilism of Nietzsche¹⁵, one needs to affirm that generalisations are necessary. While generalisation simplifies complex realities, that simplification is not necessary a falsehood (cf. Leithart 2008:16). So to every issue discussed below, there are obviously exceptions, but I will attempt to paint the more general rule to see how humanity has journeyed to this current point.

¹⁵ This radical nihilism is “the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it is a matter of the highest values that one recognizes; plus the insight that we have not the slightest right to posit a being or an in-itself of things that would be 'divine' or incarnate morality.” (White 2009)

It has been argued by certain historians and philosophers¹⁶ that the story of humanity's 'development' has progressed in a straight line from ancient, pre-modern times, through to the renaissance, and onto the high modernity of the twentieth century. For example, many tell this storyline: humanity, up until the dark ages, believed that the spiritual was higher than the secular, that the pope was higher than the king. And this belief was categorised into a hierarchical triangle; Christian Mystics held particularity in a very high regard, the king and bishops held power and wealth in high regard, and it didn't matter what the peasants held in high regard (cf. Paton 2009).

From this set structure, the Renaissance humanist challenged this status quo, and said that farming and fighting were as important as consecrating sacramental bread. These philosophers and thinkers include Desiderius Erasmus and Copernicus (cf University of Chicago:2009; Brooklyn College:2009). Finding and re-exploring pre-Christian texts and philosophers, they challenged the bourgeois society of the current church, and sought to create a more fully human world. Nature (and humanity) suddenly started to have a value that was independent of any spiritual and supernatural world; and thus the world of matter in motion became the only world and the only path to progress to a fuller humanity.(cf. Leithart 2008:20-21; Brooklyn College:2009).

Yet, this generalisation falls into the trap mentioned above, and does not take into account the fluid nature of history. For example, in the conquests (by the European powers against the 'new lands') of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, the Western

¹⁶ See this in the works of Colson (1999) and Leith (1981).

developing modern mind viewed creation and the environment as not an entity in itself (and thus giving it sacred worth) but it was viewed as a means to an end, and primarily that end was wealth(cf. Green 2004:180-190).! And so, in viewing the environment as utilitarian rather than sacred, categories of thought were implemented that were incompatible with ecology, yet at the same time held strongly to certain pre-modern ideals¹⁷. And it is this thought process and development that so dominates the modern mindset today (cf. Green 2004:190).

So, I will expand on the history above, taking into account the fluid links and changing cultures. The period before the ‘enlightenment’ (which can be partly linked to the Renaissance), which started roughly in the fifteenth century, could rightly be called the ‘pre-modern’¹⁸ times; and the “pre-modern” period dates back to the ancient period. Part of this period’s worldview was a belief that there was a purpose for being alive – at times a fatalistic view, and there was a ready acknowledgement of supernatural powers and forces at work, which often were the ones to determine the fate of humanity. Another of the key characteristics of this time period was a form of dualism, that is, there was a major separation made between the spiritual and the physical aspects of humans. Often, the spiritual actions (prayer, devotion) were seen as holy, while the physical actions (sex, drinking, enjoying life) were seen as evil (cf. Erickson 1998:15). Here, the spiritual was higher than the secular, the pope and religious authority was higher than the king or any other political power. This at times led to an abuse of religious authority, and a complete

¹⁷ See Zdanow (2009) for a well presented view on how modernistic ,capitalistic views and economic ideals have had a significant impact on the way creation is treated

¹⁸ The irony of dismissing any generalization of history, and then proceeding to generalize is admitted, however, the scope of this paper is not the premodern worldview, and thus a generalization is needed. See Chapter 5 for a deeper discussion around the premodern times in which Ecclesiastes was written

lack of accountability (cf. Leithart 2008:20-21). This extensive period can be referred to as Christendom, as during this time the church provided both stability and security as a key social institution. The church was thus the key institution around which life was based, and Christianity became the key political and economic entity within an empire; it was a kingdom of Christendom (cf. Gibbs 2005:17). From this worldview, the stage was set for a radical change in the way humanity viewed the world, and a massive change in the ethics practise towards each other and the environment.

But this sense of dualism and unequal burdens that needed to be rebelled against was strongly seen within and held together by the Christian church. In fact, it was permeating all aspects of Christianity, and it is still evident in even the most progressive thinkers¹⁹, and one needs to try and uncover where it originated. How has Christianity, which argues fervently for a Creator and equality, allowed elements of dualism to develop within it?

3.1.1 Plato's Influence

Green (2004:190) argues that the origin of this problem lies back with one of the founder of Western thought: Plato²⁰. The Christian tradition has always regarded Platonism²¹ as a close cousin to Christianity (even among the church fathers, especially Augustine, this influence is strongly seen). Wildman (2008) agrees with Green, stating that “Plato is the most influential of philosophers on Christianity, and especially Christian theology”. Yet this influence was mostly indirect, as it was mostly mediated largely by neo-platonic

¹⁹These elements can be seen in prominent theologians work, such as Erikson's (1998) chapter on 'the last things'

²⁰ Plato was a famous Greek philosopher who lived in the 4th century BCE and whose philosophy has greatly influenced much of Western thought (Wildman 2008)

²¹ The philosophy which follows Plato's writings

scholars. There were times when this relationship between Christianity and Platonic thought become too close, and started to impact on the current Christian worldview. An example of this is seen in the way that certain apologists sought to present Christian doctrine as purified, definitive Greek philosophy (cf. Wildman 2008). However, throughout the centuries, Christians have been comfortable to integrate the platonic ideas into Christian thought. This is seen in the development of a creation theology. Plato's concept of forms are portrayed as the creative thoughts of God, and this prepares way for the concept of *Ex Nihilo* to be developed fully (cf. Boersma 2007:298; Wildman 2008). As Wildman (2008) argues

Plato was adapted and subdued as much as he was accepted and used. The Jewish tradition had many ideas of its own, some of which overcame Plato's in the development of Christian thought, some of which were overcome, and some of which combined in fascinating ways with Plato's

When one interprets Plato in a way which the primary thought is Plato's sublimation of the working of the mind as the ultimate perfection (his theory of forms), one places a major stress on the separation of the mind from the natural world, and its capacity to think objectively and reflect critically on that world (cf. Green 2004:190; Wildman 2008). This sublimation of the working mind makes

...very clear the distinction between the sensible and the non-sensible, and expresses Plato's clear valuational preference for the non-sensible. In that realm is to be found the unchanging, ever-being, eternal forms, the things we love in the shadows around us. Matter, it follows, is a lesser stuff that is subdued and elevated by form. This results in a sharp form of dualism that looks down on things material and looks up to things spiritual and rational. (Wildman 2008)

And thus, by placing such a great division between the natural world and the spiritual world could easily lead to a situation when one would attempt to control the world, to bring the perfection of the mind to bear on the world. Plato's harsh dichotomy between

the material world and the world of ideas has led to a devaluation of the material, natural world in favour of western philosophy and theology (cf. Van Dyk 2009:197).

Thomas More cites Plato as his inspiration for his *Utopia*²². “For once you take the non-existent perfection of the mind and transfer it to the world, it’s not very surprising that what your left with is far from perfect – and is in fact dystopian” (Green 2004:191). And once the mind is separated from the world, a situation may arise in which the mind will begin to view the world as an end in itself. And if this occurs, there is a chance that the mind will want to control, to manipulate, to distort and to destroy that outside of it. And it is where this controlling, this manipulating and distorting thought process has been allowed to develop, that one can see the core roots of the modern mind set developing.

Yet this usage of Plato did not always results in a destruction of the world around. Within the history of the church, it was proposed that there were three key aspects of thought that were missing in Platonism but were vital to the Christian faith (cf. Boersma 2007:298). The first of these was the belief that God did not have to create, but that he was free to create. Secondly, they rejected the Platonic idea of emanation; where the “one” is perfect and the many are imperfect, as this would interfere with the doctrine of the trinity (cf. Boersma 2007:298; Erickson 1998:41). Thirdly, the two above views led to a view of matter that was different from the Platonists. A Platonist could not see matter as good, as matter was an involuntary result of God having to create, and was thus at the bottom of

²² A brief summary of this work is found at books.google (2009) “Utopia, written by Sir Thomas More, depicts a fictional island with its own unique religion and customs. Sir Thomas More's work introduces readers into the concept of a perfect society with utopian, or perfect, ideas and beliefs. This timeless classic, originally written in 1516 and heavily influenced by Plato's Republic, is often read in schools as a required reading”

the hierarchy of being. Therefore, they maintained that nothing was better than the soul to be freed from this mortal body. In contrast to this, the traditional Christian view of creation celebrated nature, and especially the body (cf. Wildman 2008). Consequently throughout history, Christians knew when to say no to Platonic influences (cf. Boersma 2007:299). Augustine was a prime example of this; in Plato's theology he found a vehicle from which Christian theology could be conducted (cf. Erickson 1998:41). Yet his theology had very strong elements of ecological and cosmic promise—highlighting that he had not adopted true Platonic thought. In another instance, he adopted part of the Platonic theory of knowledge to his own doctrine of illumination²³ (cf. Erickson 1998:41).. Despite his overreaction to certain Manichaean ideas, he still portrayed an amazing universal vision of cosmic history. His dualism in certain aspects did not lead him to reject all of creation as evil. Humans are called to contemplate and give thanks for wonders of earth; not to dominate it, as Augustine believed that the 'Day of the Lord' is the consummation of the entire cosmos (cf. Santrime 2000:25-28; cf. Erickson 1998:41).

However, the idea of the sublimation of the working of the mind as the ultimate perfection always remained in some form of thought within Christianity (cf Wildman 2008). With the closing of the dark ages and the re-discovering of the classic philosophical texts within the renaissance, these ideas began to gain prominence again. And Christianity began to flirt more and more with the Platonic ideal, which slowly led to a different, and albeit more dangerous form of dualistic thought forming(cf. Erickson 1998:41). Creation, and other humans were placed on differing levels, and those on the

²³ The doctrine of Illumination states that “the light enlightening every man (sic) who comes into the world (John 1:9) is God impressing the forms of the human intellect” (Erickson 1998:41).

lower level than one self could be treated as one willed. And so the Renaissance and the Reformation began to take centre stage.

3.1.2 Aquinas's Influence

The early elements of this can be seen in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, who, in the thirteenth century, changed the idea that philosophical thought and Christianity can never marry. He gave an exalted place to theology, calling it the 'queen of sciences' (cf. Erickson 1998:35). In doing this, he created a clear distinction between the realms of nature and grace. Following Aristotle's philosophy which strongly influenced his theology, he argued that nature and natural purposes have their own goals; while theology has a supernatural goal, that of eternal life (cf. Boersma 2007:294-295; Erickson 1998:28). His intellectualism sought to prioritize the mind over will, and in doing so he created an unhealthy dualism (Boersma 2007:296). He adopted the Aristotelian metaphysics philosophy in stating what he believed about the Christian faith (cf. Erickson 1998:28). Aquinas was not a proponent of the Platonic views; on the contrary by drawing on Aristotle, his theology and thought slowly began to drive a wedge between the Platonist-Christian syntheses (cf. Erickson 1998:38). By insisting that human life is separate from God, the Platonic notion that humans share and participate in God's own being fell away (cf Wildman 2008). Nature was perceived as a self-regulating, private functioning realm, free from influence from any supernatural activity (cf. Boersma 2007:301). So as the theology and philosophy changed, so too did the ethical action and call to care towards creation. And this created opportunity for new ideas and concepts to begin to dwell, and to challenge the thought process of that age.

Another view that slowly emerged from this thinking was the view of Nominalism. Nominalism is the “theory that there are no universal essences in reality and that the mind can frame no single concept or image corresponding to any universal or general term” (Merriam-Webster). Nominalism challenged another basic Platonic idea – that objects share in a Universal form, that there is a common humanity (cf. Wildman 2008). Instead, Nominalism rejected this, saying that even though person A appears the same as person B, this does not mean that there is something like a common humanity (cf. Stravridis 2006). Suddenly, there was nothing to link anything; there were only appearances of humanity, there was no common and shared identity (cf Zdanow 2009). Slowly, every atom of the natural world was perceived as being individual, everything was seen as being completely independent (cf. Boersma 2007:302).

Thus “the abandonment of Platonism in favour of nominalism implied that the nature-grace distinction had turned into a dualism that was accepted as fact” (Boersma 2007:303). Consequently the western world came to view nature as autonomous and independent from God, as having its own destiny (cf Zdanow 2009). The nature-grace dualism is largely a result of accepting nominalism and rejecting Platonism and it results in the strong dualistic reliance on the otherworldly (cf. Boersma 2007:304). And nominalism can lead to an excessive form of particularity; that is, “the quality or state of being particular as distinguished from universal” (Merriam-Webster). And this further leads to a belief that life as no inter-connectedness within itself (cf Zdanow 2009). Yet ironically, this problem of particularity extends beyond knowledge versus wisdom, it is still a prevailing cultural worldview as the challenges of globalisation are encountered.

Global economics and global trends have destroyed the small, the treasured, and created a giant monster of information, of needing, of wanting to belong (cf. Paton 2009). This has gained dominance over the normal; for “when everything is special, well then, nothing is special.” (Paton 2009).

Consequently, following Aquinas’s hierarchical dualism, the otherworldly began to represent a split between time, space, being and agency. In regard to time, God is seen as infinite, everlasting, without beginning and end. The human soul is seen as being part of this eternal immaterial world which will continue on once the body has died (cf. Elvey 2006:66-67). And so in terms of space, God is ‘unbounded’, at home outside the material universe. Thus there is no moral or ethical obligation to care for creation; rather, creation can be used as a means to accomplish humanity’s gains, in the service of God.

3.1.3 The Renaissance

Yet these ideas did not immediately take root in the psyche of Western thought. In fact, the opposite happened as a thought and cultural rebellion occurred against the dualistic and ethically problematic thinking of Aquinas and the church at large. The Renaissance was that period of intense freedom of expression and acceptance of all being equal: the birth of humanism.

Leithart (2008:22) describes the Renaissance as a breath of fresh air, “an era of artistic and cultural creativity, a liberation of self, knowledge, time, space, politics and religion”. And due to the nature of the ideas, the aftershocks of this time would reverberate

throughout the Western world for many decades. The humanists of the Renaissance revelled in challenging the status quo (cf. Kretchmar 2008:6). For example, Desiderius Erasmus proposed a radical new understanding of educating children, and Copernicus bravely questioned the core understanding of where humanity stands within the cosmos (cf University of Chicago:2009; Brooklyn College:2009).. They questioned the idea that all reality could be placed into one big theory; in fact, they were extremely cautious of systematizing anything. In fact, they gladly raised the epistemological challenge of the relativity of human knowledge (cf. Leithart 2008:23). Thus, for the Renaissance thinker, the world and the human existence began to be perceived as a vapour “a whirl of change without fixity, smooth edges and symmetry” (Leithart 2008:18). By acknowledging the vaporous character of human life; the Renaissance Humanist also believed that there was nothing to be done about it (cf. Leithart 2008:26).

The humanists were thus awakening the world to a new way of living, and encouraging the freedom of thought and expression. And being influenced by these advances, the reformation arose to challenge and disperse the religious unity of Christendom (a natural outcome of the Renaissance worldview). Consequently, Christianity was thrown into turmoil as the hierarchal structures and dominating theological position was questioned and at times rejected. Inevitably, the conflict soon became political, and many years of savage ‘religious’ war started. These wars lasted for years and resulted in devastating large parts of Europe (cf. Stravridis 2006). This was not the only misfortune; the new religious thought and political will completely fragmented the common psyche of the European mind. New kingdoms and countries were formed, new types and styles of

religion were started to show the uniqueness of that particular culture²⁴. Slowly, from this basis of new creativity and an apocalyptic sense of crisis, modernity slowly was born (cf. Leithart 2008:25).

These new Cartesian philosophical programs implied that politics would come first and religious convictions, which appeared to be completely unlinked to nature, needed to be set aside, or compartmentalised, should one desire to search and arrive at truth, and linked to this religious observance was commonly seen as socially disruptive; the wars of the last few decades had made this self evident²⁵ (cf Kretchmar 2008:6). For this new philosophy to work, religion could not stay the centre of public life, because experience had shown that as soon as religious people disagree, they end up killing each other (cf. Leithart 2008:25). Thus modern political thought needs religion to be pushed into the private sphere of life, or to exist in the fringes of the general societal discourse.

3.1.4 The Enlightenment

So, on the back of the Renaissance and the reformation, the enlightenment period emerged. The Enlightenment was the period starting in the 18th century that, while drawing on the basis of the previous thoughts, also went a step further and questioned and challenged the religious and the humanist's views, which obviously had not worked (cf. Kretchmar 2008:1). Bacon and Descartes were forerunners of this style of thought. As faith in any religious institute grew, humanity's ability to reason began to reign supreme and all supernatural activity began to be viewed as deism, or eventually as a myth. Some

²⁴ For an example of this, see Leith (1981) Chapters 6 and 7, for a detailed explanation of how the reformed tradition gained its unique culture, views and styles of worship.

²⁵ Leith (1981) again offers some examples in Chapters 6 and 7

have reduced the Enlightenment to two beliefs. One, proposed by Francis Bacon, was that science was all about objective, empirical study. The other was the belief that the entire world could be reduced and qualified and described; there is nothing that cannot be known from reason (cf. Danaher 2005:292).

Another key thinker of this time was Descartes. Descartes emerged from this world as the fountainhead of modern philosophy, and his importance is twofold: his plan to construct self-evident, neutral basis for intellectual consensus, and the substance of his conclusions. Descartes admired mathematics, the clarity and precision of its proofs, and he sought to develop a philosophical method that mirrored the attributes to mathematics (cf. Erickson 1998:161; Stravridis 2006). Thus, he sought to create thought that would be thoroughly objective; no matter what the historical, culture, context of the person, should they apply the proper method, a consistent outcome would follow (cf. Erickson 1998:161). In other words, should a catholic and a protestant combine hydrogen and oxygen, they would both get water; this in spite of the fact that one affirms the papacy, while the other views it as a tool of the devil. Hence, nature will always speak for itself; it does not need to rely on fallible scientists to express it (cf. Leithart 2008:25). Consequently, Descartes believed that unquestionable truths could be arrived at if the correct methods were followed despite any of the beliefs that were held by the practitioners. Placing theological differences aside allowed the inquirer to be separated from the inquiry (cf. Erickson 1998:161-164; Stravridis 2006).

However, this straight line of thinking and progression again has its own problems and distorts many of the elements of the Renaissance thought that was still evident in the emerging modern worldview. Firstly, Renaissance thinkers were not as secular as they are often portrayed. Francis Bacon, a leading advocate of scientific discovery, urged exploration in science for the sake of theological advancement (cf. Erickson 1998:162). And these were motivated by Christian charity; Bacon hoped that in discovering the fixed laws of God, he could help and improve the lives of many. Bacon and his contemporaries also would not have thought of themselves as ‘modern’. Descartes himself was a practising Catholic who also strongly believed in God. The term ‘Modern’ only gained prominence in the eighteenth century once science had shown that it could improve lives, and it was believed that applying more reason in the form of science could bring about an even better world, one close to utopia (cf. Leithart 2008:22). It was only in the latter stages that the modern beliefs started; and these beliefs were that those who had come before them, the ancients, were old and weak, while this new breed were the giants, the bringers of peace and prosperity and the true wisdom of all ages.

3.1.5 The Modern Worldview Emerges

And yet still modernity did not reach its final form all at once; despite its quest and characteristics for uniformity, it was also ironically fluid. Some aspects of modern thought took route in the late seventeenth century, but only came to true fruition in the nineteenth and twentieth century. For example, after the Renaissance, states began to centralise, but it was only in the nineteenth century that Italy and Germany were unified as national entities. Industrialisation and urbanisation, major characteristics of

modernism, only came to the fore in the nineteenth century. England was urbanised far earlier than France, another key aspect of modernity that occurred at a different time and place. Thus modernism took shape at different places at different times (cf. Leithart 2008:28).

But slowly and surely, as a reaction and a development against Renaissance Humanism, which acknowledged the vaporous character of human life and argued that there was nothing to be done about the fluidness of life, the modern mind emerged (cf. Leithart 2008:26). The Renaissance Humanist argues that the world was an uncontrollable vapour, and that was that. Modernity, on the other hand, was not content to observe the chaos of the world; in fact, moderns set out to tame the world, to shepherd the wind (cf. Leithart 2008:26). Modernity was more than a response to the effects of religious war, it was an effort to “correct the errors of Renaissance humanism to tame and control the disordered creative energies the Renaissance had unleashed” (Leithart 2008:26; cf. O’Donnell 2003:14). So against the freedom and asymmetry, moderns made order a dominant theme of political thought and philosophy. This passion of order and systems took route not only in the political sphere, but in philosophy, as well as religious theology (in fact, systematic theology is largely a modern enterprise; the quest to explain God and all creation in a neat ordered thought process). Biblically, the cultural and technological wisdom of the modern Westerns was often paralleled to the Old Testament kingdoms and the wisdoms associated with Solomon. As the new conquerors and colonies advanced, backing was found in the Old testament to justify this quest for control (cf. Holter 2006:858).

3.1.6 A “Story”

Perhaps, since the start of the development of the modern mind began with a warning against generalisations, one can present this history in the form of a story. One can argue that it is thus fitting to summarise this modern history in the form of a postmodern story.

Green (2004:300) paints a fascinating story of part of the reason for the emergence of the dominant spirit in Western—and ultimately modern thought. Despite its irony and sarcasm, it serves to highlight these factors discussed above; and it also exposes some of the reasons, attitudes and thoughts that may be underlining this worldview (even those that are subconscious). Green’s story goes: Several thousand centuries ago, as Europe was emerging from the ice-age, the Sahara was not the massive desert that it is today. Rather it was a fertile land, filled with lakes, animals, plants—a mini-Eden. Those who had been forced to live the bitter cold of the ice-age resented those who had lived in that relative paradise. Consequently, from the Northern collective suffering, which had caused them to become hard and solid, two new psyches began to emerge. Firstly, they vowed that they would never experience that severe cold which had so dominated their very lives. And secondly, they would hate those who had lived in the warmth while they shivered – and who had most properly been responsible for their banishment in the first place (cf. Green 2004:300).

As time shifted, so did the power. The difficulty of the ice-age had left the Northern fearsome warriors, hungry and ready for any conflict. Accordingly, they advanced, expanded, developed their technology and slowly fulfilled their pathological need for heat (cf. Green 2004:301). The discovery of oil enabled them to heat up the world by

mass combustion – and so erase all memory of the cold from their unconscious memory. So, as they had been forced to live in the cold, they decided to let the world feel the heat, to ‘let them fry’. Slowly, all wars little by little evolved to become about energy, oil, the source of that heat. Yet at the early stage of this advancement, they had ironically adopted a religion whose roots were strongly African. Jesus was a Jew, and the Jews practised many African customs (such as circumcision, the belief in an all encompassing, over arching God). The Jewish people even had a creation myth, often thought to refer to Arabia, but one which could as easily refer back to the paradise and richness of the old Sahara; where the temperature was tropical, and day and night existed as equals. And so the Jews were the first to experience the second psych, they were reminders of that cold time, and so they needed to be burnt, converted, tortured, expelled—anything to get revenge on them (cf. Green 2004:301).

And from there, as the European explorers discovered new land, those who had enjoyed the warmth while the Europeans shivered in their glaciers would work now. They would slave to bring warmth to those who had suffered before. Natural justice was taking its course. But the natural punishment never took its course; it continued – more victims meaning more heat (cf. Green 2004:301-302).

And so, today humanity is facing the consequences of these thoughts and attitudes. What is true is that at the root of the development of the modern mind and psyche, a strong element for the need to control is evident.

3.2 Definition and Characteristics

And so, using the development of the modern mind as well as keeping in mind the attitudes that Green's story exposes, it is worth investigating what is defined and characterised by this worldview, which has emerged over the last few centuries to be the prominent worldview for the Western mindset in the twentieth century.

Firstly, before defining modernism, one needs to highlight that the philosophers of this modern mind were the scientific disciples who were hoping for a brave new world and utilising technology and mathematics in their design, and science was seen as their way of hope (cf. O'Donnell 2003:14). Newtonian physics (based on Isaac Newton's theories), which defined a world with separate entities acting on each other in measurable ways, further spread the dualistic and modernistic mindset (cf. Sponheim 1999:4). And soon the key to learning was seen only as observation, and the belief began to develop that everything could be explained (cf. O'Donnell 2003:11). Naturalism, humanism, reductionism were all elevated as key features, and certainty and determinism were seen as humanity's prime goal. In the ancient biblical era, heaven was understood to be above the earth but within the materiality of the cosmos, as part of a hemispherical disc. Yet as this new understanding and view of the universe grew, heaven came to be understood as separate from the cosmos, and God was no longer as living in the starry expanse, but in a new world beyond material space (cf. Elvey 2006:67).

Thus individualism was the model used to understand life, and any eternal authority (especially any concept of God) was seen as folly in light of human reason²⁶ (cf. Erickson 1999:17). More and more, the world focused on progress and technological advances, which were seen as the new god, and people began to predict that with the advance of progress, the world would get better and better, leading to world peace (cf. O'Donnell 2003:12). The idea of progress was bound up with a particular group of people identifying themselves as having advanced and evolved more than others (cf. Gare 1995:6).

An example of this is seen within the attitude of the early explores to the 'new-found lands'. When the Spanish 'found' Mexico, the native people had a concept of value that was linked to ecology; cocoa beans were the primary means of exchange, metals were metals and had no extra value (cf. Green 2004:189). Thus their currency was locked into the seasonal changes; a sacred, not utilitarian attitude. The conquerors, to fully conquer, had to change this worldview to make the natives view the environment as utilitarian. Hence they destroyed the original cosmology of the ancient beliefs (cf. Green 2004:189).

With the above in mind, an overarching definition of modernism can presented:

Modernity is the name of the social, cultural and political apparatus that since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has inspired Europeans and North Americans to aspire to control vapour, to sculpt mist, to rein in the energies inspired by the Renaissance. (Leithart 2008:33).

²⁶ This is especially true of 'later' modern thought. To avoid oversimplifying the matter, it must be noted that many early Enlightenment thinkers held to deism, which means they acknowledge the existence of a far away, transcendent God. In this current age, deism does not have many followers.

In general, modernists believe in centrality of reason, progress, access to truth, individual agency, and the scientific method (cf. Kretchmar 2008:7). That is, modernity is a set of styles and thoughts that aspire to reduce the complexity and the evanescence of reality to stable order. It refers to scientific practises that seek to map and order reality in theory, which is often expressed in mathematical terms (cf. Gare 1995:5-7). It refers to the quest to control, manipulate, to manage and improve nature through technology. It is the belief that humans – humans who are progressive – can actually attempt to achieve a level of semi-divine control over all law, politics, humans and creation (cf. Leithart 2008:32-33).

And so, the key elements and characteristics of modernity are that

Modernity promises it can bring peace among nations; it can explain everything; it can control the natural world through science and technology. As a result, humanity will free itself from war, poverty, political oppression, evil, perhaps even death itself. *By sculpting the vapour and shepherding the wind*, modernity promises to liberate humanity from the uncertainties and imperfections that mankind has long, but wrongly, believed inherent in existence. [italics added] (Leithart 2008:29-30).

In summary, some key affirmations of modernity are

- Knowledge is good, and needs to be sought and will provide a cure to the evil in the world.
- Objectivity is desirable and achievable
- Foundationalism is the model for knowledge
- Truth is absolute, but interpreted differently by each knower.
- Reality is structured rationally
- Modernism is about control. (Erickson 2001:73-74).

To understand how some of these affirmations have negatively impacted the world, modernity's quest for control and those results within a Christian environment will be further explored.

3.3 Modernism's Emphasis on Control

One of the core elements of modernity is the need to erect walls and boundaries that will keep the world neatly controlled and divided. Modernity is overly confident in its ability to control – and thereby virtually eradicate – nature, among other things (cf. O'Brien 2004:297). So the wall separating religion from politics will stop the irreligious passions from starting a war; the boundary between nature and culture will enable the ordered life to not be tempted by the wild of nature (cf. Leithart 2008:30; Brooklyn College:2009). The fundamental boundary is the “Us” vs “Them”. Martin Buber's concept of the “I-Thou” relationship is an expression of this (cf. Santrine 2001:61-65)²⁷. As soon as there is a distinction made between I – Thou, “Us” vs “Them”, there is an opportunity to control that which is not yours. And Modernity is partly founded on the need to control, as well the central idea of progress. Even the word modern hints at the idea of progress. This distinction of “Us” vs “Them” is both temporal and spatial; temporal because it distinguishes sharply between the present and the past, and spatial as it sharply distinguishes between those who are up to date and those who are stuck in a past that the modern person has transcended (cf. Leithart 2008:31). This division extends itself into many other divisions. For example, the thought may go along these lines: “*We* moderns organise ourselves into rationally constituted nations; *They* are organised by irrational

²⁷ See Chapter 6.2 in examining how to re-claim Buber's thoughts

blood-bound tribes. *We* are rational; *they* are irrational” (Leithart 2008:32). Between religion, politics, arts, life, culture, these divisions are crated, but the more modern person who believes they have advanced, they have progressed, and they are the curators of creation.

This notion of control extends itself onto the view of creation, and thus the ethical response to creation. The modern notion rest on the thought that

We know nature as it truly is and thus have the ability to control nature in ways *they* never imagined. *We* can arrive at certain knowledge of the world through scientific knowledge of the world through scientific investigation; *they* operate by guesswork, tradition and opinion” [italics added] (Leithart 2008:32).

And this dualistic Modernistic concept of the otherworldly *is* ecologically problematic; and is seen strongly within the Church as well (cf. Elvey 2006:63). This theory of progress rests on a notion that there is a cut in time; there is all that went before, and there is all that is to come. In the middle, a great divide is dug by the modern thought. And in this divide, one can place “Us”, those who live in the present and are moving to the future, and “them”, those who are still lost in the past (cf. Leithart 2008:32).

Modernity’s efforts to control are also illustrated in the quest to control and define time. Pre-modern thought treated time as a localised enterprise; often each village had their own church clock, which did not matter if it was exactly the same time as the village down the road. As modernism arose the shift came to be that time needed to be correctly regulated and controlled (this was practical in some cases, as the development of Rail Transport meant that time was important to run the train safely). And so the uniformity of

time began to permeate all cultures, and is seen in the fact that all cultures, regardless of their acknowledgement of Christ, celebrated the Millennium (cf. Leithart 2008:29).

Another key component of the modern controlling mind is that of Objectivity. During the middle ages, the mystics held particularity in a very high regards; however, this was another element that was lost during the advance of modernism (cf. Paton 2009). This problem is illustrated when considering the notion of Objectivity as a way of knowing; or more specifically, how the myth of Scientific Objectivity as being the prime way of knowing has been perpetuated. This gift from the “Age of Reason” has also come with a hefty price. It has been a good thing to think big, to think logically and clearly, and think impartially, and in terms of the whole unit. But the hefty price that has developed is that “Objectivity” has become a pernicious myth, which is not only self-contradictory, but has served to eliminate other ways of knowing – especially anything linked to the spiritual part of humanity. “In brief, it is contradictory because it cannot escape its own gravity: the belief that the objective is a superior (or the only) way of knowing what is true, is in itself a subjective belief.” (Paton 2009). Lyotard introduced this idea of “incredulity toward grand narratives’. These grand or metanarrative are an all-inclusive belief system that explains all reality, and thus shapes the view of the world (cf. Erickson 1999:18; Lakeland 1997:35). This theory dismissed two myths – “that science leads to progress or the betterment of humanity, and that science contributes to uncovering the ‘truth.’”. Instead, his views allow for a multiplicity of meaning, each legitimate in its own right (cf. Kretchmar 2008:2).

Thus, the downside of this myth of Scientific Objectivity is that any other approach to truth, whether the personal, the emotional, the spiritual, the traditional, the individual or imaginative are vilified – if not side-lined. This even extends to the way the bible is interpreted and to one's theology. Soon, the “correct” ways of biblical interpretation (almost always handed to one from an authority above) creates division, creates ‘heretical no-go areas’ and taboos within communities (cf. Paton 2009). This again shows the quest of control, over thought, over life, over God – which leaves little space for questioning, for one to doubt, for one to explore. And inevitably, in the name of this larger, ‘objective’ truth; “individuals who cannot in good conscience “toe the line” are given an ultimatum: our way, or the highway” (Paton 2009).

And this controlling worldview has changed the nature of Christian thought and action as well. Despite the insistence that God is both immanent and transcendent (especially in the Incarnation), the divine transcendent often came to be valued more highly than the material, corporeal immanence of God (cf. Elvey 2006:67-68; Erickson 1998:161-164). This led (and still does lead) to God's immanence being seen as being dependant on transcendence in the relationship between Creator and creation. The distinction between Creator and creation tends towards dualism when the creator is understood to be active in bringing creation into being. This can result in a view in which God, the primary agent, operates in the world without being part of its essence (cf. Elvey 2006:68). So modernity presents itself as both a fulfilment and a rejection of the impulse of Christianity and medieval Christendom. Christianity had promised that the truth would set one free. This in light of the fact that the Bible begins with a command “take dominion” of creation, to “rule and subdue it” (cf Stravridis 2006). Consequently, as modern civilisation advanced,

often at the hands of the missionaries and monks who worked together and brought in new technologies, the new Christian moderns believed that anyone who refused to adopt the better, progressive modern ways, are primitive, and thus lesser. These lesser humans needed to be controlled, to “the glory of God”. And if humanity could be controlled to fulfil God’s will, then obviously the ethical actions towards creation became ones of dominance and control (cf. Leithart 2008:31).

This affected all aspects of theology and ethics. As a result Creator came to be written with a capital and creation with a small letter, which reflects this dualism (cf. Elvey 2006:63). The valuation of ‘Creator over creation’ can fuel a very dualistic rendering of life. Yet the Incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity suggest a far more complex and dynamic situation (cf Stravridis 2006). In Jesus, God brought together a divine and human agenda and being, and this otherworldliness avoids dualism and offers a chance to the entire cosmos to share in “Gods transcendence of nature” (Elvey 2006:65-66). However a modern worldview fails to comprehend and live out this paradox, but instead, the focus on the otherworld dominates belief.

The otherworldly is the belief that anything that is natural needs to be subordinate to an Idea of God, Truth or Good (cf. Elvey 2006:65 Brooklyn College:2009). Within this dualistic framework, nature and humanity’s place in nature is devalued and insubstantial; the diversity and the interconnectedness of the earth become meaningless (cf. Elvey 2006:65; Wildman 2008)). In general, this dualism leads to an eschewal of responsibility to non-human creatures and the environment in general. This focus on the otherworldly

can at times lead to the extreme of waiting for an earth destroying apocalypse (a common view in Dispensationalist²⁸ theology (cf. Erickson 1998:1168-1170). Even in a moderate form, this leads to a hyper-separation dualism (cf. Elvey 2006:64; 80). This dualism results in a left-right hand right hand split, in which infinite is seen as good; and the remaining matter is seen as a background.

This is especially evident regarding the meaning of death in Christian systems of belief. Often the fact that the meaning of life is elsewhere (in 'heaven') is highlighted; not in this world, but in another world that is only accessible to humans (cf. Erickson 1998:1168). The idea the heaven is in another place and that Christians are in an alienated state on earth fuels this dualism, and further separates nature for the Christian understanding of eternal life. This 'salvation' is above and beyond the nature and world that is currently inhabited (cf. Elvey 2006:63-64; Stravridis 2006).

So the Particular, under the modern consensus and controlling worldview, has been ousted by the general, by the safe, by that within control. "Take away the particular and you are left with knowledge in place of wisdom." (Paton 2009). Creation ceased to be seen as having any particular value, rather the treatment and ethics around how creation is treated was based on the idea of the greater good or the bigger story. A small forest in a small impoverished country did not need to be treated or thought of, as God's big story for humanity to control creation was at work.

²⁸ A school of Eschatology which relies on a complete literal reading of scripture and a belief that the world will be destroyed and that god will tale his servants to a spiritual; heaven. (cf. Erickson 1998:1168-1170).

Again though, one must be careful of being too simplistic when discussing modernity. Modernism claimed many things; one needs to examine whether it actually achieved what *IT* had claimed (cf. Leithart 2008:36). Max Weber described modernisation as a process of rationalisation and disenchantment. Thus in its truest claim for itself, modernity should be bereft of any outside magic and meaning; life will be reduced to scientific precision and mathematical mechanism. Yet this was never the case; the world actually never emptied of wonder. As Leithart (2008:36 - 37) gives as an example; one can take all of the finest classical music and download it and compartmentalise it onto a metal item no smaller than a match box; that fact in itself actually causes one to wonder. “...the world has never been as modernised as moderns hoped and antimoderns feared” (Leithart 2008:37).

3.4 Christian Thought and Ethics Impacted by Modernity’s Quest for Control

Yet, there has defiantly been an impact of modern Christian Worldview in the way creation is viewed and treated. Modern Christianity, strongly influenced by the elements above, has often operated out of a dualistic, modern worldview. This view perceives Nature as an object to manipulate and to be used to serve humanity for profit. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, the US government, led by Secretary of Interior James Watt, called for the increase in the exploitation of nature to gain growth and profits, and this call came from a Christian eschatology view (cf. Santmire 2000:1). These sorts of ideas are often linked to the eschatological view of dispensationalism, which maintains that the earth is getting worse, and that there is no need to save it (cf. Van Dyk 2009:

198-200). The role of politics also plays a role, as many conservative Christians – who see intervention in the environment as being part and parcel of ‘liberal policies’ such as abortion and gay-marriages – avoid all aspects of conservation as well as conversation with those who hold different views²⁹.

There are those of a modern mindset and Christian convictions who hold that the idea of an environmental crisis is a myth (some of these examples are discussed below). Even into the late 1980’s, environmental and conservation issues were largely absent from any Christian discourse and had little room within worship and theology (cf. Van Dyk 2009:187). Salmon (1993:25) holds the view that global warming is a fabricated story that only serves political agendas. He argues that even if the earth’s temperature increases by a few tenths of a degree per decade, one cannot take future climate change predictions seriously. He sees the actions taken by the Clinton administration (spearheaded by then USA vice-president Al Gore³⁰), as having a more serious agenda in mind than the environment. The emissions of GHG do not matter, as there is no scientific evidence to support global warming; indeed, he contends that “Carbon emissions from cars, power stations and the like have only a marginal impact on the climate” (Salmon 1993:25). Salmon thus sees no need to reduce emissions, and he can state that the USA “...*only* emits 30% of the earth’s greenhouse gases” (emphasis added) (Salmon 1993:25). It is important to note that he was writing in 1993, and thus he easily treats with disdain computer models that predict a rise of temperature, as he distrust the use of computers to properly simulate climate: “Computer models were considered interesting, but largely

²⁹ For example, see the type of article written at <http://www.rightwingnews.com/>).

³⁰ Who, as this dissertation was written, won the Nobel Prize for his work in raising awareness about global warming!

academic, exercises” (Salmon 1993:27). He sees the thrust of these models having political motives, as environmental group’s grabbed hold of it to advance their personal cause. Due to this, he would rather wait five years to do more research than insert any preventive measures, as “...five years...would only cost one-tenth of a degree of additional warming” (Salmon 1993:28). He concludes his argument in hope that the hype will stop and that scientists will come to their senses (cf. Salmon 1993:28).

This view is also highlighted by Beisner (1997:166), who, also operating out of a very conservative and fundamentalist Christian world view, argues that there is no global warming and no true statistics (he bases his argument on one book, Balling’s *The Heated Debated!*). Thus he can state that the ice shelf is actually growing, not shrinking (cf. Beisner 1997:66). Beisner (1997:120-127) argues very strongly that humanity still has a responsibility to rule and subdue nature as it is wild and needs to be tamed and ordered. He contends that since the fall, a process of de-creation has occurred, turning nature into a cursed mess that humanity needs to transform by subduing and ordering it. He does not see population growth as having an impact on the environment; rather, he contends that the more humans there are, the more that creation can be subdued, and thus ultimately saved. In fact, he argues that population growth is God’s command to be productive (developing this from a literal reading Genesis 3) (cf. Beisner 1997:21). As he argues

...continued population growth will not result in depletion but in the increased abundance of resources, and not in increased pollution of the earth, but in its increased cleansing and transformation from wilderness to garden (Beisner 1997:107).

Thus he sees any moves to help ‘save’ the environment as being futile, as God’s will is being done through humankind at the moment. Another such book, that follows the same arguments and themes (discussed in section 3.4) is Steve Milloy’s book: *Green Hell: How Environmentalists Plan to Ruin Your Life and What You Can Do to Stop Them*

Recently, an “*Open letter to the secretary general of the United Nations*” was published by “100 prominent scientist”. The purpose of the letter was to argue against the United Nations taking any action against the phenomenon of global warming. The letter states

It is not possible to stop climate change, a natural phenomenon that has affected humanity through the ages. Geological, archaeological, oral and written histories all attest to the dramatic challenges posed to past societies from unanticipated changes in temperature, precipitation, winds and other climatic variables. We therefore need to equip nations to become resilient to the full range of these natural phenomena by promoting economic growth and wealth generation. (Aitkin 2006:1)

The authors go on to contend that it is not human-produced carbon dioxide (CO₂) that is causing the increase in ‘greenhouse-gasses’, but rather “a non-polluting gas that is essential to plant photosynthesis”. (Aitkin 2006:1). Thus, it is not possible to prove that by cutting down the human usage of carbon dioxide producing substance will actually results in a decrease of global warmth. They argue that the IPCC documents are only crafted by a small handful of reviewers who take the majority of scientific findings and word them in such a way to support this view (Aitkin 2006:1). The authors of the letter highlight three major concerns with the IPCC findings: that none of the documented changes have been proven to lie outside the realm of natural changes; that the change in temperate falls within range of the climate changes of the last 10 000 years; and that computer models cannot predict climate change (cf. Aitkin 2006:1-2). The letter

concludes that the focus on trying to decrease carbon dioxide emissions is actually taking time and money away from the real issue of trying to help society adjust to the actual threat of the changes.

Attempts to prevent global climate change from occurring are ultimately futile, and constitute a tragic misallocation of resources that would be better spent on humanity's real and pressing problems (Aitkin 2006:2).

Another document linked to this is “*A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming.*” This is funded by the Cornwall Alliance who are “... a coalition of clergy, theologians, religious leaders, scientists, academics, and policy experts committed to bringing a balanced Biblical view of stewardship to the critical issues of environment and development”.³¹

This document speaks out against the Evangelical Climate Initiative’s (ECI) “*Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*”. They drafted this document against the ‘misunderstandings’ that the ECI presented, and they seek to present their “...own alternative call to action to protect the poor, the rest of humanity, and the rest of the world’s inhabitants – not only from global warming but also from other potential environmental threats.” (Beisner 2006:1). As Mohin (2006) argues “The central claim of ISA’s “A Call to Prudence:” human-induced global warming, if it exists at all, is an exaggerated theory lacking sound scientific background”

They argue against the 4 ECI’s arguments:

³¹ See <http://www.cornwallalliance.org>.

- Human emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as humanity burn fuels for energy are the main cause of global warming.
- Global warming is not only real but is almost certainly going to be catastrophic in its consequences for humanity—especially the poor.
- Reducing carbon dioxide emissions would so curtail global warming as to significantly
- reduce its anticipated harmful effects.
- Mandatory carbon dioxide emissions reductions would achieve that end with overall effects that would be more beneficial than harmful to humanity and the rest of the world’s inhabitants (Beisner 2006:1-2).

They accomplish this using some interesting semantics, challenge certain supposed assumptions, and presenting and at times interpreting data differently³². At times they raise pertinent question, at times they themselves are guilty of the very misinterpreting and creating assumptions that are accusing other of making. An example of their argumentation is

How much of current global warming is man-made versus natural? How much future warming can we reasonably expect? What changes in human behavior that affect climate may be anticipated, under what conditions? What difference will such changes make to the world’s climate? And what would it actually take to fix the alleged problem? (Beisner 2006:1-2).

Often times their argument is more aimed at creating doubts rather than actually presenting solid counter evidence. For example, on page 8 of their document, they claim

³² See examples of this in Section 3.4.1

that “There is evidence that the current warming period, from the mid-1800s to the present and likely to continue for a century or more, is driven largely by natural causes” (Beisner 2006:1-2). However, they never mention this evidence, or its sources, or how this evidence may change ones approach to policy or ethical living. They allow their worldview to influence their examination of the scientific facts and the objectivity they claim is actually tainted from the beginning. However, if the ‘facts’ they examine point towards global warming, they then revert to argue around the practical usage of those facts (which is always a very good dismissive point). This is illustrated within this quotation: “almost certainly true (since humans have long affected climates in which they live), the claim is too vague to have policy implications.” (Beisner 2006:1-2).

They then go on to argue that, rather than helping the poor, reducing carbon emissions will in actual fact harm the poor.

Because energy is an essential component in almost all economic production, reducing its use and driving up its costs will slow economic development, reduce overall productivity, and increase costs of all goods, including the food, clothing, shelter, and other goods most essential to the poor (Beisner 2006:11).

They contend that the current economic environment and usage of fossil fuels needs to carry on enabling the poor to prosper:

The world’s poor are much better served by enhancing their wealth through economic development than by whatever minute reductions might be achieved in future global warming by reducing CO2 emissions.(Beisner 2006:13).

They go as far to say that

It is immoral and harmful to Earth’s poorest citizens to deny them the benefits of abundant, reliable, affordable electricity and other forms of energy (for homes, cars, airplanes, and factories) merely because it is produced by using fossil fuels (Beisner 2006:15).

In other words, their worldview, that of using (dare one say ‘controlling’) nature to get the best available source of fossil fuel is what God has in mind to relieve the plight of the poor. They even present a picture of an un-industrialised world as a ‘human game reserve’ – that is, if one is not willing to modernise, then one is not one of ‘us’, but rather a ‘savage’ (Beisner 2006:17).

The Cornwall Alliance has issued two further important documents; the *Cornwall Stewardship Agenda* and *The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship*. It is fascinating to see the modern mind at work within the concluding *Aspirations of the Stewardship Declarations*. For example, in analysing the section below, many of the characteristics of the modern mind discussed above are seen: they state that

- (1) We aspire to a world in which human beings care wisely and humbly for all creatures, first and foremost for their fellow human beings, recognizing their proper place in the created order.
- (2) We aspire to a world in which objective moral principles—not personal prejudices—guide moral action.
- (3) We aspire to a world in which right reason (including sound theology and the careful use of scientific methods) guides the stewardship of human and ecological relationships.
- (4) We aspire to a world in which liberty as a condition of moral action is preferred over government-initiated management of the environment as a means to common goals.
- (5) We aspire to a world in which the relationships between stewardship and private property are fully appreciated, allowing people’s natural incentive to care for their own property to reduce the need for collective ownership and control of resources and enterprises, and in which collective action, when deemed necessary, takes place at the most local level possible.
- (6) We aspire to a world in which widespread economic freedom—which is integral to private, market economies—makes sound ecological stewardship available to ever greater numbers.
- (7) We aspire to a world in which advancements in agriculture, industry, and commerce not only minimize pollution and transform most waste products into efficiently used resources but also improve the material conditions of life for people everywhere.” (<http://www.cornwallalliance.org>)

Just a brief read through immediately illuminates these characteristics, and thus shows the underlying worldview. Within item 1, 6 and 7 one can identify the modern need to distinguish between the 'I and the Thou'. Items 2, 3, 4 clearly highlight the myth of 'Scientific Objectivity. Item 5 is a striking example of the modernistic and capitalistic economic order on which modernism was founded, as well as the individualistic thinking with modernism. All of the statements speak of some level of control; either control of creation, control of humanity, or control of one's own destiny. In these aspirations, they set out their guidelines as to how they can sculpture the mist. In general, the above points highlight the problems and the characteristics of modern thought and a modern worldview that have been discussed in depth above. These affirmations have an underlying sense of control and the need to set one's own future. These and the other articles above are the modern mind responding to the ethical problem of the environment.

3.4.1 Response to the Above Arguments

But this view of humans having no impact on the environment is shallow to say the least. For the truth of the matter is that the destruction of the world environment is not a new thing (and it is definitely not something that all these great conferences, great declarations and global meetings can solve) (cf. Green 2004:185). And since it is not a new thing, it is not something that polices can resolve. The root of the environmental destruction has its foundation in the way the world is perceived, and until that issue is addressed, attending conferences, making declarations or pledges are absolute waste of time (cf. Green

2004:185-186). And one needs to contend that the tradition from which those opposed to global warming stem is in actual fact a large contributor of the problem.

Mohin (2006) writes a very good response and critique of these ‘declarations’, focusing on the *Open Letter*. She contends that a review of their report “reveals a critical lack of research, politicized arguments, and backwards thinking that misrepresents widely accepted scientific and economic data”. She is also extremely concerned that the authors begin their argument on the basis of standing up for the poor. She gives an example of how the authors used some interesting data. Their contention that sea level rise will have minimum impact (see Beisner 2006:4) is based on an article that oddly excludes any of the continental ice-shelves’ data for its analysis. This study was never meant to include all potential sources of melting; and thus it is poor work to use this as an argument against global warming. To exclude the ice-caps (with Antarctic containing 70% of the world fresh water and 90% of the world ice) is to surely ignore all of the evidence. Another study they take out of context is one by the Climate Institute, where they quote the article as saying “Observational evidence and computer models yield little confidence in forecasts of the impact of global warming on agricultural production, whether in poor countries or elsewhere.” (Beisner 2006:7). Yet in this article, the president of the Climate Institute, John Tapping, states that: “It is our understanding that rapid climate change is very likely to cause great problems in food production, particularly in developing countries with poor food delivery infrastructure”. This is echoed even in the conclusion, which reads that “even if developing countries adapt to climate change, they will not be

able to completely avoid the problems associated with climate change.” (Mohin 2006). Again, the authors have misinterpreted good data in the quest to prove their world-view.

Regarding the claims that stopping greenhouse gas emissions will harm the poor, Mohin (2006) is scathing in her attack. She argues that high energy costs are already a source (possible a leading cause) of the high poverty rates in the world. However, the most revealing fact is shown when Mohin reveals who sponsors the authors of the report. Three of the four panellists who promoted the report at the annual Heritage event have worked or currently work for institutions who receive major funding from Exxon Mobil. The Heritage institute itself has received more than half a million dollars from Exxon since 1998. She goes on to show more shadows behind the authors:

The Competitive Enterprise Institute, which the ISA cites as a source, has received over \$2 million from the Exxon Foundation in the last 8 years. So, are we really talking about “a call to truth?” Perhaps the ISA should consider changing the title. “Politicizing the Global Warming Debate: Misusing Data with the Support of Big Oil,” has a nice ring to it. (Mohin 2006).

Harsh, but revealing a worldview in which capitalism, control and progress are seen as the correct tools to utilise. And as Green (2004:182), states, paradigmatic ideas and discussions remain alone in the mind, and not take the form of a practical level.

This worldview, in which those who care for the environment are actually portrayed as being behind a conspiracy, is a common one, stemming from the modern quest to control all-including creation. Clawson (2009) draws attention to this on her blog, highlighting Steve Milloy’s book: *Green Hell: How Environmentalists Plan to Ruin Your Life and What You Can Do to Stop Them*. Just the cover of the book gives insight to what the

author is out to argue. He writes that the green movement has been “steamrolling nearly all opposition with its apocalyptic predictions of environmental doom, the Green movement has gained influence throughout American society” (Milloy 2009). The book goes on to contend that the ‘Greens’ are “demanding that you turn down your thermostat, stop driving your car, or engage in some other senseless act of self-denial.” It argues that apparently trying to save the earth must be fought because it threatens “the entire American way of life” and envisions for us “a grim future marked by endless privation” (Milloy 2009). Clawson’s response is typical of the new grain of thought that goes beyond the controlling mind. She says “Well, duh, of course it does. But apparently for some it is far better to be selfish jerks than to have to give up anything to help others.”(Clawson 2009). Apart from her crassness, she raises key divisions in the debate; and highlights how the conflict of worldviews is impacting the ethical response one has towards the environment.

What is true is that there is no complete agreement across the board in theological circles on the impacts, true cause and final effects of global warming. Gibson (2008) highlights this in an insightful article investigating the ‘*Evangelical Divide on Global Warming*’. Throughout the article, the author highlights the many different statements, articles of faith and campaigns that have been launched and published by Christians on all sides of the faith tradition. Each and every statement is different, and a divide has rapidly risen between those who support a reduction in Greenhouses gasses, and those who see there being no problem with them and in a patriotic and religious society like the USA, any

religious stance on the environment could easily lead to lasting policy changes. Gibson (2008) writes that

With the Evangelical Climate Initiative, however, climate change became the first social issue to split the solid conservative consensus in support of Bush administration policies and, in some cases, even to bring conservative evangelicals into coalition with liberals.

Two major areas of debate and division have arisen: the first one is around the interpretation of scripture and how that interpretation leads to ethical living. The second division is regarding the political funding of the parties, with oil companies often supporting the Conservative side, while the moderate and liberal sides receives funding from organizations linked to more liberal polices (cf. Gibson 2008). And so, whenever a document or statement is issued, one needs to be aware of what funding and theology is behind those words.

One such document is “On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation”. Written in 1994 "*An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*" asserted a Christian responsibility for "creation care." The *Cornwall Declaration*_(as above) answered with a defence of the concept of human dominion over the earth and the importance private property rights trumping government regulations. Both these documents contain well argued interpretation of scripture, but illustrate how ones worldview can lead to a different final conclusion.

Another similar document is the one discussed in section 3.3, the Evangelical Climate Initiative’s “*Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action*”. This document also issues a Christian ethical call to protect and serve the environment, from a worldview that

acknowledges the problems and issues within the current modern worldview. They argue for four key facts: firstly that human-induced climate change is real; secondly that the poor will be the hardest affected, thirdly that Christian moral convictions demand a response to the climate change problem and finally that the action needs to be immediate and urgent. Again this is an honest attempt to identify the problem and an ethical response to it.

Yet, in spite of these attempts, evangelical theologians and ethicists have largely ignored environmental issues in the recent history (cf. Davis 2002:270). They have devoted too much time on the origins of humanity in Genesis, and not enough on humanity's proper relation to creation (cf. Davis 2002:273). The latest research³³ by the Barna group (focusing on American Christians) has revealed that a person's attitudes to the environment and global warming are largely linked to their faith (cf. Barna 2007:1). The most scepticism towards global warming is expressed by evangelical, born again Christians (cf. Barna 2007:1). Over 40 % of evangelical Christians are very sceptical about the global warming scenario. This figure is not linked to a person's age, as Christians across all age groups viewed it with scepticism. This reveals that young Christians follow their parents' ideologies, and also adopt a 'wait-and-see approach to global warming (cf. Barna 2007:1-2). Thus evangelicals are the 'least concerned' segment in the more than 50 population groups studied. Catholics are the most concerned religious group regarding Global Warming, at 59 %, while atheists and agnostics (at 69%) are the overall most concerned with global warming (cf. Barna 2007:2). Thus

³³ Even though this Research is American, it is still relevant as many conservative South African's rely on American Fundamentalist Theology and ideas to shape their faith and their life understanding. A trip into local bookstore CUM will reveal this.

evangelicals have little investment in environmental priorities, and in regards to recycling and sustainable development, their engagement is average. A greater percentage of Non-Christians perceive global warming to be important, as environmental protection is an “absolutely necessary” (Barna 2007:1). These results lead to this conclusion “...if outsiders do not see Christians embodying biblical care related to creation, a Christian’s influence is significantly diminished” (Barna 2007:3). Charles Colson, a leading evangelical fundamentalist, wrote a book on the Christian worldview, yet did not include any chapter or information on caring for and living in nature³⁴. His idea of a future spiritual kingdom impacted his judgment. With ideas and statistics like this, one could conclude that “Christianity is ecologically bankrupt”. In fact, Van Dyk (2009:195) contends that this view is “hold (sic) by many ‘mainline’ theologians who are at best silent about ecological matters and at worst dismissive about the new so-called ecotheology”,

Consequently, despite the modern worldviews contention, often exhibited in conservative and at times ‘right wing’ views that the environmental crisis is a fraud, the majority of the evidence (as highlighted above), as recognised by a large majority of scientists, Christians, politicians, scientists and leaders agree that the planet is in an environmental crisis (cf. Santrime 2000:2). They are willing to acknowledge that the planet and the ecosystems are not a never ending sponge—slowly at first, then building quickly, the impacts of this degradation started to impact on the world. It soon became obvious that, “...unless all the passions could be laid bare, brought out into the open, and thus put to rest, the planet itself would be sacrificed to their needs” (Green 2004:302). And so those

³⁴ See Colson, C. 1999. *How Now Shall We Live*. Illinois:Tyndale

who emerged from the ice-age began to realise that those ancient urges need to be buried before they destroyed the world.

Therefore, as illustrated within this chapter, the modern worldview has failed at protecting creation; especially in light of the fact that the ethics of controlling is in part responsible for the current environmental crisis. And Christianity as happily co-existed with the modern worldview, even supporting its quest for control, and at times failing to stand on issues of justice and mercy. Thus, a new worldview has begun to and is emerging, one which seeks to view ethics, life and the world in a light that is radically different from that above. This worldview, postmodernism, will now be explored in more detail.

CHAPTER 4

The Postmodern Worldview

4.1 The Development of the Postmodern Worldview

In the previous chapter, the modern worldview, as well as some of the dangerous attitudes and how they have impacted upon the environment were explored. Within this chapter, a worldview that has arisen as a protest against modernity will be explored. The development of the postmodern worldview will be briefly be studied, and then a definition, as well as characteristics, functions and the ethics of postmodernism will be examined. The theory of deconstruction as an antidote to modernism emphasis on control, as well as three challenges (intensifications, inversions and unmaskings) that postmodernity presents to the modern worldview is discussed. Finally, the Christian responses to postmodernism and the ethical implications of this response is examined.

While Modernism was at its peak; a new worldview slowly began to materialize to challenge the modern emphasis on control and the damage some of its proponents had done. However, this was not the first challenge to modernity. In fact, modernity has faced many internal opponents who have challenged the modern trinity of “Control, Progress and Freedom” (Leithart 2008:33). Romanticism was such a movement; as it celebrated the natural and organic elements of life against the mechanism and artifice of modern thought. In theological circles, it was argued that religion is not a matter of doctrines, intellect or behaviour; rather, feeling and experience is what would constitute a true spirituality (cf. Erickson 1998:871). For example, moderns would have seen

‘progress’ in the ascending smoke of a factory, while the romantics would have seen what William Blake called ‘satanic mills’. Moderns advocated rational control, progress and liberation; romantics saw these as oppressive domination, degradation and decay, as a new form of slavery (cf. Leithart 2008:33;Erickson 1998:871).). Yet, as often is the case with protest movements, the romantics were happy to accept many of the premises of modernity. One such acceptance was in regards to the idea of progress, which is illustrated in the support Romantics had for the French Revolution (which is a quintessential modern event) (cf. Leithart 2008:33;Fry 1994:347). Another protest movement was the artistic and literary movement known as ‘modernism’, led by poets TS Eliot, novelists like James Joyce and artists like Pablo Picasso (cf. Hartmann 2009). Ironically and curiously, this movement shares the name of the very thing it was protesting against. The modernists condemned the everyday modern urban life ideal, and they frequently tried to elevate it to a bustle of life in artistic form (cf. Leithart 2008:35).

Consequently, postmodernism is another protest movement that emerges from within modernity. In actual fact, despite the claims that postmodernism is a completely unprecedented event, nothing about it is wholly new (cf. Stravridis 2006). For if postmodernism is a scepticism about an overwhelming dogma, there have been *sceptics* before. If it was “a tragic resignation, so was Stoicism; if it is a tragic joy, so was Epicureanism” (cf Leithart 2008:35). In fact, all of its elements and characteristics have had a pre-runner or cultural trend, that although has emerged in a different time, has accomplished and set the standard for that protest. And so, when one starts to investigate

what makes postmodernism new, the challenge of beginnings arises, and one can agree with Solomon: “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles 1:9).

To return to the story, as Modernism was reaching the crux of its progress, certain elements of society began to question and wonder if the true goal of modernity was good and the ideal quest after all. The movement and belief that had promised freedom, progress, peace and rational understanding of the world appeared to be missing many elements that were redeemable. The two World Wars of the twentieth century further destroyed this idealistic picture, and certain sections in general society began to oppose these affirmations, and so postmodernism began to emerge as a reaction against certain of these elements in modern thought (cf. Kretchmar 2008; Leithart 2008:20-50; Stravridis 2006; Erickson 1998:160-161).

Postmodernism showed its first signs during the 1930's, as an architectural movement; but it expanded as the ideals and quests of Modernism were further exposed as being all about control, not freedom (cf. Kretchmar 2008:1). As more wars occurred (such as the Korean, the Vietnam and the Cold War), as the civil rights movement took off in the United States, and the South African government tried to enforce the modern concept of Apartheid, as African countries slowly emerged from under the control of their European leaders, the reaction against modernity grew stronger and stronger (cf. Erickson 1998:164-165). This has extended to the current situation where postmodernism has now influenced nearly every academic discipline in the humanities, from literary analysis to anthropology and education (cf. Kretchmar 2008:1).

There are two key characteristics of the postmodern movement that deserve mention as they define its development: firstly, it was extremely contentious; it challenged modernity head on, and caused great conflict. This is seen from the reaction to an early postmodern cultural movement, the hippie movement, to the academic and philosopher's reactions against elements of postmodernism, and even in the Christian church, with some seeing postmodernism as the new evil. "Indeed, postmodernism has spawned disagreements within universities and academic departments that have no rivals in modern times" (Kretchmar 2008:1). Secondly, throughout the emergence of postmodernism, there has been an inability to clearly define it (as is seen below in attempting to define it). But still, postmodernism³⁵ has arisen in many cultures and situations, and has no key leader or philosopher; in its quest to be anti-modern, it has rejected many of the modern principles, one of which is defining and controlling it (cf. Kretchmar 2008; Leithart 2008:20-50; Stravridis 2006; Erickson 1998:160-165).

The key philosophers and thinkers of this movement who have added input and ideas into the mixture are Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among others (cf Kretchmar 2008:2; Erickson 1998:160-165). Lyotard (1979) introduced the idea of "incredulity toward grand narratives". This, as discussed in the previous chapter, dismisses two myths – firstly, that science leads to progress or the betterment of humanity in its entirety, and that science

³⁵ Although postmodernism is a new world view, it is not held universally in the West. It may be fair to say that there are still more moderns than pre and post moderns; however, youth and philosophical culture is largely being shaped by postmodern thinking.

contributes to uncovering the objective and all truth. Instead, his views allow for a multiplicity of meaning, each legitimate in its own right (cf. Kretchmar 2008:2). Foucault leads many discussions and thoughts regarding the linkage of power and knowledge and how these are used to control certain elements and aspects of life (cf. Kretchmar 2008:3). Derrida is probably the most well-known of these, and introduced new terms such as *deconstruction*³⁶ of a text (cf. O'Donnell 2003:24). These philosophers developed their own beliefs, and due to the nature of postmodernism there is a lack of any certain, central belief. Modernity, in contrast, can be seen as great metanarrative; the belief that all can be found, and all understood, with a mathematical exactness. Postmodernism, following Lyotard, problematized any idea of metanarrative being at all possible (cf. Danaher 2005:295).

Even though humanity always lives in one state of change or another, these current times in which modernity and postmodernism are meeting seem to be more transitional than others (cf. Leithart 2008:13). Hartmann (2009) describes the various aspects in which society is changing: from literature and interpretation approaches, to architectural design, to philosophy and confrontation and it is strongly felt in aspects of pop culture. He argues that at one extreme, postmodernism is a critique of modern rationalism. Modernity has developed a technological 'superiority complex,' and in doing so has conjured up an ecological crisis and is thus in need of a "complementation in the form of a postmodern era of nature mysticism" (Hartmann 2009). Yet, within the broad scope of Postmodernity, one can find it as a plurality-friendly opportunity, and at times even opening up to Modernity itself. And thus, in opening up to Modernity, from the simple viewpoint of

³⁶ See below for a more detailed analysis.

unitary thinking (appraised in a totalitarian sense)—one history, one reason—now becomes subject to critical revision. And at the other extreme end of the spectrum is what Hartmann (2009) calls the “*postmodern arbitrariness* so frequently disparaged in the feature pages, but holding itself out as corresponding to a new era become ‘too big to grasp.’”

This postmodernism challenges the fundamental distinction of “Us vs Them”, the modern quest for control; and it recognises that modernity has never been what it has claimed or aspired to be (cf. Hartmann 2009). Thus postmodernism thought does two things; it recognises the faults and failings of Modernity and it sees that postmodernism is a complex set of recess within modernity (cf. Leithart 2008:38).

4.2 Defining Postmodernism

Postmodernism is extremely challenging to define. Kretchmar (2008:1) argues that “Despite its far-reaching impact, postmodernism is difficult to define, largely because postmodernists themselves reject the idea that any phenomenon can be understood in just one way”. Or as Gare (1995:4) in a joking way writes that postmodernism is a word that has no definition, and thus should be used as frequently as possible. So, how then should the term postmodern be utilised? “Does it actually refer to anything, or it is useful only for faddish intellectuals to assert their intellectual superiority over the darkened masses?” (Leithart 2008:16). Again, the word itself is clearly a generalisation; and to avoid the radical nihilism of Nietzsche mentioned previously, this generalisation is again necessary.

It is wise to affirm that while generalisations simplify complex realities; that simplification is not necessary a falsehood (Leithart 2008:16). Thus to call this current cultural age postmodernism is to say that certain identifiable beliefs, practises, thoughts, attitudes and styles are dominant within that time (Leithart 2008:18). Accordingly, a move from a modern culture to a postmodern one means that the beliefs, practises, thoughts, attitudes and styles have changed to reflect something new. As Hartmann (2009) argues

Through the critique of scientism, functionalism, and utopianism, now the thought of finitude must be emphasized, in which human beings know themselves to exist in a dependency on an Absolute that is not subject to manipulation.

Since postmodernism is still a developing idea and worldview it is often defined in terms of theory versus practise. The general use of the term refers to a range of philosophical positions and aesthetic styles that have been developing from about 1950 (cf. O'Donnell 2003:7). Some use the term postmodern as simply meaning a general rejection of Modernity and its principles (cf. Danaher 2005:292). Detweiler (2004:23) labels the experiences of the real world as 'postmodernity'; he differentiates this against the ideas and philosophies of thought in academic circles, which he terms 'postmodernism'. He observes that most people have never heard of Derrida or Baudrillard, yet they are experiencing a change from the old to the new. People don't care about post-postmodernism or any other new philosophical phrases, they just want to know how to deal with what they are experiencing (cf. Detweiler 2004:24). Codrington (2004:146) also makes a distinction between postmodernism (a reactionary movement) and Postmodernity (the emerging era). For him, you can be part of this reactionary movement without holding to all the theories and philosophies of it. In this paper I will enforce

Codrington's distinctions, as I would contend that one can be a postmodern Christian without being a holder of postmodernism philosophical thought. These Christians will not hold to all of the characteristics that I will list below, yet in their practical lives elements of them will be manifest, and consequently the reason to argue for a different approach in reading Genesis 1-3.

Post-modernism needs to be used as a general term to describe, as Leithart (2008:12) puts it:

...the remarkable set of interrelated cultural and political changes that marked the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty first: the collapse of the bipolar political world of the cold war; the globalisation of trade, finance and business; the establishment of an American culture, and increasingly, political empire; the renewed vigour of fundamentalist Islam in world politics, the belated discovery of the dominance of Christianity in the Southern Hemisphere, and the dissolution of denominational boundaries among post-Reformational churches; the rapid spread of new information and communication technologies, the rise of advertising, entertainment and popular culture as the shared culture...new trends in immigration and urbanization; the related shifts in how theorists talk about knowledge and language, the self, and power.

Hartman (2009) adds to this by, stating that

“Postmodernity is a condition in which the legitimization of knowledge and the just society can no longer be achieved through the instrumentality of ‘great narratives’ (dialectic of spirit, hermeneutics of meaning, emancipation of the subject).”

And since Postmoderns are completely anti-modern, the usage and distinctions that are inherited from Modernism need to be avoided (cf. Danaher 2005:292). This is true especially in the usage of modern terminology and ideas within their reality. The idea of the “Us vs Them” is a very modern concept; yet is often employed by Postmoderns who, in being very critical of Modernity, are actually still utilising its framework (cf. Leithart

2008:38). In other words, one cannot say that everything postmodern is new and cutting edge and that anything still 'old' or looking like Modernity is wrong or non-reformed. Those who do this are affirming the modern view of progress and re-enforcing the "Us vs Them" divide. This applies to cultural critics as well as theologians and ethicists; one cannot judge someone on their differing worldview as this easily leads to hypocrisy.

4.3 Characteristics, Functions and Ethics of Post Modernism

Postmodernism has many characteristics and seeks to achieve many things, however, there are certain ideas and characteristics which are borne out of its thought processes which will be discussed here. These reactions can be called postmodern 'non-beliefs', and are based on the following:

- A continual scepticism towards the ideas and ideals of the modern era, especially the foundationalist epistemology
- The belief that most truth is shaped by cultural and political bias
- Meaning and truth are generally perceived to be relative to the individual's interpretation.
- Irony, parody and satire are the prime means to communicate
- Completely against any form of control, hierarchy and abuse
- A quest for justice (cf. Stravridis 2006; Erickson 1998:165-167).

The above list will be further explored in the points below which examine some of the key philosopher's views and the reactions of what is being seen.

4.3.1 Deconstruction: An antidote to control

Derrida is commonly known as the leading figure of deconstruction thought. And although he is not the only philosopher to propagate these ideas, his name and ideas are strongly linked to this issue (cf Stravridis 2006). Deconstruction revolves around the way one interprets and understands texts as Kretchmar (2008:2-3,7) states

Texts, according to postmodernists, refer to everything – texts in the traditional sense, a performance, a film, a conversation. Deconstructing a text involves turning the logic of the text against itself, so that the inherent contradictions and paradoxes are uncovered. Some view deconstruction as merely destructive, but Derrida believed it was also affirmative in that it identifies and affirms ‘the Other’ excluded from the text.

Deconstruction immediately breaks any power plays, any quest to create a “Us vs Them” dichotomy. It searches for the lost voices, for the elements that may have been overpowered by the powerful, by those in control. It challenges the ideas of objectivity: that a person can read or live without any influences (cf. Leithart 2008:33-50; Kretchmar (2008:2-9). At its very basis is a rejection of modernity’s ideals; and thus I would call it an antidote to the control of modernism.

In the Caputa and Derrida’s (1997) book *"Deconstruction in a nutshell"*, Derrida is interviewed by Caputa, in which the common myths about postmodernism and Deconstruction are discussed, and the myths dispelled, especially regarding the perception that Derrida is advocating an absolute relativism, Caputa (1997:36) argues that it is not uncommon to portray Derrida as the devil himself:

...a street-corner anarchist, a relativist, or subjectivist, or nihilist, out to destroy our traditions and institutions, our beliefs and values, to mock philosophy and truth itself, to undo everything the Enlightenment has done - and to replace all this with wild nonsense and irresponsible play.

This view, this demonization, is a common one among conservatives, moderns and Christians who view anything as postmodern as pure relativism, which is at complete odds with *their* understanding of the Christian Worldview³⁷. Caputa calls those who portray Derrida in this light irresponsible critics who are ironically avoiding their integrity in academic responsibility. As the conversation with Derrida unfolds within this book, this myth is exposed (Caputa 1997:36). In fact, Caputa (1997:37-8) argues that:

...the following axiom, which governs what I call a certain "axiomatics of indignation" that Derrida seems to provoke: *the most fundamental misunderstanding to beset Derrida and deconstruction is the mistaken impression that is given of a kind of anarchistic relativism in which "anything goes."* On this view, texts mean anything the reader wants them to mean; traditions are just monsters to be slain or escaped from; the great masters of the Western tradition are dead white male tyrants whose power must be broken and whose name defamed; institutions are just power-plays oppressing everyone; and language is a prison, just a game of signifiers signifying nothing, a play of differences without reference to the real world. Thus the dominant reaction that Derrida provokes among his critics, who do not content themselves with simply disagreeing with him, is indignation. (Italics added)

And so by not acknowledging that Derrida is not advocating a relativism of 'anything goes', his critics (across both the philosophical and theological fields), claim a self-righteous ethical, moral view. This ethical view is one of a 'self approving good conscience' (Caputa 1997:37-8). And the more that Derrida's thoughts move from the academic halls to the streets, to politics, to ethics, to general Christian ethical living, the stronger the response, and the sooner the closing of the laager to anyone thinking of these ideas. And this type of thought needs to be confronted wherever it is encountered, as

³⁷ For an Extreme view of this which borders on neurotic fundamentalism, see www.discerningtheword2.co.za

Caputa states “ *Ergo*, we, the Good and the Just (self-authorized and self-knighted, to be sure) - that is what "we" almost always means - must stamp it out.” (Caputa 1997:37-38)

Often times the most ironic fact is that those critics who so strongly oppose Derrida and the postmodern thoughts he encourages have never read any literature about postmodernism or by Derrida (cf. Caputa 1997:32-38). In this authors opinion, the contempt, the anger, the unwillingness to learn is not based on their understanding, but it based on passed down, second-hand, malicious knowledge, often spread by those who do not care to understand a new way of doing things³⁸. In some ways, it is the typical modern response which labels the “us” and the “them”, and never shall the two meet. Consequently, one of the modern paradoxes and problems is strongly proved; the belief that the “us” group can never be wrong.

Caputa (1997:37-8) would agree with this assessment; he goes even further by saying that:

...their condemnation of Derrida violates on its face the very "values of reason, truth and scholarship" with which they so self-righteously cloak themselves, in the name of disinterestedly "protecting" [a university which was considering awarding Derrida an honorary doctorate] from itself. As if anyone asked them!

Derrida himself argues that Deconstruction is “not simply positive, not simply conservative, not simply a way of giving the institution” (Caputa 1997:5). He goes on to say that Deconstruction is made of “...not the mixture, but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break” (Caputa 1997:6).

³⁸ Again, to see this angry perspective, see www.discerningtheword2.co.za

Derrida contends that the *justice* he envisions (that which is beyond description) resounds beyond the philosophical debates, and finds it home in the biblical notion of justice and its quest for singularity (cf. Caputa 1997:20). Derrida also contends that religion, that which is set on dogma's, hierarchical structures, and rituals needs to be deconstructed, and this should often be done in the name of faith (cf. Caputa 1997:20-24).

Clawson (2008) agrees with the above, arguing that deconstruction is not all about the practice of tearing down and destroying (an idea that many Moderns and modern Christians have made it out to be); rather it is more about understanding and justice. A good deconstruction will involve discovering, investigating and understanding any underlying assumptions (and one could add worldviews to this) present in an idea, system, or belief. For Derrida, and anyone attempting to deconstruct, the ultimate goal needs to be justice (the one thing that cannot be deconstructed), "For as one seeks better understanding one is able to better love the Other" (Clawson 2009)

4.3.2 Challenging the Modern Worldview

Apart from deconstructing texts and the modern thoughts, postmodernism offers a challenge to all aspects of Modernism; it is an 'anti-modernism'. Leithart (2008:39-55) suggests three major challenges and forms that post modernity presents and takes against modern thought. At times, postmodernism has produced intensifications of Modernity; other times an inversion of Modernity has occurred, and at times Modernity has experienced an unmasking. These intensifications, inversions and unmasking of

modernity are not completely separated trends; they overlap and interpenetrate in many ways. Postmodernity is “vapor’s revenge, the recognition of modernity failures and an embrace of the fragmentation and dissolution of politics, selves, language and life” (Leithart 2008:39). It is worth briefly discussing these in more depth.

4.3.3 Intensifications of the Modern Worldview

Postmodernism is in a unique position in that it is the first worldview emerging at a time when a large majority of world population is able, or soon will be able, to communicate and share ideas in an instant. The internet, the advanced telecommunication systems, television and radio enable its ideas and beliefs to travel anywhere, at any time. They also enable anybody to comment and spread the message; many people who hold a postmodern worldview have no qualifications, and yet have a huge following on their blogs as they share their views and experiences³⁹.

However, this author contends that this technology and information is as much a negative as a positive for the postmodern worldview. In many ways the current cultural trends are continuing and exaggerating the great modern goal of control, progress and liberation. The efforts to map the genome and the constant talk of human cloning echoes the modern quest to control and to know all about life (cf. Zdanow 2009). As more and more money is poured into technology, new warfare and new ways to travel, the modern ideal of conquering space, time and each other is still, very much in the fore-front (cf. Leithart 2008:40). In actual fact, the postmodern emphasis on constantly shifting through television channels and the quest for entertainment has spurred this on as more and more

³⁹ For two scuh blogs, see www.onehandclapping.com and www.spirituality.org.za

graphic, fantasizing and fascinating “news” needs to be broadcast to the world to satisfy people. The current telecommunication system at times appears intent to turn all of humanity into glorified computing machines (cf. Green 2004:178). One can imagine how this could happen; as more information is presented to humanity, more information needs to be processed and so the more computer like humanity becomes, and thus more and more true and real beauty (as is perceived by humanity) will be gone from the world, which will be impossible to return (cf. Green 2004:179). In fact, this information gluttony that is happening is in many ways echoing Modernity’s quest for knowledge. And it may be even more a quest for knowledge, as suddenly anybody’s opinion counts, as it is theirs, made in their circumstances, and thus should not be quested. And so the intensification of the modern worldview occurs(cf. Leithart 2008:39).

Consumerism, another key element of postmodern culture, again intensifies the world economic trends that have been at work for the last hundred years; that is, it is a culmination of Modernity enterprise (cf. Zdanow 2009). Linked to this is the role of mass media, and specifically advertising, which constantly sells the latest new novelty at the expense of lasting permanence (cf. Zdanow 2009). Life occurs and is lived place in the context of these images and adverts, and thus the vapourness of reality comes to the fore (cf. Leithart 2008:41). These super-fast images represent a moment of overcoming (or gnostically denying) time. Suddenly ‘virtual reality’ and globalisation are leading to a lack of satisfaction, and a lack of appreciation for creation (cf. Gare 1995:6; Zdanow 2009). The postmodern worldview could allow a situation of artificial life to take precedence over the appreciation, and then the actual experience, of the created world. It

appears that while the moderns gutted the natural world, the postmoderns are destroying humanity's capacity to appreciate beauty⁴⁰ as an end in itself (cf. Green 2004:182).⁴¹

Thus ironically, "Like many modern advances, the domination of time turns into the opposite; absolute control of time through absolute speed, speed for its own sake, leaves us feeling we have no control of time at all" (Leithart 2008:42). Paton captures this spirit well (Paton 2009);

Technologically enabled connectedness is once again a two edged sword. That twitter feed means I am part of a churning groupmind, in real time, but it also means my retention of the actual memes passing through is reduced to almost zero. The "Virtual" as in "Virtual Reality" has gained the ascendancy over actual (true) reality. In fact, VR is one of the most cynically ironic concepts to date. As we strive for the most realistic game ever, we are forgetting: even the *virtualist* reality is utter fantasy. This confusion is by now deeply part of our generation.

And thus, what these things (objectivity, globalisation, virtuality) point to is the loss of the particular. As in objectivity, the external, the universal and the general, drive out the internal and the specific. The global devours the local, and the virtual displaces ones time-and-space bound perspectives (cf. Paton 2009). This is a danger any follower of postmodern thought or culture needs to be aware of, otherwise their ethical treatment of creation may become non-existent. Modernity has always suffered from internal contradictions. It aspires to control the cosmos, yet is it driven by a critical spirit that dissolves all traditions (cf. Leithart 2008:42). Postmodernism at times echoes this very spirit, and these dangers need to be avoided when one works within a postmodern understanding of life.

⁴⁰ As in something that is real; not fake or human-created or engineered.

⁴¹ The movie *American Beauty* brilliant presents these worrying concerns.

4.3.4 Inversion of the Modern Worldview

Yet there have also been major shifts and changes to the modern ideal and the modern system and times, ironically, brought about by pushing the modern trends to their extremes, which actually create something entirely different (cf. Leithart 2008:43). These shifts are specifically seen in the changes that the factory system and the nation state have experienced over the last century. The centralised factory, dominant in the lives of its employee and dominant in its vastness and the way it exhibits its force on the horizon, has slowly diminished in its visible power (cf. Hartmann 2009). These days, many large corporations have offices scattered across the globe; many of them have games rooms to make the employee experience fun. Los Angeles (often said to be *the* postmodern city) has basically de-industrialised, and survives very well through entertainment and software (cf. Leithart 2008:45).

One of the main drivers of these shifts comes out of the practise and the understanding of deconstruction (discussed in 4.3.1). Deconstruction allows for the emergence of a type of relativism, and so some contend that the central tenant of postmodernism is that the objectivity of knowledge is undermined. Knowledge is seen as subjective and uncertain, and the pure goodness of knowledge (a modern view) is questioned. Pluralism, tolerance, diversity, ecumenism; these are all synonymous of the current trend in postmodern thinking for the “unity above belief” attitude. There is no longer a belief in a metanarrative that all humanity embraces, there is no overarching view of reality to which humans all subscribe (cf. Danaher 2005:293). As Lyotard contended, there is an “incredulity to metanarratives” (Gare 1995:4). A metanarrative is an all-inclusive system

that explained reality, and shaped the view of the world (cf. Erickson 1999:18; Lakeland 1997:35). Trying to develop this metanarrative, it is argued, is seen as a pointless task because truth is now defined by the community and subsequently changes with each different community and culture (cf. Pearce 2005:51). As many Postmoderns would contend that the truth can be problematic, it is never said that there is no such thing as truth. As stated above, Derrida does not hold for a universe where anything goes. Contrary, he, and most Postmoderns, believes strongly in *justice*, which by its essence means that there is something final beyond. It may be better to say that Postmoderns are comfortable to say there is some form of truth; however, they would doubt if anyone could ever encounter and have all that truth.

As a result of this, the postmodern person desires relationships with others above knowledge, demonstration above being told what to do, and meaning and a sense of belonging above learning, arguing and developing doctrines (cf. Pearce 2005:56). They value community to help them determine their own ethics. There is a strong distrust of any form of hierarchy, of which the traditional churches generally hold to, and the most popular churches are currently the ones that are independent or united (cf Stavridis 2006). Postmodern Christians do not want to become ‘churchified’, to learn hymns and doxologies, they don’t want to learn Christian behaviour to be done religiously over and over; instead, against this control, they want to see lives being changed and people growing in their relationship with God (cf. Pearce 2005:52-53; Erickson 1998:167). They live in an unpredictable world where any moment may be their last and they are

encouraged to ‘seize the moment’ now, and worry about consequences later. This is the relativism of postmodern culture (cf Stavridis 2006).

The same trend is seen in the nation state, as over the past hundred years, national boundaries (the defining reality of the modern state) have slowly begun to dissolve, helped by modern communication technology. Currencies, letters, cultural foods are spilling over into foreign cultures with extreme ease and minimal conflict (cf. Leithart 2008:46). It is my opinion that in some ways, Barak Obama’s victory in the USA was an early example of postmodern thought reaching a global scale, and his successes or failures in office will be a fascinating glimpse into an emerging postmodern global culture.

Inversion also occurs when postmodern scepticism questions modern conceptual and technical control. Scientists (predominantly male and of European cultural background) are seen to constitute historically powerful groups; and thus there is scepticism towards them, their work and their conclusions (cf. Bereiter 1994:3; Zdanow 2009).) For example, quantum mechanics finds a degree of uncertainty in the fundamental structures of physical reality. Freud’s theories of the subconscious ironically undermine his scientific ideal of objectivity, as “modern man (sic) is know and controllable; Freudian man (sic) is not” (cf. Leithart 2008:47).

Even ecclesiastically, the modern (post-reformation) church has been divided and subdivided into numerous branches, each based on some small, but important, different

doctrine. And the job of the theologians and pastors was to defend their view and to show how the other Christians were misguided. Due to this, a post-rational spirituality is emerging (cf Stavridis 2006). Despite claims to the contrary, one could argue that Postmodernity does not signal the death of the narrative, the story; instead it is the time and rise of the anthology (cf. Detweiler 2004:304).. This generation believes that an all-encompassing story is almost impossible to find, and therefore they look for the smaller, personal, various stories and myths that explain their life and faith, and then develop a ‘mythology’ or postmodern ‘narrative’ (cf Stavridis 2006;Leithart 2008:52-53). For example, many who hold to this view contend that truth is therefore no longer limited to the Bible, but truth is found readily in the *Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Matrix* and even the controversial *Da Vinci Code* (cf. Detweiler 2004:304). God is therefore no longer an object of knowledge, *He*⁴² is free to become a subject, a person whom one cannot understand but with whom one can actually relate (cf. Danaher 2005:294). It is the opinion of the author that Christianity is *not* a metanarrative. At the heart of Christianity is a personal relationship with a risen Christ, and this is beyond knowledge and metanarrative forms. The personal relationship with God defines the narrative to be more than a way of viewing reality; it reminds one of the immanence and the transcendence of God. Thankfully though, modern denominations are dividing. This partly from disgust with the fragmentation that has occurred, but it is also a result of grassroots activism where Christians of different denominations have stood shoulder to shoulder, and in doing so discovered how much they share. The *Us vs Them* shifts: “we” are learning from *them* (cf. Leithart 2008:52-53).

⁴² Many also have no trouble referring to God in the feminine form (see for examples of this <http://soundandsilence.wordpress.com/>)

4.3.5 Unmaskings of the Modern Worldview

The third area in which postmodernism challenges Modernism is in the area of showing up Modernism's failings. The technical failures of Modernity, especially in the quest to control creation, reveal the postmodern unmasking. The example of Germany's nineteenth century project to rectify the Rhine River to prevent flooding and to create a faster, deeper and shorter river is a case in point. In fact, it was an archetypal modern plan involving the management of one of the most unmanageable substances - water (cf. Leithart 2008:52-53). And yet flooding, even more devastating, continued, and continues to occur. And Postmodernity unmasks this modern concept and control; it recognises that technology has never achieved the control it promised and claimed, and that science, marked by great debate, has never been a unified force (cf. Leithart 2008:53; Zdanow 2009).

Another area this unmasking is revealed is within the theological sphere. Against the idea that faith is about reason and correct doctrine, an emphasis on the mystical ways of God has emerged. The idea of 'mystery' must have a place in postmodern theology; not in any irrational thinking, but a reminder of the fundamental super rational reality that is God (cf. Grenz 1994:3). A postmodern Christian will try and unite the paradox of the transcendence and the immanence of God. They attempt to do this primarily through relationships and therefore, the church needs to strive to be a united community of faith (cf Stavridis 2006). "Science has of course proved its power to explain and control reality, but Postmoderns are dystopians who unmask the scientific progress, costs in

ecological damage, in loss of human dignity, in waste and disorientation” (Leithart 2008:79).

Ultimately, one can conclude that Postmodernity is a knot of cultural, philosophical and social divisions arising from inversion, unmasking and intensifications that challenge the modern trinity of control, liberation and progress. In a nutshell, Postmodernity “is vapours revenge” (Leithart 2008:55).

4.4 The Christian Responses to Postmodernism and the Ethical Implications

I will now examine how Evangelical Christians have responded to this new worldview—and whether there is any value in utilising it in determining an ethical response to the environment. The modern worldview which influenced Christianity does not have a good track record regarding any ethic and action towards the environment. Perhaps this new worldview offers new perspectives and new ethics to treat creation with care.

There are two general responses by evangelical Christians to postmodernism; either it is labelled as being completely incompatible with the Christian thought, or it is seen as a new opportunity in which the church can contextualize the faith and spread the gospel (cf Codrington 2004:146; Stavridis 2006). Leithart (2008:11) agrees with this ironic division of people, and he breaks down the Christian response to postmodernism into two groups: the APC’s (Anti Postmodern Christian) and the PPC’s (Pro Postmodern Christian). The APC’s most common criticism of postmodern thought and theory is epistemological;

especially in terms of “relative truth”. Leithart (2008:11-12) contends that it is a fallacy that relativism is at the heart of postmodern thought; rather, he argues, eschatology is more central to the postmodern method, as well as the Christian response.

Erickson (1999) looks at six separate and personal views of Evangelical Christians towards postmodernism, three of these are very negative to postmodernism and want to reject all forms of it, while the other side acknowledges that there is merit in it and that the church needs to contextualize its message to reach the current generation. He himself battles to find a way to reconcile Christianity with postmodernism, whereas Codrington disagrees with him, and warns one against dismissing all things postmodern as evil (cf. Erickson 1999:151-157; Codrington 2004:146).

Postmodernism, like previous worldviews, once again challenges the Christian church to re-evaluate its beliefs and thus its ethics. Evangelical Christianity has three central tenants to it: theism, a belief in the wholly Other; divine revelation, that this wholly Other seeks to bridge the gap with humanity; and illumination, that the current reader of the Bible understands this by means of divine application (cf. Wilson 2004:154). In some ways, these three central tenants, with their emphasis on scientific thinking and empirical approaches and proper hermeneutical reading of the text, are children of early Modernity (cf. Grenz 1994:28). Modernist ‘traditional Evangelicalism’ has at times fooled itself into thinking that its reading of Scripture is authoritative, that it is the only way to absolute truth, and that any other thought process or methodology is wrong (cf. Codrington 2004:147).

It is very important to remember that Postmodernity does not want to be an alternative to Modernism; rather, it offers a scathing critique of modernity and its practises (cf. Danaher 2005:293⁴³ Kretchmar (2008:2-9). Looking at secular postmodern thought at the current time, true Christian theology cannot agree with that radical scepticism and ‘problemtising’⁴³ of absolute truth that it portrays (cf. Grenz 1994:29). The Christian worldview has no place for a philosophy that questions and places any transcendent reality in a predicament, as seen in Sartre. On this precise definition of postmodernism, one can reject it outright. A reformed, conservative response will therefore see Christianity as being completely opposed to postmodernism, and see no good in even trying to minister within it (cf. Codrington 2004:146; Erickson 1999:151-157). Yet there is more than this at stake, and on this issue certain reformed, conservative and dispensationalist theologians lose the plot. They are stuck in the belief that the modern mind is the only way, and they try at times to reduce God into a systematic encyclopaedia that leaves little room for mystery. These doctrines then develop into proof of absolute truth, which is then used as the basis on which they continue to expound their modernist thinking (cf. Codrington 2004:148;cf Stavridis 2006).

One must keep in mind that there are many ‘streams’ of postmodernism. There are good characteristics to it: the reminder that knowledge is not entirely certain; that there is still a transcendent reality—God (Emmanuel Levinas is a postmodern philosopher who

⁴³ Since postmodern thought is a reaction against modern thought, it never ‘denies’ anything, it only problematises ideas. None of the core postmodern philosophers would claim to deny absolute truth – this is a faulty accusation often made of postmodern thought. However, their view of truth is very abstract and impossible to pin down (Weilanga 2006).

acknowledges a form of the transcendent). Even Derrida acknowledges “the constancy of God in my life is called by other names” (Caputa 1997:20). Other positives are that knowledge is not without its bias (one can never be truly objective), that all knowledge is not good (atomic bombs and genocides are perverse results of knowledge) (cf. Weilanga 2006). It reminds one that there is an emotional-spiritual side to rational, logical thinking. postmodernism reminds one that the greater the potential for good, the greater the potential for evil (cf. Grenz 1994:29). The question posed is this: If one is tired of the clinical modern mind, why can that person not begin to explore Christianity in a different way, in a way that is “after” the modern way?

As in the discussion above, the postmodern person does not deny an absolute truth; they do not live in a purely relativist bubble. For the postmodern Christian, absolute truth is still a reality; their focus is on the various ways to learn, know and experience that (cf. Weilanga 2006). They are also more than willing to admit their own prejudices and subjectivity when they come to read a text. The issues revolve around how to know and experience that truth as they live in a paradox of faith, how to know a God who is invisible (cf. Codrington 2004:150). Just because one is subjective in their personal faith does not mean they deny Christ’s death and resurrection.

As I have stated, one can be a postmodern Christian without holding to the full philosophy of postmodernism, and therefore a need arises for the church and Christianity to cater for this culture, and to ethically respond within to the challenges facing this generation. This is very much linked to one’s view of the church and culture, and if one

acknowledges that there can be true Christians who worship, live and form an ethic in a postmodern way, the challenge to adjust the church is great. The relationship of Christians to the current culture is the current crisis point for the church (cf. Keller 2006:36). Being culturally relevant is a Biblical mandate (see 1 Cor 9:9-13) that one would ignore at peril (cf. Weilanga 2006). Not only that, but bringing in a different perspective and differing worldview to interpret Biblical texts can provide a fresh and exciting way of determining new responses to current challenges. The ethical questions of the day need answers, and the modern reading of scripture does not always provide these answers (cf. Keller 2006:38). The need to contextualize the gospel so that it is culturally relevant is real; so that the symbols of Christ's love coincide with what the generation is searching for (cf. Adams 2005:297).

The challenge to the Christian church is learning to communicate to the postmodern generation—but at the same time, avoiding becoming overtly postmodern (cf. Weilanga 2006). The criticism levelled against the influence of Modernism in the Evangelical Christian church in this paper is that theology and ethical practise has become based on a modern, philosophical worldview. It is this author's opinion that the church should never take on all the characteristics of any philosophical argument or worldview. A modern church and a postmodern church fall into the same trap, in that they let cultural ideas dictate to them. The challenge is to be in but not of the world. The Evangelical church needs to be relevant and adjust in order to communicate the gospel to this emerging worldview, thus earning the right to speak into the lives of the postmodern generation.

This also means that when postmodern themes are seen within the Scriptures (especially regarding the environmental crisis) one would be brave and willing to engage the Scriptures to see how they will provide a new perspective and offer new hope to save, care and treat creation with the respect it deserves. It is exploring one of these scriptures, reading them from one's worldview and creating an ethic which brings God glory which will be focus of the remainder of this paper.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the postmodern worldview, its development, its definition and its defining characteristics. The opposition it presents to the modern worldview was explored, especially its non-controlling nature and the way this offers a new alternative to the modern worldview. It was also concluded that Christians can operate within the postmodern worldview, while not adopting all aspects of it. Having now explored postmodernism as an alternate to the modern worldview, especially in regards to ethics around creation, the scriptures (specifically Ecclesiastes) will be explored to see if they can concur with postmodernism

CHAPTER 5

Ecclesiastes, Postmodernism and Environmental Ethics

Having established and explored the two worldviews at play within Western civilisation today, chapter five turns to examine scripture and its relevance to the environmental crisis. Wisdom literature, as found in the book of Ecclesiastes, will be explored in depth by investigating the context in which the text was written (in terms of the author, date and historical setting, literary expression and structure). After this basis, parallels between postmodernism and Ecclesiastes are drawn, especially regarding the vaporous nature of life and the concept of *The Earth Remaining Forever*. This chapter concludes with how the author of Ecclesiastes could be speaking to a postmodern worldview.

5.1 Approaching Scripture

Before one can properly explore the writings and ethical imperatives of Ecclesiastes and how that ethical message can speak today, correct hermeneutical principles need to be adopted to understand the original context, dating, author and any literature styles that were unique to that era. And before one does that, a brief discussion around how Scripture, specifically regarding creation has and should be read. This will be conducted by examining the type of Literature that Ecclesiastes is, as well as the context in terms of authorship, date, setting and literary expressions. This is a very important step, as it

enables one to correctly find the ethical instructions and then to utilise them within ones situation without doing an injustice to the text

The development of independent, critical and questioning Biblical scholarship throughout the 18th and 19th century was a direct consequence of the advancing modern mind. The general, philosophical and political changes of the time greatly influenced the way the scriptures were studied and interpreted (cf. Holter 2006:859). This results in many texts still being read through an interpretative grid that reflects a Eurocentric and modern context (cf. Holter 2006:859). For example, at certain times set frameworks were the only ones that were utilised, as “Ecclesiastes was interpreted almost exclusively in the context of the wisdom tradition of the First and Second Temple periods, and where a larger frame of reference was sought, pessimistic traditions in Greece and Egypt were often invoked.” (Janzen 2008:468). Yet this narrow view has been great questioned (as discussed briefly below) and as the interpretative lens of scripture reading is questioned, a new, exciting and for some, a worrying, reading can be carried out.

Since Scripture is the foundation of doctrine for Christianity, a new perspective in reading it regarding the environment and humanity has begun to emerge. A rediscovery of how to read scripture with all of creation in mind, and not just issues of human salvation, is occurring, linked strongly to the emergence of the postmodern frame of mind.

This requires a move beyond anthropocentric particulars, and an acknowledgment that the Bible goes from first things to last things—and not to “me” (cf. Santrime 2000:29-31). The scandal of particularity; in which it is believed that the Bible “needs to speak to my situation (pro-me), or else it cannot make a difference to me”, should be rejected, especially in the light of the postmodern focus on community and the breaking down of the controlling divisions of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ (cf. Santrime 2000:29-31).

If one begins to look in Scripture at what points towards the future and fullness of life, a different picture emerges. This perspective keeps in mind the theology of deliverance and that of blessing (Sponheim 1999:55-58). The theology of deliverance is a promise to humans (Israel) of a fertile, physical land, a deliverance from oppression through the means of nature; they are delivered to a land of justice. This land is never the property of people, it is not to be used as a source to amass wealth; rather it is intended for all of the people. This theology is expanded to have a universal scope in the prophets (Is 25:6-8) (cf. Santrime 2000:31-32).

The second part, the theology of blessing, is a framework used to understand God’s redemptive activity. Genesis 1 and 2 have been criticised for being highly anthropocentric, as they only focused on humanity and the fall. In this type of reading, the ‘Image of God’ is interpreted spiritually, hiding humanity’s commonness with animals (cf. Santrime 2000:35-36). The earth is seen as a house for humans to use on the way to the next world. But if one reads it through eschatological and ecological lenses, Genesis 1 emerges as a primary text of divine creativity (cf. Santrime 2000:35-36).

Humanity are placed in the sixth day, waiting for the 'shalom' day of rest. No 'fall' is mentioned in this account; all of creation is seen as good (not just humans). This is the picture of a state of shalom when humans and animals share a common life (cf. Santrime 2000:37-38). God speaks to create, God's words remain creative words; he does not withdraw from that creative engagement. Creation is working still, it continues, it has a pulse (cf. Sponheim 1999:x). "God continues to act towards God's creation" is heard throughout the Scriptures (Sponheim 1999:57).

Genesis 2:27 states that humanity is formed from the earth that they inhabit. The Hebrew word 'Adam' is from the root word for earth, 'Adamah' (cf. Laituri 2007:1). The human creatures get a special vocation; that of worshiping God. Thus when the 'fall' occurs in Genesis chapter 2, one must say that it is a fatal flaw that is located within humans; not the earth. The rest of the Torah also provides much evidence that people are to care for creation; and leaves one with the impression that humanity is bound to the earth in more ways than one could imagine. The laws present a system in which humanity and the earth are meant to work for six days or years and then rest for one. As Berry argues "Creation is not in any sense independent from the creator, the result of a primal act long over and done with, but it is a continuous, constant participation of all creatures in the being of God" Laituri (2007:1).

The rest of the Old Testament is also rich in its appreciation and care for creation. Dempsey (1997:269-278) presents key Biblical verses from the prophets and wisdom writings that highlight how creation, salvation and redemption are linked as part of God's

plan of hope. This dispels the notion that humans are the only beneficiaries of God's redemptive action. "Redemption of humankind is connected to the restoration of the natural world through divine promises" (Dempsey 1997:282). This vision of salvation is a harmonious relationship between God, humanity and the earth. Yet this vision is false unless one starts to embrace it and practically live in new ways that anticipate the future (cf. Dempsey 1997:282).

These themes carry on in various places in the New Testament. They are seen when Jesus speaks in jubilee terms in Luke 4:18; in Colossians 1:15, when Paul says Christ makes peace with all things; in Romans 8, which concludes in a universal ending (cf. Santrime 2000:42-43). In Romans 8:22-23, creation is pictured as groaning because it is in pain, it is needing transformation, it is also in need of redemption (cf. Sponheim 1999:3). The Pauline vision in Romans 8, Colossians 1:15 and Galatians 3 speaks of a universal salvation, of a universalising gospel (cf. Santrime 2000:15). In this vision, the shadow of the cross falls on the entire cosmos (cf. Santrime 2000:24). Christians need to re-understand the fact that "...we (all creation) are creatures together" (Sponheim 1999:17). Creation comprehends all the work of God, and thus all theology must be creation theology, keeping this fact at the forefront of any work. Humans are creatures created in the image of God and having 'dominion' over creatures does not lift human from being creatures; instead, they are part of God's creative process, and should work to transform creation (cf. Sponheim 1999:25-27).

And in light of this, Christians are called to serve the Creator's will, "to care for, to advance, the cause of creation", since the "Creator is to be found with the Creatures" (cf. Sponheim 1999:35-36). I would content that the following themes, gleaned from the stories and the verses above, need to be kept in mind when reading Scripture from a postmodern perspective; that God has universal history with all things, that Human creatures are placed in the world of living things, that Humans are called by God to care for the earth, that the earth is not at fault in human's sin, that Humans are called to live in divinely mandated limits, that God places humans in a world within a world, the human community, and that the Divine universal goal for all things is shalom; this is the cosmic vision to which Christ's death extends and gives hope.

Regarding ethical imperatives in Scripture, two general types are utilised. Deontological Ethics are an ethics based on a rule system, it is concerned with classifying what is a right and good action and what is a wrong or bad action. It is a determining factor, if the action is wrong, it is always wrong and it is bound by duty (cf. Herman, 2006). Teleological ethics are ethics that consider the ends, or final out comes. This is a goal based ethical approach, placing more concern on the situation (cf. Herman, 2006).

In summary, one can conclude that the Biblical story in terms of creation has just began, and needs a lot more graft to truly justify that the whole scope of Scripture views creation in a good light (cf. Van Dyk 2009:187).

5.2 Wisdom Literature

Before one explores the key pericope, the correct context needs to be set as to avoid any unknowing reading into of the text. Within the Scriptures that reveal the nature and will of God, there is a type of literature that speaks practical wisdom into everyday life. It is within this category of Scripture that a practical, ethical living within a new framework can be found (cf. Middlemas 2007:216). This Wisdom literature has a unique history and characteristics, and as discussed above, is linked to the story of Israel and God's plan for the entire creation. Wisdom writings are representative of a worldview that is found in the literature of the Old Testament Scripture and surrounding Ancient Near East cultures that sought to institute clear strategies to accomplish and bring about contentment and justice (cf. Middlemas 2007:216).

The people of ancient Israel's self-understanding, and their view of the surrounding world, was largely based on a story line reflecting the historical process of her past (cf. Bandstra 2004:400). A brief re-cap of this story will serve to highlight this: it begins when the creator God called and covenanted to a people through Abraham, who was the father of the nation (see 2 Chron. 30). God looked after the Sons of Jacob, and through Moses He led His people out of captivity in Egypt (cf. Bandstra 2004:400-402). God taught them how they should live as a holy set apart people, judging their actions (usually with abundant mercy), and He was with, or not with, the various kings of Judah and Israel (dependant, not on their economic or political success, but as determined by their relationship with God) (cf. Bandstra 2004:400-402). This overarching story is echoed numerous through the Scripture; the New Testament writers acknowledge and give

reference to this past. Take for example this verse from the book of Galatians: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” (Gal.3:6 NLT). Here, as a Jewish Christian, Paul, expands on this theme as he encourages the churches of Galatia in their expression of faith and spirituality. The social, political, economic, and military happenings of the people of God was an agenda of faith and experience, it formed the foundation of their understanding of whom and what they were. However, this is broader picture of God and the People of Israel, of God and His world (cf. Birch 1999:373-377). This is a picture of the shared faith of a nation and how that nation needs to be a blessing to others, and it is especially evidenced in the great histories, chronicles and law books of the Scriptures. But this great theme does not speak *directly* about the relationship between God and an individual; and an individual and their world. And so within this great meta-narrative, the question began to be asked as to how an ordinary individual can grasp ethical guidelines to live a decent life.

Thus, in response to this great meta-narrative that spoke so strongly, and to help understand the average life of an average person, a different genre emerged to help guide one in their faith. This “Wisdom literature” presents one with an alternative interpretive category and a different form of discourse and reflection; it exists to provide a practical, reflective ethic (cf. Bandstra 2004:410). There are three wisdom books in the Old Testament; namely Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (the larger Greek canon, also included wisdom books Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom of Solomon) (cf. Bandstra 2004:465). Each of these exhibits some of the same characterises.

5.2.1 Characteristics of Wisdom Spirituality within the Old Testament

The genre of “wisdom” is broad; however, Birch (cf. 1999:373-377), argues for five factors that are re-occurring characteristics of wisdom writing. These, while being generalisations, are helpful in understanding the relation between God, humanity and creation. These will be briefly further explored.

As explained above, Wisdom literature operates quite differently from the typical law literature, or historical writings of the Old Testament. The first factor that is noticeable in Wisdom literature is that it is a reflection of lived experiences of a quite mundane kind, and thus the spirituality presented is very much about the everyday things of life rather than an external, overarching meta-narrative (cf. Birch 1999:373-377). “Wisdom Literature focuses on the daily routines of human interaction, and asks the meaning and social significance of matters such as speech, money, friendship, work, sexuality and land” (Birch 1999:373). It presents ethical guidelines for everyday activities, at times a theological ethic; at other times, a deontological, rule defining ethic.

Take the story Job as an illustration of this; Job is a righteous man who experiences great loss in regards to wealth, health, and eventually his family. In conversations with his friends, and with God, he questions God and His judgment. This is showing how, in the backdrop of the great meta-narrative of Israel, an individual is living in relationship with God. Job is a story of an individual’s life and experience. These themes are echoed in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NLT):

*For everything there is a season,
a time for every activity under heaven.
A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to harvest.*

*A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
A time to cry and a time to laugh.
A time to grieve and a time to dance.
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.
A time to embrace and a time to turn away.
A time to search and a time to quit searching.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
A time to tear and a time to mend.
A time to be quiet and a time to speak.
A time to love and a time to hate.
A time for war and a time for peace.*

Here, the mundane issues of life—which form the backbone of every society, are discussed and brought to the fore, to present a viable and understandable ethic.

The second general characteristic of Old Testament wisdom follows on from the first. This literature insists that these mundane matters of everyday interaction be injected with “significance and ethical outcomes”. This literature is concerned with the wellbeing of everyday people, not about theologising. “Through the observation of the natural and God-given order, sages (sic) established rules that enabled people to master various situations.” (Middlemas 2007:216).

Thus, even more than being concerned with the day to day happenings of life, wisdom literature is concerned about the ethics and consequences of how these play out (cf. Bandstra 2004:411). As Birch (1999:374) argues,

Wisdom teachers recognise that there is a balanced network of givens, choices and consequences and that one cannot out-flank or escape the requirements, disciplines, and demands of the dailiness (sic) of life.

The basic premise is expressed: ‘What is sown, will be reaped’. And nobody (even the powerful) is exempt from these categories. Thus, the wisdom teachers think hard about

what it means to be righteous or wicked, and the lived consequences of those choices that are made.

An example can be seen in Ecclesiastes 5:13 (NLT) “*People who work hard, sleep well*”. Here, the basic premise about everyday mundane life is that when one works hard, sleep will come easily (and sleep is seen as a great blessing). Thus, those who are lazy, will not sleep, they will not be blessed by God. As Birch (1999:374) puts it “wise living consists in respecting the ‘givens’ of daily life in making responsible choices about daily existence and in anticipating the consequences of these choices”. It represents a choosing of a path for one’s life style: it is a great foundation of one’s relation between God, each other and the broader creation. In light of these consequences, one can label a person either wise or foolish (cf. Bandstra 2004:410). A wise person chooses the path and knows the content of the collective experience of their forefathers (they know the proverbs which have been passed down from generation to generation), and they apply their knowledge in the things they are expected to do, and they are always ready to learn (cf. Rogers 2006). In contrast a fool is one who has chosen not to follow the path of wisdom; rather, a fool is someone who is ignorant, lazy and unteachable (cf. Rogers 2006). As an ethical enterprise, one would want to ensure that they are constantly wise.

The third characteristic of wisdom literature is that the “*reflections and interpretations of experience...are crafted in artistic speech that intends to be compelling and persuasive*” (Birch 1999:375). Once more, take the proverb from Ecclesiastes as an example, “*People who work hard, sleep well*”. The advantage of using such a figure of speech is that it is easy to remember and to quote as it becomes part of the lived experience of daily routine.

It can also be used in a non judgemental way, and it speaks across generations—although it is compiled specifically for the young (cf. Bandstra 2004:410). This carefully crafted speech engages in many rhetorical strategies that negotiate what is hidden and what is engaged. As Birch (1999:375) states,

This artistic speech seeks to communicate about experience what is not flatly and obviously available but is given to the discerning who are patient enough to reflect, to notice recurring patterns, to pay attention to odd exceptions.

The fourth factor of wisdom literature is that it is an intellectual and ethical enterprise; it is not some passing fad. Rather, wisdom writing provided a forum of comfort for those who undertook the challenge of having a deep, trusting curiosity about the way things work, and patience to observe the world around them (cf. Bandstra 2004:411-412). Their methods of ‘knowing’ obviously do not correspond to the modern methods of science, nor do they comply with any modernistic mindset. However, Birch (1999:375) suggests that the wisdom teachers approximated a scientific understanding of reality. That is, “they observed the orderly patterns of reality on the assumption of constancy” (Birch 1999:375). Much of the wisdom needed for life to be happy and successful is gained and accumulated over previous centuries (cf. Bandstra 2004:400). Thus, those who act foolishly will lose money - a fact borne through a long period of time. And so this ethical wisdom teaching is more than common sense; it is a “*studied reflective judgement about reality* that provides reliable lore transmitted to the next generation about how to live well, safely, responsibly and happy” (Birch 1999:375-376, italics added). It is a reliable counsel of knowledge to guide one ethically, and assist in present decision making.

Finally, this Wisdom teaching is a theologically literate; it witnesses to Yahweh, His world, His people, and the other existing nations (cf. Birch 1999-376). More specifically it is recognised that wisdom theology is a theology of creation (cf. Bandstra 2004:411). That is, it is “a reflection of faith upon the world intended by the creator” (Birch 1999:375-376). The Creator God intends for the world to be safe, whole, prosperous, and peaceful— that the entire creation order be marked by *Shalom*. Wisdom literature rests on the belief in the goodness of God’s created order (cf. Bandstra 2004:412). For that end to be reached the Creator has given gifts of well-being, and He has also set limits and built into creation rewards and punishments. These are set into motion by either wise or foolish actions. “The creator God has willed that all parts of creation are delicately related to one another, and therefore every decision, every act matters to the shape and well-being of the whole” (Birch 1999:376).

An important point to highlight within this genre is that even though each of these wisdom sayings contains truth according to their own context, by no means are they commands, or even true in all situations. It is common that these wise sayings contradict each another. This is illustrated by the author of Ecclesiastes in the following verses: “*Better to have one handful with quietness than two handfuls with hard work and chasing the wind*” (Ecclesiastes. 4:6, NLT), and straight after this verse, “*Fools fold their idle hands, leading them to ruin.*” (Ecclesiastes. 4:5, NLT). This should not surprise one, as even today, it is characteristic of these sayings to at times contradict each other. For example, people say “too many cooks spoil the broth”, and also say “many hands make light work”. For these saying, it is all about context and the intended meaning for the

intended situation These sayings make sense and bring truth within a context, but should not be used as a command or as a rule for all life.

5.3 Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes, part of the Wisdom literature in Scripture, can be seen as “a philosophical account of the attempt to find happiness by a man who has everything” (Dor Shav 2008:211). Dor Shav (2009:19) argues in another article that, humanity is “...disparaged not because fleeting life is itself unworthy, but because he has made it so by virtue of his actions.” However, due to its cynical commentary on life, compared to the rest of the Scriptures, Ecclesiastes authority is very frequently called into question (cf. Seow 2001:237). Even within the Wisdom literature, it is the book which is the most questioned, most argued about. For example, traditional wisdom, as that found within the proverbs, correlates blessing and well being with right behaviour (cf. Bandstra 2004:412). Ecclesiastes flips wisdom tradition on its head, by questing this and many other observed life experiences (cf. Rogers 2006).

The book is written in the name of Qohelet⁴⁴ son of David, King in Jerusalem. Dor Shav (2008:211) argues that the twelve chapters of the book are one of literature’s earliest encounters between faith and reason. For him, the author struggles to believe that life is meaningful despite all that he (taking Solomon as the original author) has experienced. Thus, the book’s inclusion in the Hebrew Bible testifies to “Judaism’s interest not only in divine revelation, but also in man’s (sic) exploration of the meaning of life and mortality”

⁴⁴ Qohelet is a transliteration from Hebrew and thus it is spelled differently by different commentators. Some spelling is Kohelet and Haqoheleth; for this paper, Qohelet will be used.

(Dor Shav 2008:211). Hayman (1991:93) agreed with this, arguing that the Jewish people could clearly allow Deuteronomy and Qohelet, the Mishnah and *Sefer Yesira*, to co-exist both in their collection of sacred books and also in their minds .

5.3.1 Author

The first issue to be explored is who is responsible for the writing of Ecclesiastes. Traditionally, the authorship has been attributed to the Israelite king, Solomon, who reigned during the golden age of Israel's United Kingdom, in the tenth century B.C.E. The Author introduces him⁴⁵ in the beginning of the book (1:1), "These are the words of the Teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem". The Hebrew word translated teacher here is 'Qohelet'

The Hebrew word "*Qohelet* ", is the word generally used to refer to the author and how the author uses it to refer to himself; and it is the name from which Ecclesiastes derives. This word has been variously explained as the following: a personal name, a nom de plum, an acronym, and a function (cf. Crenshaw 1988:32). One of the difficulties in comprehending the 'meaning' Qohelet is that there is different usage of it throughout the book. Middlemas (2007:221) writes that

At the beginning of the collection (i:i, 2), the sage is called haqoheleth (the definite article and the feminine participle), translated literally 'the Qoheleth'. The participle used this way frequently connotes "the one who engages in a certain activity

⁴⁵ As argued in the next few paragraphs, the identity of the author remains a mystery, and thus a feminine author cannot be ruled out. For this work, the masculine pronoun will be used; however, this does not discount a potential female author.

When used as a name, the word Qohelet has an article (see 12:8); however, in 1:2 it lacks this article. In all likelihood, this same article is also employed in 7:27, where Qohelet takes on a feminine verb form (which is in comparison to the rest of the usage of the word, which is presented as masculine) (cf. Crenshaw 1988:30-32). Formally, the word is a *Qal* feminine participle, thus it is worth noting that the personal name with a feminine ending preceded the masculine. The term Qohelet occurs seven times within the entire book. Elsewhere the root *qhl* occurs in Hiphil or Niphal (acting as a causative or reflective/passive). Thus, aside from considering ‘Qohelet’ as a name, the word could mean “to convoke,” “to assemble (Hiphil)” or “to be gathered (Niphal)”; that is, to be used as a verb (cf. Crenshaw 1988:32).

It needs to be noted that the author claims to be part of a royal bloodline. However, the prominence of this royal testament appears limited, as this description is abandoned after the second chapter (cf. Crenshaw 1988:29). King David, Solomon’s father, did not have a son or daughter named Qohelet and it is unlikely that Qohelet was a nickname of King Solomon, or any of his other children (Bullock 1985:190). The link between “Qohelet” and Solomon could lie in the language of 1 Kings 8:1-12, where the king assembles (*yaqhel*) recitative of the people of Jerusalem. However, the initiative to draw on such a suitable text is probably a reflection of the author’s self-presentation in 1:12-2:26 (cf. Crenshaw 1988:32). So, if the author is not Solomon, why would they present themselves in such a manner? A common literary practise within the culture of that day was to ascribe a book to a ruler; which may be the case for the beginning of Ecclesiastes (cf. Bullock 1985:190-197). Another explanation can be found from an Egyptian royal testament, which could provide a prototype for a section of Ecclesiastes. An example of

this is the allusion to a shepherd in 12:11. The image of the Pharaohs being shepherds for their people was a regular occurrence in Egyptian literature, and the author of Ecclesiastes may have been borrowing a literary device from the surrounding nations. This can be supported by the fact that elsewhere the author presents himself as an underling—not a ruler (see Ecclesiastes 8:2, 10:20) (cf. Loader 1996:73). Nevertheless, Qohelet usually addresses his audience as a teacher, or as a wise person (*hakam*) (12:9), and not as a king, pharaoh, or any other type of a ruler. This by no means diminishes the authority of the author or of their reflections (cf. Loader 1996:73-75). I would argue that this ambiguity regarding the identity of the author sits neatly with Postmoderns who are happy not to have every item boxed, labelled and controlled.

While the identity of the author remains ambiguous, so too does the personality and the character of the author. Some argue that the author is a depressive workaholic, while others call the author a preacher of joy. The majority of commentators see the author as a pessimist, while others would argue the opposite, that is, that the Qohelet is an eternal optimist (cf. Seow 2001:238; Dor Shav 2008:213). Janzen (2008:479) goes as far to state that “Qohelet was a disillusioned eschatologist under a heartsick sense of the indefinite or “everlasting” deferral of such hopes.” However, again these characterisations only serve to further add confusion or exclusion to the book. For in truth, the Qohelet is neither a determinist nor a nihilist. Rather, he is a profound humanist, valuing both life and the process of learning that makes it worthy of our sincerest efforts (cf. Dor Shav 2008:213). And the Qohelet is not out to disprove any type of conventional wisdom; rather, "Qoheleth is not so much contradicting himself as observing contradictions in the world."

(Seow 2001:238). At times the negative type-setting of the Qohelet reminds one of the ease in which certain scholars have demonised postmodern thinkers, such as Derrida. By easily classifying people, it almost allows one freedom not to properly explore the depth of the wisdom within the literature.

5.3.2 Date and Historical setting

There has been a lack of, or an unwillingness to investigate the message of Qohelet within the background and context in which the book was written. Partly, this is due to the problems in identifying the correct dating of the book and partly it is linked to a reading that takes the author as discussing more eternal truths (cf. Seow 2001:238). However, the Qohelet draws many of the lessons presented from a view of his background. These observances of daily life lead Qohelet to make the arguments and discussions that would lead to an ethical perspective on life (cf. Seow 2001:239).

The context in which a book is written is extremely important when it comes to correctly understanding what the author is trying to convey. To understand the issues that the author was writing against, and how these issues impacted every day life, is needed for a correct contextualisation of the ethical imperatives to be understood. Yet, dating the compilation of Ecclesiastes and placing it into a historical setting is not a straight forward task (see some of the complexities in Rudman (1999:47-52). There was a period in which scholars argued that the original language it was written in was Aramaic (and thus that the book was compiled at a very late date), however, fragments of the book that were found at Qumran were written in Hebrew, and this theory is thus seen as being

improbable (cf. Crenshaw 1988:40-50). From this find in Qumran, some scholars have dated the book as being written during the middle period of the third century BCE.

In support of this later dating, there are particular language usages in the book which mark a transitional stage between classical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew (cf. Rudman 1999:49). According to certain scholars, twenty-seven hapax legomena occur in Ecclesiastes, together with twenty-six words or combinations of words that appear in Hebrew only in Qohelet's writing, and in Mishnaic texts (cf. Crenshaw 1988:31). These words and combinations would therefore provide evidence for placing the writing of Ecclesiastes around the same period as the compilation of other Scripture books like Daniel, Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah (cf. Crenshaw 1988:40-50). Occasionally, the Qohelet uses Persian loanwords such as *pardes* (park), and *medinah* (province) in describing their everyday life. From this, the book would have been written after the Jewish people had been exiled. Other Persian loan words, such as technical and legal words that correspond to Persian legal documents of that time, would also argue the fact for a later authorship of the book (cf. Rudman 1999:47). This would place the book in the fourth century BCE, especially as there is a lack of Grecisms which would point towards the Hellenistic influence that began in the third century (cf. Rudman 1999:48). The evidence of a Greek influence in the use of phrases such as "under the sun" and "to see the good" further adds to this evidence.

And this disagreement over dating leads to debate around what context it was written in. Even though the majority consensus is that Solomon did not write the book, there is still

much debate as to the date and context in which the author lived. Birch (1999:408) argues that the book is most probably dated in the Persian period that could also have early elements of Hellenistic thought. The meagre political data that some have read from the text points to a period prior to the Maccadean revolt in 164 B.C.E., as the attitude towards foreign rulers best fits the Ptolemaic period. Seow (2001:242) supports this, as he argues that if Qohelet is basing his observations on experienced life, then one could conclude that the volatility described points towards the late-Achaemenid period, when society seemed, at least in some quarters, to have turned upside down. Middlemas (2007:219) argues for a slightly later date of around the third century BCE, based within a Jerusalem ruled by the Ptolemies in Egypt. Yet for Bandstra (2004:465), it becomes even earlier: “The style of its language, its vocabulary, and themes it holds in common with Greek philosophy suggest that it dates to the second century B. C. E.” Crenshaw (1988:49-50) agrees by suggesting that a date between 225 and 250 remains the most likely date. Rudman (1999:52) sums up the debate well, by arguing that due to all the various views, the debate on the date of Ecclesiastes cannot be closed.

Even though there is no consensus on the exact time and location of the authorship, what is agreed upon is that the author was living in a time of unrest, and a time that was characterised by powerful rulers who were oppressing those under them. This especially fits either the Persian or the Greek hierarchical system in which a king or ruler would have been set up in the land of Israel, these rulers were often power hungry, cruel, and used their wealth to enrich their friends and oppress many. The Ptolemies were very oppressive rulers, who enabled a wide gap to develop between the rich and the poor.

With a strong centralised governing power, they were able to exert control over political and financially dependant territories (cf. Middlemas 2007:220). A lot of the issues observed during that time would have therefore have revolved around land, property and wealth, and “the Persian system of property grants provides a backdrop for a number of instructions in Ecclesiastes.” (Seow 2001:243). A geographical location of Palestine is likely for the area in which the book was written (Bullock 1985:200). Seow (2001:243) offers a good summary regarding the context for the text being written,

In sum, the period that Qoheleth observed was one of economic vitality but also volatility. It was a time for heady optimism about hitherto unimaginable opportunities tempered by sociopolitical and economic realities. It was a perplexing new world of rapid political, social, and economic innovations, many of which were initiated and determined in seats of power that the ordinary citizens of the vast empire could hardly grasp.

To these ancient times, which in many ways reflect the world as similar to the current one emerging from the control and destruction of a modern era, the Qohelet speaks words of wisdom, challenge and help.

5.3.3 Literary Expression and Structure

Apart from the general wisdom literature characteristics described above, it is worth exploring the more specific medium that Qohelet use for his message. In general, there is not one single genre which describes the whole book; however there is a distinct personal style that the author employs. This is especially highlighted in certain characteristics of the writing and the usage of language that is employed.

One of these characteristics is seen in the tendency of Qohelet to resort to extreme expression of calamity and bliss, as he juxtaposes malediction and benediction (see for example Ecclesiastes 10:16-17). Another example is evident in 4:10, in which Qohelet describes the calamitous result of falling when one lacks compassion. In his style of an autobiographical narrative (1:12-2:16) the author forms a basis for a conclusion about life (2:17-26), however the literary function of the above passage makes it difficult to know exactly how much of this is derived from personal experience, or from very good observation. Another characteristic is that the author converses with his heart (1:16, 2:1, 15; 3:17, 18; 7:23). Again, this is a reflection of an Egyptian literature convention. The language employed often reflects observation and subsequent reflection; for example, “I saw” (1:14, 2:24, 4:1, 6:1, 8:9), “I know” (1:17, 3:12, 8:12), and “there is” (2:21, 6:1, 8:14, 10:5). The author also makes use of antidotes from experience and observation (4:1) (Crenshaw 1988:29-31). This is in keeping with the wisdom function of studied expression of normal, mundane life.

At another point of the book, Qohelet makes use of storytelling technique, as seen in (4:13-16) and (9:14-15). The first story appears to combine typical and actual features that could have been observed (an obscure youth goes from prison to the throne: a rag to riches story). In contrast, the second story may be completely hypothetical, or it could be a recollection of an ancient incident (possibly a legend) in which a poor, wise man (who had been captured?) uses his power of persuasion to rescue a village. The book of Ecclesiastes also consists of a number of profound poems, such as 11:7-12:7. Crenshaw (1988:29-31), understands this poem as a parable. The Qohelet also “... makes use of analogy and simile, synecdoche, hyperbole, personification, and antanaclasis” (cf. Miller

1998:444). In all, Qohelet's unique style and unique employment and merging of different literature conventions provides for a fitting medium for his/her radical message.

In regards to the structure of the book; it has been suggested that Qohelet adopts a Greek rhetorical device known as "palindrome" (cf. Crenshaw 1988:38). This device is a complete 'balancing of material' so that, whether one starts from the beginning or from the end, they would still achieve the same result. Lohfink (1980) envisions the structure of the book as:

<i>1:1-2</i>	<i>Frame</i>
<i>1:4-11</i>	<i>Cosmology</i>
<i>1:12-3:15</i>	<i>Anthropology</i>
<i>3:16-4:16</i>	<i>Social Criticism 1</i>
<i>4:17-5:6</i>	<i>Criticism of Religion (poetic)</i>
<i>[5:1-7E]</i>	
<i>5:7-6:10</i>	<i>Social Criticism 2</i>
<i>[5:8-6:10E]</i>	
<i>6:11-9:6</i>	<i>Ideology Critique (Refutation)</i>
<i>9:7-12:7</i>	<i>Ethics (poetic at the end)</i>
<i>12:8</i>	<i>Frame</i>

Using this structure as a palindrome, one could see how, after a basic framing, the author looks at cosmology, which is reflected by the ethical poetry at the end. Thus, one can argue that ethical guidelines strongly linked to cosmology and creation are present from the ending and the beginning of the book.

However, as with the author and dating, there are countless differing views on the structure. For example, Bullock (1985:191-192) argues that the structure is

<i>1:2-11</i>	<i>Prologue</i>
<i>1:12-2:26</i>	<i>Section 1</i>
<i>3:1-5:20</i>	<i>Section 2</i>

6:1-8:15
8:16-12:7
12:8-12:12

Section 3
Section 4
Epilogue

Nevertheless, as one has seen, Ecclesiastes is not a typical book and here too there is debate over the structure. Recent critics have emphasised the view/re-view nature of the book. The consideration has been to look at the book in two parts: firstly, a view of the human condition, 1:4-4:3; and secondly, a re-view of the human condition, 4:4-12:7 (cf. Crenshaw 1988:39). It has also been suggested that one consider part one in two parts, (1) the Balance Sheet, 1:4-2:26 and (2) the Destiny of all, 3:1-4:3. The balance sheet contains an objective and a subjective expose, while the examination of human destiny meditates on time and divine justice. The second part includes a paradox (4:4-6:9) and an ethic (6:10-12:7). There are other theories on the structure of the book of Ecclesiastes, so by no means has this subject been exhausted, only that two examples of structure have been provided (cf. Crenshaw 1988:39; Lohfink (1980); Dor Shav 2008).

But apart from a differing usage of literature and structural tools, the major defining element of Ecclesiastes is the usage of a non-conventional wisdom style that goes against the traditional wisdom as found within the Proverbs. At risk of generalising again, it can be argued that the Proverbs provide wisdom that is compatible with a modern worldview; they are easily understood, clearly defined and provide easy guidance to ethics and how life can be controlled and understood. In contrast, the wisdom of Qohelet is very postmodern, especially as the cynical wisdom of Ecclesiastes challenges the neat and the tidy world of that presented in the book of Proverbs and in conventional wisdom (cf. Bandstra 2004:465). Bullock (1985:190) argues that Ecclesiastes provides an appropriate

balance to the conventional and practical wisdom that is provided in the book of Proverbs. And so as one attempts to find a new ethic for the treatment of creation within these turbulent times, perhaps one does not have to be so sceptical when approaching a book of the Bible which is often dismissed as being purely pessimistic. Ecclesiastes is “...a document of the absurd, suitable for times of absurdity” (Birch 1999:412). That is a book that can be at home in a postmodern worldview.

Dor Shav (2008:211) also adds the important point that that the use of Solomon’s voice carries a special importance for the ‘modern’ reader. Although he never defines what he means by a ‘modern reader’, one can conclude from his narrative that a ‘modern’ person is one who lives in the overwhelming wealth and prosperity of the Western World—and that he is not referring to the modernistic worldview. And this would be true of a postmodern as much as a modern. In the West, humanity generally does live in a time of unparalleled prosperity, income inequality and corrupt rulers, as the Qohelet would have (cf. Zdanow 2009). And thus, opposed to the quest of Job, “Solomon's search for wisdom did not arise from a desire to make sense of either personal misfortune or national catastrophe.” (cf. Dor Shav 2008:211). Rather, Qohelet sets out on his inquiry for meaning from a perspective of wealth, prosperity, and power. In other words, “Ecclesiastes is not about what God wants of us, but about what we want for ourselves” (Dor Shav 2008:211-212). This approach of the Qohelet should resonate especially strongly with Western readers of today, since few Westerners appreciate doing things simply because they are told, regardless of who does the telling (cf. Dor Shav 2008:211). Qohelet’s purpose is not in presenting a systematic theological argument; rather they are reflections that concern the practical and real issues of life and attempt to offer some

advice on how to cope in a world that is utterly beyond human control (cf. Seow 2001:246).

5.4 Postmodernism and Ecclesiastes: Vapour and the Earth Remaining Forever

As discussed, Qohelet reflected on humanity's plight before God in a time that was full of uncertainty. Thus, from his perspective, human beings dwell in a world that was in every way out of human control. Nothing that humanity does, builds, accomplishes or owns is ultimately lasting. And so all that occurs in this world is confusing and incomprehensible; life is not able to be placed in a box (cf. Seow 2001:243). This message is echoed in many ways by the postmodern mind today. It will be worthwhile exploring two such postmodern echoes within Ecclesiastes; the portrayal of life as a vapour and following on from that, the permanence of creation compared to the vapour of humanity.

5.4.1 Vapour

The second verse of Ecclesiastes (1:2. also see 12:8) is often translated as "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless", or alternatively, as "Vanity of vanities!" "All is vanity". However, these very common translations do not do the text, nor the Hebrew word, justice. The word in debate is הַבַּיטָה לַאֲוֵר. "... הַבַּיטָה לַאֲוֵר— traditionally "vanity" but literally "vapor" or "breath"— has correctly been recognized as pivotal to understanding the book of Ecclesiastes as a whole" (Seow 2001:243). הַבַּיטָה is transliterated as hebel⁴⁶ and this

⁴⁶ Similar to Qohelet, hebel can also be used as hevel to reflect the transliteration. For this work, hebel will be used

Dor Shav (2008:215) agrees with Liethart (2008), Seow (2001), Miller (1998) and Middlemas (2007). He also argues that the central message of Ecclesiastes may be encapsulated in a single word: *hebel*, agreeing that it is usually translated as "vanity." This word appears 38 times in the text, and is thus critical to understanding the book, and the message that the author is trying to bring across. This translation is meant to imply futility or meaninglessness, or the idea that anything one does is in vain (cf. Dor Shav 2008:215).

Outside of Ecclesiastes, *hebel* is often translated as "breath" (P9-4:11; 144:4) or "vapour" (Prov. 21:6) (cf. Leithart 2008:66). In fact, the word can be used to describe air, steam, vapour, gas; and when it is used in its participle form, it often takes on the meaning of 'making steam'. Other Jewish sources explain *hebel* with the image of "steam from the oven" and when this is taken in its superlative phrase "vapour of vapours", it can actually refer to the fact that humans are even less substantial than steam (cf. Leithart 2008:66-67). *Hebel*, when used metaphorically, seeks to emphasize the shortness and elusiveness of human existence. When used in other parts of Scripture, *hebel* is used to describe this aspect of human life (see Psl 39:4-11; 78:33; Job 7:16). This metaphor serves to remind one that life is impermanent. Apart from human life, *hebel* is also used to describe words (Job 21:34) and beauty (Prov. 31:30) as "mere breath". (Leithart 2008:67).

Miller (1998:437-454) presents many of the different usage and translations of הֶבֶל; which highlights the fact that this very key word and concept, so linked to understanding the book, is extremely difficult to translate, and one's worldview and perspective approaching the book can lead one to different conclusions.

If one chooses to translate hebel as vapour, Ecclesiastes 1:2 would then read as "Vapour of vaporous. All is vapour." (Leithart 2008:66) or as "Fleeting transience (hebel havalim), says Kohelet, All is fleeting" (Dor Shav 2008:217). Thus one can conclude that the Qohelet uses hebel as a symbol of vapour to represent the entirety of human experience (Miller 1998:443). As Dor Shav (2009:18) states, "It is only through the corrected reading of hebel as "transience" rather than "vanity" that we may understand the structure of the book of Ecclesiastes, and thereby learn its message". The idea behind the central premise of the message of Ecclesiastes is that all is fleeting and transient (Bullock 1985:200). And so, in describing this intractable situation of life and the flowing nature of circumstances, Qohelet utilises the Hebrew word "hebel" (cf. Seow 2001:243).

As discussed previously, the modernistic quest for control and its success in controlling life in general, and creation in particular, has brought about the postmodern worldview. In this worldview, which is opposed to modernity, the view is presented that life is a liquid, a vapour, a mist. And this view, so often shied away from by Christians, possibly would not have surprised the Qohelet. In fact, the author of Ecclesiastes "would have seen our sense of disorientation and the lack of control not as the end of reality but as our

awakening to reality as it is and always has been” (Leithart 2008:66). As Seow (2001:243) contends,

“He does not mean by this that life is vain, meaningless, insignificant, futile, or hopeless. Rather, his message is that there are no fail-safe rules, no formulas that will guarantee success, nothing that one can hold onto, for everything is as ungraspable as vapor.”

For the Qohelet, in this current world where everything is seen as hebel, there is nothing good that one can hold onto forever. However, this does not mean life must be lived in a dapper manner, rather all the good in the world needs to be enjoyed as a gift of God (see Ecclesiastes 3:11-13). This enjoyment is not a hedonistic experience of life, but rather it is a responsibility, and appropriate response to the problem of hebel (Seow 2001:244).

By using hebel, the Qohelet agrees with the postmodern assumption that death is the final end, that one day all things and people will go to the grave. Qohelet has an intense interest in death which is portrayed as the great equalizer (Middlemas 2007:218). Again, this fascination correspondences with the postmodern thought reacting against the modern desire to control all. For example, the modern worldview seeks to control humanities’ bodies by starving off the natural aging of a created body. Modern humanity has taken the control of creation to such an extent that it attempts to control its own created house, the human body. A focus on *death* is a postmodernism opposition to modernity’s control.

This theme of death is seen early on in the Scriptures. Hebel is also the Hebrew name of Abel, Cain's brother, the second son of Adam and Eve. As per above, Dor Shav (2008:217:-218), in arguing that the better translation of hebel, refers back to the root

meaning of the word: that it is *vapour* or *mist*, as was the life of Abel. Hebel, or Abel, was also the first human to suffer death, the first to know the reality of life's vaporousness (see Gen. 4:2). In light of Qohelet's preoccupation with death, his reference to Abel is striking. Abel is the first human being to die. Just two verses after humankind was denied the tree of eternal life; his story becomes the embodiment of human mortality (cf. Dor Shav 2008:216). In fact, this is a reminder that the human race learned early on about the insubstantiality of existence. In the end, every last one human is Abel (hebel). (cf. Leithart 2008:67). Thus, what is important about the life of Abel is not "its futility, but its transience. It was as fleeting as a puff of air, yet his life's calling was nonetheless fulfilled" (Dor Shav 2008:217). Nevertheless, Abel's representation of death is only half the story: as in Genesis 4:4, he is also the first human to offer a sacrifice that is acceptable to God. And in this, "God is deliberately accepting, or as the Hebrew connotes, "delivering," not only the offering, but Abel himself" (Dor Shav 2008:216).

Thus, one can see how a translation of Abel's name (hebel) into "vanity", as has been done traditionally, makes it impossible to reconcile the term with Abel's acceptance by God. As Dor Shav (2008:216-217) says:

Indeed, the story of Abel teaches the exact opposite - the possibility of salvation despite the fleeting nature of life. Precisely because of the tragic nature of Abel's interrupted life, we learn its deepest message: In turning one's life into an offering, one is not dependent on any life circumstance, or on any achievements in the material world.

So one can conclude that Ecclesiastes does not imply the dismissive nature of "vanity", but the more objective "transience", referring strictly to mortality and the fleeting nature

of human life. Or to view it another way, one must again affirm that Abel is every human. With the negative connotations of “vanity” removed, one can begin to discover in Qohelet an author who is tormented—not by the meaninglessness of life (and thus the need to control it), but rather by how swiftly it comes to an end. Life is gone so very quickly and likewise humanity’s worldly deeds (cf. Dor Shav 2008:217:-218).

Thus, creation can be seen as not something to be controlled or manipulated. As God freely accepts humanity, God also accepts creation. And in the midst of those who seek to control and manipulate all created things, the hope of a reality beyond this one allows one to avoid a life void of hope that will only result in death. This outside perspective is again seen in the discussion about power and abuse; there is a hope that the *Earth will remain forever*, and that final justice will be served.

5.4.2 Ecclesiastes 1:1-18, The Earth Remains Forever

The Qohelet, by using hebel to describe the vapour of life, contrasts this with the permanence of the created order, and the futility of trying to control that.

Observe the following pericope from Ecclesiastes:

*What do people get for all their hard work under the sun?
Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes.
The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again.
The wind blows south, and then turns North.
Around and around it goes, blowing in circles.
Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full.
Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea.
Everything is wearisome beyond description.
No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied.
No matter how much we hear, we are not content. (Ec. 1:3-8 NLT)*

Here, Qohelet sums up the true and dreadful reality of the “vapour” nature of human life that despite one’s best attempt to control, to set boundaries, to build empires and to bring about the will of the majority, creation will continue long after those who try to manipulate it are dead. The sun rises and sets day after day, the rivers flow into the seas but the seas never change, nor do they full, the wind goes round and round and round, and when it’s done it goes round again.

Another interesting phrase is found in (Ecclesiastes 1:14). All is a “chasing the wind” or “striving after wind,” is how the verse is often translated. The Hebrew phrase transliterated as “chasing the wind” is the alliterative r'ah haruach and can be translated as “shepherding the wind.” The author’s image is not one of futile pursuit but again expresses the lack of control humanity has over the world and over their own lives. Humanity can no more bring the world under one’s complete control than they can guide the wind into a paddock for the night. One cannot give permanent form to the world; trying to do so is the same as trying to create houses out of a hurricane’s wind (cf. Leithart 2008:68).

And I would content that this acknowledgment of the vapourness of life is extremely frustrating, especially for a worldview wanting to control creation, such as modernity. It is frustrating because one’s temporary, ephemeral life takes place within this particular kind of world. Ecclesiastes highlights the vapour of life, the fact that nothing a person accomplishes remains. All projects fade, all humanity’s labour achieves nothing, and then

death comes. Yet the observation that provokes Qohelet opening lament is the permanence and repetitiveness of creation.

Hayman (1991:96-97) argues that the Qohelet finds a theological basis in the fact of creation; and rarely shows an interest in revelation (for example, see Ecl. 3.11, 14; 7.13-14, 29, and especially 11.5; 12.1). Thus there is no room for dualism in the view of creation taken by the Qohelet. God has created everything, and so there can be no other source of evil. This is seen in the following passage, “Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider God has made the one opposite the other, so that mankind cannot complain about Him” (Ecl. 7.13-14) (cf. Hayman (1991:97).

Qohelet himself acknowledges that he has displayed modernist instincts to control, form, shape, and manage the world (see Ecclesiastes 2:1-11). And as in a recapitulation of Yahweh’s creation of the garden in Genesis, he attempted to make a pleasure park, with trees, rivers, slaves, and exotic animals. Yet after doing this, the Qohelet realises it is “vapour” (2:11) and so his modernist impulses disband into a postmodern examination and a questioning of the instability of reality, and the quest for meaning. In 2:23, he says that “Life is painful and grievous”; and this leads on from 2:11, where he states “Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labour which I had exerted, and behold all was vapour and shepherding wind and there was no profit under the sun” (2:23, 11) (cf. Leithart 2008:110-140).

Once again, the Qohelet agrees with the postmodern ideal of vapour's revenge, that is, the resurgence of the vapour that modernity attempted to ignore or arrest. Postmodern society is a rush and toil of change, and humans get caught up in the whirl (cf. Leithart 2008:126). As Leithart (2008:68 – 69) puts it:

It appears paradoxical to say both that life fades quickly away and that the world never changes, but both are true, and Solomon's insight into human life depends on both. The weariness Solomon describes (2:17) comes about not because of change alone or permanence alone, but because of the dynamic interaction of change and permanence. Permanence alone would not be frustrating, because everything we build would remain. Change alone would not be frustrating, because we would have nothing stable that allowed us to recognize change as change. Constant dissolution in a world of permanence is weariness. We strive to shepherd wind and control the vapor, but the world goes indifferently on its way as it has always done. Our frantic efforts count for nothing as the sun still rises and sets, the rivers still flow into the sea, the wind still goes around and around. We are frustrated because the world is impervious to our efforts to improve it

Postmodern social, technical, and cultural conditions highlight the fragility of human thought and reason, the limits of what can be known, the diversity of human language custom, and knowledge (cf. Leithart 2008:69; Erickson 1998:167-168). This postmodern theme is found in Ecclesiastes: the author seeks to master knowledge, wealth, human life and creation, but in all these quests, the end result is a “shepherding of the wind” resulting in frustration (see 1:17-18). And thus, despite the best efforts of humanity to try and control the world, to shape one's destiny, to gain profit and leave a legacy, at the end of the day, it is all a vapour; and what is more, that seeking to control does more harm than living in tune with the vapourness of life.

5.4.3 Qohelet speaking to Postmoderns

From above, one can conclude that the ethical instructions of Wisdom literature are clearly concerned about the Creator God, the intrinsic image of God within each human being, as its message is one of a *shalom*—a peace and balance only attained by a recognition of a great and almighty God who created humanity and the cosmos. These wise sayings are concerned about a right, ethical way of living in response to the Creator, whose grace shows his love and concern for humanity, as he has given humanity all they need to live a full life if they choose to do so.

And so ultimately, the Qohelet agrees with the postmodern thought that control, gain and the need to be right are a waste of destructive time. The world keeps plodding along as it always has despite all of humanity's efforts to control it. Creation itself, despite the harm and changes that humanity has attempted to wrest upon it, will slowly and surely continue long after all have gone. The sun will keep rising and setting—smiling pityingly at our self-important activities (cf. Leithart 2008:70). The rivers will keep on flowing, finally meeting the sea, and the sea will always remain at the same level despite how long those rivers flow. And creation will continue its dance with the creator with or without humanity's help or hindrance; the greatest success and the most devastating failures of human action on the environment will not last (cf. Leithart 2008:70). *Yet the Earth will remain forever.* And with this in mind, the modern concepts of control need to be dismissed as pointless endeavours that not only bring great harm and damage to creation, but also miss out on the meaning and fullness of the frailty and importance of one's

current life and the ethical consequences that view should have on one's walk with their creator.

With Qohelet, one can conclude that the modern quest to control nature and all creation is in itself a vapour: it is as pointless as chasing after the wind. Part of this wisdom of life is to ground a person to live in harmony with creation and to walk in the just order of the cosmos (cf. Middlemas 2007:220). The cyclic process of nature had led the author to conclude that all life is in flux and despite humanity's achievements, nature will continue long after they are gone (cf. Bullock 1985:205).

Qohelet does argue that enjoyment is a gift from God, and it is an imperative for this life but for the author, the final emphasis at the end of the day is a remembrance of the creator (cf. Slemmons 2001:301). In fact, there is a warning about enjoying and not enjoying life,

“Human discontentment is so pernicious that it is life threatening, even cosmos endangering! And the counterpoint to that threat is in the pivotal theological claim that God has freely given humanity the possibility to enjoy the moment (Seow 2001:245).

Or as Middlemas (2007:219) argues, “Because the striving of each individual results in nothing (hebel), each person should enjoy what his or her days on earth have to offer”.

The Qohelet echoes a postmodern thinker in the emphasize that the world is built to force one to live by faith and not by sight. By unmasking the pretences and the hidden agenda of modernity, postmodernity has allowed humanity or begin to emerge from the

controlling reality. And the challenge is to keep the Qohelet's word in mind so one does not fall into the trap of postmodern despair, as Seow states (2001:247),

The workings of the world are simply not subject to human control. As in the socioeconomic realm, so in nature one learns about the functioning of the cosmos quite apart from human manipulation: when the clouds are full, it will rain; when a tree falls in one direction or another, there it will be (11:3). These things happen regardless of human determination.

Consequently, humanity can only truly live if they give up any pretence of control. Without a doubt those who long for perfection and certainty will not be able to function. As the Qohelet argues: "One who watches the wind will never sow; one who watches the clouds will never reap" (Ecclesiastes 11:4). As Qohelet argues elsewhere (3:1-15), times, seasons and periods are ultimately unpredictable, despite humanity's best efforts to control them, and so any attempt to find certainty is but a "pursuit of wind," a grasping of that which is ungraspable (cf. Seow 2001:248). Within these thoughts, the "Qohelet promotes the embrace of the divine gift of daily living in spite of, or possibly in revolt against, the uncertainty of life and death." (Middlemas 2007:221). So, when the author describes everything as a vapour, he is not trying to argue that everything is meaningless or pointless; rather, he is seeking to highlight the elusiveness of the world, of certainty, and of the futility of trying to control life. The author is pointing towards the "brevity of life, and everything in it, which dissolves as quickly as mist in the morning sun" (Leithart 2008:67).

Subsequently this vision does away with any controlling or dualistic thought. As a result of the prevalence of the danger of modern dualism, many people from all religious traditions have unconsciously become accustomed to seeing everyday life as separate

from spiritual existence. And even today, Christians deal with the mistaken belief that if they focus on earthly reality, issues and worldly wisdom, they are less close to God (cf. Dor Shav 2008:214). And if do hold to a belief that focus on earthly issues is a lesser spiritual pursuit, then creation immediately takes the back seat these holy actions. Yet Dor Shav (2008:214), reading from a Jewish perspective, strongly dismisses this,

In fact, visions of the afterlife are discouraged in the Biblical narrative, and God is shown to place great value on man's (sic) actions in the material world. As such, it seems unlikely that Ecclesiastes' intention is to conclude that our involvement in the world is without meaning.

Derrida and his deconstruction would agree with this, as he goes as far as to argue that even a book is vaporous, and its solid boundaries are not as solid as they appear. Deconstruction would contend that any interpretation, any supplementation is in fact doing an injustice to the original author, and thus in its way it is almost impossible to know the true, intended meaning of the author. As shown, various translations have been conducted by people who, influenced by their own worldview, attempt to bring meaning to words, and that in some ways affect their realities as well (cf. Leithart 2008:94). And as one's worldview changes, and as the context changes, so will the interpretation.

Leithart (2008:94) accrues on this line of thought, saying that

...the Context will expand forever, and therefore meaning, which arises from difference, will be deferred forever... This is Derrida's concept of *differance*, which he punningly spells with an a rather than an e to capture the twin notions of "difference" and "deferral." Meaning arises from difference, but precisely for that reason, meaning is endlessly deferred. For Derrida, *differance* is an issue not merely of textual meaning but of knowledge itself.

One final point should be made before taking the Qohelet's thoughts in helping to create a new postmodern environmental ethic. Qohelet, while being similar in some regard to postmodern thought, would not agree with every aspect within it. Rather, the Qohelet also offers a good glimpse to the excess of postmodernism. Despite affirming that seeking to control is pointless, that true knowledge can never be found, that humanity's activities for profit, for gain and for control are a waste of life, the author still would contend that there is some certainty, some purpose beyond it all. The author often says "I Know", and is referring to a certainty that goes beyond only having a partial knowledge (see 2:14, 3:14, 11:9). And Qohelet can do this as his observations are limited to those "under the sun". Yet Qohelet also acknowledges another reality, another vision, a belief in God, who is above all reality, and who is not vaporous, and who, although not seeking to control, is in control. Qohelet is willing to trust that God will not let evil prevail. And so the author, while being in general agreement with Derrida and the other philosophers, diverges from them as a belief in God, in the finality of life and in the existence of true hope and justice is revealed in the present. There is a time after time that is coming and that will be far better than the time "under the sun" (cf. Leithart 2008:101).

So in concluding this Chapter, the scriptures and specifically Ecclesiastes, were explored to see if there was any relation to the postmodern worldview. The concept of vapour was explored and it was seen that the Qohelet also spoke out against a controlling ethic. In fact, it was shown that Ecclesiastes is speaking to a postmodern generation, and from those scriptures, a vision of creation and humanities relation emerged in which the vapourness of human life is embraced with a love and care of creation. this lays a

foundation from which a new understanding and ethic of God and creation can be explored.

CHAPTER 6

Developing an alternative postmodern environmental ethic

So far in this dissertation, the environmental crisis has been explored, as well as two worldviews that are at play within society today. In the previous chapter, Ecclesiastes was explored as presenting a message that is compatible with postmodern thought. The concept of the vapourness of human life was contrasted to the controlling ethic that emerges within the modern mind. In light of the above, this Chapter carries on with this anti-controlling attitude in laying a foundation from which an alternative postmodern environmental ethic can emerge. The relationship between God, creation and humanity is explored, and the concept of the cosmic Christ as a counter to modernistic dualism is presented. The vision of humanity and creation living together in community as part of a ‘new’ vision and ethic within the postmodern worldview is presented as the concluding argument.

Before discussing a new ethic for a postmodern world that agrees with the Qohelet’s thoughts, it is worth noting O’Brien’s (2004:295) warning

The attempt to articulate, defend, and put into practice a consistent Christian ecotheological ethics is fraught with dangers, not the least of which is the diversity of sources with which it must work. Among others, the natural sciences, social theories, and theological traditions must all be carefully attended to and addressed in the attempt to speak normatively about how Christians should relate to earth’s ecosystems and respond to environmental degradation.

With that wise warning in mind, the task can begin. In the aftermath of the modern expansion, one needs to recover the sense of sanctity and reject the idea that humanity will forever be in control of nature. Currently, the rampant expansion of information is turning one into glorified machines and preventing humanity from returning to an emotional identification with the world (cf. Green 2004:193; Paton 2009). Obviously, the global information stream and the instant contact have great advantages. However, one needs to recognise the other side of the coin, that the remorseless digestion of information is likely to make humanity more mechanical and strip away ones capacity to appreciate the planet, and creation as an end in itself⁴⁷.

Even within one's Christian belief, this focus on controlling the whole over the particular experienced is evidenced. The church has allowed a dualistic thought of a separate future with God to gain emphasis over the everyday, mundane elements of existence (cf. Weilanga 2006). It is too often that one looks to the "future glory" and ignores the current creation in its created and fallen splendour (cf. Paton 2009). And yet, part of the amazing mystery of the incarnation is that the creator chose to affirm the created world by entering it and experience the joys and struggle that it offers (cf. Paton 2009).

This recognition and rejection of dualism recognises that

"The problem with the western culture of 'modernity' which has dominated our thinking for the last couple of hundred years, is that its impulse is to stress the universal rather than the particular or vernacular, the anonymous or disengaged rather than the personal. (Sheldrake 2001:22).

⁴⁷ See Chapter 4.3.2. for more discussion around this

Underlying this dualism is a hyper-separation between spirit and matter, which allows creation to be treated as humanity wants. Yet there are Christian theologies that understand matter and spirit to be inter-implicated and interdependent, and these will be further explored (cf. Elvey 2006:69). Continuing this line of counter-dualistic thought, one realises that it is necessary to think theologically about loving nature as well as loving humanity. Santrime (2000) identifies three schools of theological response that have emerged to ethically develop a new view of creation, especially regarding reading the scriptures. Firstly, the reconstructionists argue for a development of brand new foundations, new categories and new understandings. They reject classical Christian story, and are evident, for example, in the ideas of eco-feminism, and Mathew Fox, who proposes a creation spirituality⁴⁸. Fox softened the distinction between humanity and nature so much that it is difficult to reconcile his ideas with basic protestant and Catholic theology (Allen 2007:15). Grula is a proponent of this school, and a further discussion around his work occurs in 6.1.2. The second approach is that of the Apologists, who seek to focus on traditional views of good stewardship. They often speak of social justice, or eco-justice. These thinkers are generally found within traditional, protestant churches. Erickson (1999) adopts this position in his analysis of postmodernism. The problem with this view arises in the fact that the proponents are often too influenced by their current worldview to see that the traditional forms that are being reverted to are in not truly creation—respecting. For example, a person from a modern worldview may want to care of the environment, but if they revert to a traditional view of creation that is built on

⁴⁸ Yet Fox's argument fails in many aspects; his concepts only speak to elite, as they do not offer hope to poor and oppressed. They fail to tackle the problem of radical evil, the reality of original sin, and the cornerstones of traditional Christian doctrine. Thus there is no reality of struggle, no truth of a fall-redemption motif, and paradoxically, no hope available to the entire cosmos

dualism, it will be a counter-productive experience. The third approach is the Revisionist approach. This approach is a call for a reform of tradition to reflect and impact current situation and circumstance while relying on Scripture and tradition. In this approach, there is a focus on the scriptures and wisdom, keeping in line with the emerging new paradigm; while not losing the core of that faith of old (cf. Santrime 2000:6-10; Elvey 2006:69). Postmoderns fit the most readily in the Revisionist group, and this approach and some proponents will be explored in regards to the scriptures.

6.1 God and Creation: Transcendence and Immanence and Cosmic Christ

6.1.1 The Cosmic Christ

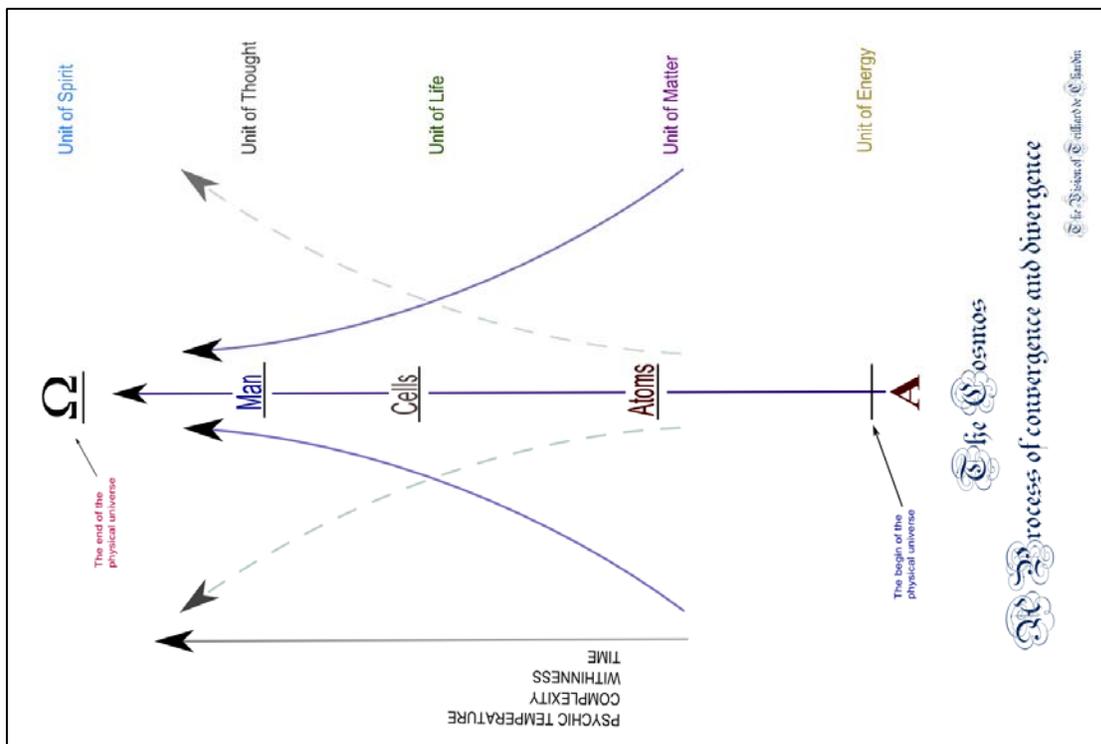
As seen in the discussion above, the scriptures clearly highlight that there needs to be concern and care for creation. Yet before one can establish an ethical foundation, philosophical questions about God's relation to nature need to be addressed. It is worth reflecting on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who offers a cosmic vision that extends beyond evolutionary anthropocentrism. His whole theology is one of genesis, a universal process of becoming⁴⁹; he seeks to 'tell not just the human side of story, but the whole cosmic story' (cf. Santrime 2000:46⁵⁰). This is a holistic, evolutionary vision; he envisions that everything has 'without' (matter) and 'within' (spirit) (thus for example, even stones have spirit). Thus he can picture a universal process of evolution, in which all things are evolving, in a process of orthogenesis (cf. Kennedy 2008). There is an underlying purpose in the universal unfolding of cosmic evolution—yet this is done haphazardly

⁴⁹This view (idea) that is used in this essay needs a clear distinction between itself and process theology. One can hold the view that all creation is 'emerging', without saying that God is evolving at the same time.

⁵⁰ Santirme (2000) is used as he provides a good translation of Chardin, with an engaging commentary.

through natural selection (a cosmic drift). In this process, humans have obtained a position in which they can bring whole universe to its originally intended purpose (cf. Santrime 2000:47-51). Consequently there is a process of cosmogenesis then biogenesis then homogenesis. He views Jesus Christ as the centre of this whole process, and christogenesis being the completion of the evolution; here there is a living, cosmically fulfilled Christ. Thus God is the ever-present final cause, the prime mover is ahead, beyond and in all (cf. Santrime 2000:51-52; Foster 2007:56).

This image by Kennedy (2008) provides a visual aid to the thought behind Chardin's work:



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's view (similar to the early church father Origen's) weaves an understanding of Christ that is linked to the evolutionary nature of the cosmos, and does so in a method that shows the cosmic Christ is not only the sustainer and the source of all

that exists, but also that Christ is the ultimate goal of all creation (cf. Foster 2007:56; cf. Kennedy 2008). Teilhard argues that this doctrine of cosmic aspect of Christology is actually far more significant than has previously been acknowledged in Christianity (cf. Foster 2007:56).

On the back of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's view, it is also worth exploring those of Bede Griffiths and his cosmic Christology. Griffiths was strongly influenced by Teilhard, and his cosmic Christology is worth exploring as it again presents an exciting non-dualistic view of God and Creation. For Griffiths, the relationship between God and God's creation is the key aspect that God and creation are not radically separated from one another (despite the fact they are significantly different, they are nonetheless one). As Griffiths writes "So it is a communion of love, an experience of oneness in love, and that is the end and the meaning of life" (Griffiths 2009). Griffiths had a great desire to overcome any artificial dualities that tend to arise between Creator and creation in so many western Christian theologies, and so he propagated the concept of a cosmic Christ (cf. Foster 2007:26). He speaks of the whole of creation as a theophany or manifestation and revelation of God; and he goes further than most theologians by arguing that it is not just a theophany, but it is also a "Christophany" (cf. Foster 2007:27). This he clarifies as a belief that all of creation, the entire cosmos, finds its meaning, purpose and goals in Jesus since in the incarnation God has entered the created order. This cosmic Person, who is the Christ, is the source and form, as well as the sustainer, of all creation (cf. Foster 2007:45). Thus

... in the ascension Christ assumes, or representatively takes, the whole material universe into the Godhead – since Jesus, as a fully human person takes the matter

of his bodily existence into the Trinitarian life of God. The conclusion of this understanding is thus, not only that God is seen in the whole of creation, but that the whole of creation is seen in God – while there is radical distinction between the nature of Creator and creation, there is no radical dualism, the two are radically one. (Foster 2007:29).

Consequently, it would need to be affirmed that Christ-saving activity has significance for the entire created world, and not just for humanity. Griffiths's views are strongly influenced by, and strongly echo those of Teilhard's cosmic Christ.

Theologically this is significant, as it implies that we are living in a universe that is not separate from ourselves (or more particularly, separate from 'self'). We ourselves are the universe, this universe is us. We are an explication of the one ultimate reality. There is a fundamental sense of interconnectedness between all persons and all of creation. We are one, one with the Creator, all creation and of course also ourselves. (Foster 2007:41).

This vision, with its evolutionary aspect, is contemporary and culturally relevant, and it self-comprehends the whole cosmos. The main problem with both these visions is in the idea of the Great Chain of Being (cf. Brooklyn College:2009). In this, the One (spirit) is at the top (as per the illustration), with the many (pure material objects) at the nadir. Humanity is in middle, part spirit part matter. Humans need to move into spirit to become like God (cf. Brooklyn College:2009). Thus humans have dominion over nature, which will one day be destroyed. This belief is of the tradition that states only human spirits matter to God, which results in dualism (cf. Santrime 2000:53-56; Foster 2007:41). This belief is not compatible with either postmodern or the message portrayed in Ecclesiastes. There are other areas of concern (especially regarding the role thinking, and sovereignty of God, the danger of deism, the true role of humans); yet one can still appreciate the picture it presents helping one understand the interconnectedness of all creation.

Following on from the two visions above, the ecological vision of Jurgen Moltmann is also vital to understand the place of God and creation. Moltmann rejects anthropocentric and hierarchical models in favour for relationally and interconnectedness. Moltmann's view of the future envisions a totally new creation of humankind and the world, in which God will dwell in it with his essence. Thus, in the present, all creation is ground not in itself, but it is ground in God's goodwill. This creation is the realm where God displays his glory (cf. Deane-Drummond, 1997:72⁵¹). Moltmann's basis for God indwelling in Creation is from the theme of the 'glory of God' within the scriptures (cf. Deane-Drummond, 1997:73). Moltmann rejects the common modernistic thought of God being overly omnipotent and transcendent, in which monarchy and power relations are at play. He argues that one must "think in terms of relationships and community" (Deane-Drummond, 1997:90). Moltmann also contends strongly for transcendence and immanence to be related. "The belief in the indwelling Spirit of God in creation which comes from the Hebrew wisdom tradition has been neglected" (Deane-Drummond, 1997:99). For God to have created *Ex Nihilo* (out of nothing), for him to "create a world 'outside' himself he must have made room for finitude inside himself" (Deane-Drummond, 1997:102). Thus Moltmann argues that the *Nihil* emerges only after God's inner withdrawal. God therefore confronts creation in his transcendence, he enters into creation in his immanence. This does not lead to pantheism—rather, this reflects the doctrine of the trinity, and thus God can be present in the world without becoming part of it. A modified form of *panentheism* emerges, in which the world is "in the space created

⁵¹ Deane-Drummond is used as he provides a very good translation of Moltmann writings and views, and an engaging discussion of those

by God, and God dwells in his creation through his Spirit” (Deane-Drummond, 1997:124).

There are also problems with this vision of Moltmann’s, especially relating to issues of the origin of evil, God’s sovereignty and plan and God’s freedom. Yet, in developing a new vision, using the connectedness of God, humanity and creation that de Chardin, Griffiths and Moltmann present, one gains a picture of God, in whom Spirit and matter are perfectly united. In this vision, all creatures will one day be consummated in God, in His glorious Omega World. There is no vision of domination and control, rather, a vision of caring and of nurturing. A Cosmic Christ did come, to reveal the perfect unity of matter and spirit. Jesus also came to restore humanity to their proper place. In face of radical evil, the classical theology of Christ also still stands. One human (Christ) inaugurates and launches the kingdom of God, of which Christians must participate (cf. Santrime 2000:57-60).

The incarnation of a Cosmic Jesus is thus the key for acquiring an ethic that treats creation as an equal. Shelldrake (2004:22-28) follows a similar theme as Santrime, as he argues that everything is rooted in the cause of creation. This cause of creation is the humanity Jesus. Thus,

By implication all things exist not only to be themselves, and to 'do' themselves. Also, in this being and doing, all things 'do Christ'. Thus each individual or particular thing is more than simply a symbol of something more. That would make it dispensable - usable and disposable. One thing might be substituted for another if it proved to be a better symbol. There would thus be no unique value in any individual or particular thing (Shelldrake 2001:24).

This view of the cosmic Christ ties in with the Qohelet's presentation of God being in control, as well as the pointlessness of humanity attempting to control anything, especially creation. One can either try to 'shape the wind', and live a vapourless life, or one can recognise the vapour in their life, but place their hope in the permanence and hope of the cosmic Christ.

6.1.2 Countering Dualism

Dualistic thinking influences Western thought in many ways; however it is not a new invention, and as was illustrated, the Qohelet argued against such thinking and separation. As in Ecclesiastes 1:1-18, trying to separate life and ignore the vapour aspects of humanity do not lead to anything productive. Thus, this dualism which leads to destruction needs to be countered in two key ways. Firstly, one needs to acknowledge and recognise its continuing influence, and the effects of the modern world. Modernity began with the creation of secular space; that is, the idea that not all aspects and elements of life have the same hierarchical level. And as discussed above, this sacred/secular split has led to a fragmentation in society linked simultaneously with the pursuit of control and order.

This has strongly influenced Christianity,

Modernity pushed the church to the margins of society and gave it the task of religious provider. The church returned the "favor"(sic) by allowing the rest of society to be beyond its domain, inhabiting the realm of the secular. As modernity's rule began to crumble, the modern church shared its fate (Gibbs 2005:87-88).

As the Qohelet called these abuses and problems to account in his setting, so too does Postmodernity mark the time when secular space was called to be accountable within

society, and this occurred concurrently with the pursuit of holism and the welcoming of pluralisation in Western societies (cf. Gibbs 2005:44). By acknowledging the failings, the problems, the dangers of a modern controlling ethic, one is then bale to start to solve the ethical crisis.

The second way to offer an answer to dualism is by appealing to counter-dualism. This counter-dualism would "...set the dualistic language of otherworldliness in counterpoint to its dualistic world subordinating and earth-denying effects" (Elvey 2006:71). Elvey (2006:69) discusses differing views of how matter and spirit are viewed⁵². One such view is the Circular complementarity, which describes how spirit and matter stem from different domains; yet matter receives meaning in its relationship to spirit, and spirit is made possible through its relationship to matter (cf. Elvey 2006:70; Erickson 1998:397). The Circular complementarity allows one to understand the otherworldly "as a way of understanding the otherness of nature, as having purposes and agencies beyond the cultural construction of earth as world." (Elvey 2006:63). Nature itself is otherworldly; it has a material transcendence, and while not being divine, it has more to it than scientific and encyclopaedic explanations (cf. Elvey 2006:77; O'Donnell 2003:11). As Foster (2007:57-58 writes

...creation differs in its very nature from God who created it. Creation differs in its very nature from God in that its nature is that of the creation of a creator God. Yet, at the same time while there is distinction between creator and creation the two are not ontologically separate from each other – since how can anything possibly exist outside of the God who is? Thus, there is a clear distinction, but not a radical separation

One could say that, like the movement of leaves in the wind, spirit is what matter does.

And since God is responsible for the creation of all things, there is no neutral division of

⁵² See (Elvey 2006:68-72) for an in-depth discussion of these views

any objects into good or bad or spiritually significant and insignificant (Erickson 1998:397). Circular complementarity allows the otherworldly to be a “category expressing a material reality that is wholly imagined within culture” (Elvey 2006:78). This view allows the power of the message of the cosmic Christ to be shared with power and without any contradiction.

However, as with most things, any excesses need to be avoided (something the Qohelet also argues for, see Ecl 5:1-7). One can go too far in advocating for God’s involvement in creation, that is, one needs to avoid removing all of the transcendence and mystery from one’s faith by taking the avoidance of dualism to an infinite level. Such an example is seen in Gula (2008:159-180), who advocates pantheism as the new paradigm that needs to emerge to save the world. He argues

That pantheism also provides a theological foundation for the deep ecology movement, reconciles science and religion, and establishes a viable third position relative to the ongoing dispute between the proponents of intelligent design and the scientific establishment (Gula 2008:160).

He holds no room for a supernatural being or God; his pantheism is built on a belief that all laws, forces and manifestations are part of a self-existing natural universe and one that constitutes an all-inclusive divine Unity. Basically, the transcendence essence and character of God is denied.

Gula (2008:161-162) goes as far as to deny any form of panentheism. For him, pantheism and panentheism are similar, but since panentheism conceives of God as an entity distinguishable in certain respects from the universe itself, he views it as the same general category as traditional theism. He does however affirm that it fosters a stronger

environmental ethic than traditional theism. He dismisses it though as it is too complex, there are too many views, and for him pantheism is easier to live with (cf. Grula 2008:161-162).

While Grula presents some interesting points, in my opinion his argument is mostly based on personal beliefs, and his main points not only go against a lot of current scholarship, but show some interesting mind aerobics. I will quickly highlight some major problems; firstly, he is too quick to dismiss God as being anything outside of creation. This obviously goes against Scripture, against the testimonies of millions and the historical witnesses of countless religions. He goes further though to shun the very centre of Christianity, the incarnation, which is one of the key elements needed to understand a correct ethic regarding creation care. While he does see the incarnation as an interesting event, he does not seem to understand the full significance of it; the fact that is God became a person, the martial world has been elevated. The incarnation is the ultimate rejection of dualism, but Grula fails to see that (cf. Grula 2008:167). Grula also dismisses postmodernism as having passed as a worldview: this again is problematic, as I have discussed above, it is only known that some parts of society are encountering it and beginning to understand its effects. Grula also fails into the generalisation trap; he assigns a poor Environmental ethic to all of the Judeo-Christian history and action, instead of acknowledging that the poor ethics for environmental care arose out of a specific interpretation linked to a specific worldview. For him, the Hebrew and Christian worldview has been a fallacy, which is unfair to say the least.

This is an example of how, by trying to avoid any dualistic thought, an ethic and theology can emerge that is inconsistent with the Biblical worldview, and denies any power to the Cosmic Christ. One needs to always keep the paradoxical balance of the transcendence and the immanence of God in balance.

6.2 Humanity and Creation: Living together in Community

As from the above, this new paradigm, against the dualism of the modern era, is emerging. Yet before it is finished, the relation between humanity and creation needs to be explored. God is personal, and humans are personal, and thus most of the theological tradition is anthropocentric (focusing just on God and humanity). Yet if one starts to place creation as also being part of God's plan, a new picture of human relationship to God and nature emerges (cf. Santrime 2000:61-62). Moltmann argues that creation is not demonstration of God's power, but a communication of God's love, without preconditions or premises (cf. Deane-Drummond, 1997:101). Within this love, humans are created in and called towards a relationship with the other (cf. Sponheim 1999:71).

This is strongly linked to the quest for the particularity

“Particularity is not an often used word. But it is one which has recently come into my awareness, and with a little reflection, has begun offering green shoots of hope in a world overrun by the global, the universal, and the general. The disconnection we experience as a result has at root, I believe, everything to do with a loss of intimate relationship with the particular” (Paton 2009).

Santrime (2001:61-65) uses Martin Buber's concept of the I-Thou relationship to expand these thoughts. The I-Thou (human-God) idea brings with it the dangerous concept of the

I-It (human-creation), that is, anything not human or God is an It, which can be exploited and manipulated for the goals of the I (cf. Erickson 1998:189).

To avoid this, one needs to envision a both/and, a “profound theological personalism, and a rich experience of nature: to be able to conceptualise a viable ecological and cosmic relationally within the matrix of theological personalism” (Santrime 2000:65). This results in modifying Buber; there is a relationship of I-Thou (which is based on mutuality), there is a relationship of an I-It (where there is an object and subject, in the case of necessary intervention), and a third category is added, the I-Ens (Ens coming from the Latin for being). This is not a subject vs an object relationship; it is a subjective pole in contact with an objective pole in an intimate community. The Ens is characterised by its givenness, “I engage with it, I contemplate it, it is a beautiful entity in its own right, I do not penetrate beyond its sheer givenness” (here de Chardin’s concepts helps one comprehend this) (cf. Santrime 2000:69). This Ens is not predictable, it has a spontaneity, it may die or blossom or grow crooked. It is an integrated, beautiful whole.

Therefore, the I responds to the Ens by wondering at the beauty it has, and the I relates to it as something marvellous created by God. The I has an openness to the Ens; it comes with no preconceived ideas, facts, notions. The I has a willingness to become small and lowly; to give Ens a space of its own, to respect it. The I has a sense of gratitude, and an acknowledgement that the Ens is “never mine, it is always Thine” (Santrime 2000:70-71). This means that humans need to start envisioning creation, nature, creators, as part of God’s plan and care, and as having a joint purpose with humanity in worshiping God (cf.

Erickson 1998:396-398).. The Qohelet in Ecclesiastes 1:1-18, warns one of the dangers of ignoring the enduring nature of creation, as well as the futility of attempting to see it as a lesser part of God's plan. Thus, having an I-Ens relationship enables one to view a tree as a member of one's extended family, which deserves care and compassion. In fact, "The cosmos itself, from quantum physics to the remote reaches of space and time, exists as a network of relationships" (Sponheim 1999:89). Sponheim (1999:90) goes on to suggest that the cosmos may reflect the relation to the creator more clearly than humanity does, as the presence of sin in the human heart means creation is purer than people. Subsequently, "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (Brockelman 1997:35). If creation is seen as a community that one belongs to, suddenly there is an ethical imperative to treat it correctly (cf. Brockelman 1997:38).

And so, the concept of the Us vs Them, or the I-It, is shattered, if one can begin to imagine that everything participates in God. "Because everything participates directly in God, each thing is a uniquely important expression of God's beauty as a whole" (Sheldrake 2001:24). Or as O'Brien (2004:307) writes "If God has made all the world as a united whole, then any attempt to establish a hard and fast division between the natural world and human social reality must be abandoned". Raising the particularity of items from being an "it" and giving them a defining reality allows an idea of absolute particularity (with an equableness before and within God, to be achieved) (cf. Sheldrake 2001:24-26). This is consistent with a non-controlling postmodern view, and links to

Qohelet undertaking that the human world cannot and must not be radically distinguished from the rest of God's creation (cf. O'Brien 2004:306).

This view of creation remaining and being apart of God's creation, as well as the picture of a cosmic Christ, leads one to see that:

In essence the doctrine of the cosmic Christ affirms that Christ has significance for the whole of the cosmos or created order and not just for the Christian faith and those human persons who adhere to it. The cosmic Christ has significance for animals, for plants, and even for inanimate objects such as planets and stars. (Foster 2007:59).

What this consciousness of the cosmic Christ accomplished is in highlighting the fact that Christ is the creator and upholder of all that exists (that is, the Christ who transcends all of material and created reality), and yet at the same time one is able to acknowledge the reality that Christ, in his incarnation, is part of the creation. In Christ's resurrection creation was sanctified, and in his ascension, matter has been taken into the Godhead (cf. Foster 2007:84).

And ethically, one cannot separate the ethics of humanity from those of creation; this distinction needs to be avoided. A love and an emotion for nature are therefore necessary. Emotion is a key factor as to why people care about the environment (cf. Milton 2002:3). The Qohelet called one to live a life of enjoyment and satisfaction in the small things, and this surely included an appreciation, respect and love for creation. Science has revealed 'the facts' to humanity regarding the effects of pollution on the ozone layer and global warming, and often this modern view of the facts is seen as being more valuable than any 'feelings' about the environment (cf. Milton 2002:9). In the

Modern worldview, a ‘commitment to trees and the earth’ is seen as being irrational and ‘new-age’; while making a profit no matter what is seen as the rational way (cf. Milton 2002:4). Yet emotions are both feeling and meaning; emotions operate in ecological relations. And all of one’s actions are related to thought and feeling, and thus a love of nature must be seen as a perfect basis for protecting it; on a level with a rational one. (Milton 2002:24). Humanity needs to remember that “We perceive the environment in relation to ourselves, and ourselves in relation to the environment” (Milton 2002:45).

6.3 A ‘New’ Vision and Ethic ⁵³

It is again wise to issue a word of caution before suggesting a new ethic and to approach the task with a large element of trepidation, and modesty, as possibly the views above are not the answer. O Brien (2004:310) argues for all ethicist to display a level of modesty.

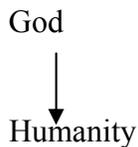
“...we note that with theological claims, as with all others, we must be cautious ... (discussion of) ‘modest witness’ normatively asserts that, whatever empirical claims we make about reality and whatever ethical conclusions we come to about how to live within it, we should always be reminded that our perspectives are limited and our conclusions are open to critique and revision. In this postmodern ethics, there are no final answers, and there are no humanly determined absolutes that cannot be called into question.”

Having examined God’s relationship to humanity and creation, along with a true study of the scriptures and theological tradition, and seeing how the book of Ecclesiastes can offer a good ethical guideline, one can conclude that nature and creation are meant to be served by humanity. The mandate that God gave to human creatures is to love, protect and look

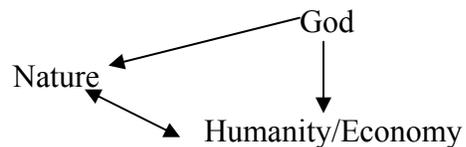
⁵³ While this may be a new vision in terms of Modern, dualistic Christian thought, it is in fact a re-discovery of biblical principles and of what certain key church figures wrote about

after all of creation, and thus there is no room for abuse. As O'Brien (2004:307) states "Humanity does not have a uniquely privileged ethical standing, but neither can the natural world be given ethical standing over against humanity." If one is connected to Christ, and to all creation, then ultimately any seeking to control and exploitation of creation is in essence a controlling of 'myself', and ultimately it is seeking to control Christ (cf. Foster 2007:87). This is a new paradigm that does away with dualism. It is a Theo-centric, creation-connectedness, in which the environment is not seen as a background for human activity, but rather it has intrinsic value (cf. Davis 2002:268-269). Here, the redeemer is overflowing into the created world, in which the risen Christ is omnipresent (Santrime 2000:81-84). Both Davis (2002:269) and Santrime (2000:11-13) present this new paradigm or vision (Santrime bases his on the cosmic vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's), as a triangle of God, humanity and nature.

Old Paradigm (Dualistic)



New Paradigm



Here, human rational thought and emotions are joined in loving and caring for the environment, and 'a love of nature' is seen as a perfect basis for protecting it. This vision acknowledges that in God, Spirit and Matter are perfectly united, and any form of dualism needs to be rejected. It pictures God as still being active and involved in his creation; and the consequences of this vision mean that Christians should partner God in bringing transformation to all of creation (cf. Sponheim1999:22). This allows for the

Qohelet's view of creation as standing firm while the vapour nature of human life continue to come alive. If humanity stops trying to control creature, and rather see creation as a fellow participant in God's grace, life won't be spent trying to 'shepherd the wind', but will be spent sailing in the wind.

Sheldrake (2001:66) summarizes the above brilliantly

“Ultimate truth must paradoxically be sought through contingent times and places. These have the capacity to speak sacramentally, beyond themselves, of God's presence and promise. What we sometimes refer to as the 'scandal of particularity', that God in Christ incarnated within what is bounded and limited, is a guarantee that every particular place is a point of access to the place of God.”

Finally, one needs to move beyond the anthropocentrism found in most modern theologians (such as Barth), yet at the same time holding to the classical faith that those theologians steadfastly defended (cf. Santrime 2000:117-118). The church needs to become a communal enclave, a light to the world, proclaiming the full gospel of reconciliation, as well as having martyr love (cf. Santrime 2000:119). A new life of 'righteous cooperation' is needed to be entered into with nature (since dominion and stewardship invoke old feelings, righteous cooperation is the best way to describe this). This means that humans must intervene in nature, but doing this creatively and respectfully, contemplating nature before trying to change it, putting the I-Ens before I-It (Santrime 2000:120-121). Keeping in mind the Qohelet's reminder in Ecclesiastes 1:1-18 of the vapour nature of life and the endurance of creation will enable one to keep a healthy respect for the environment. One needs to be firm at times and needs to have priorities (saving the whales cannot take over feeding the hungry children). Personally, a delight and wonder at nature needs to be cultivated (as the Qohelet encourages), as does a

personal I-Ens relationship with the objects of nature one encounters (Santrime 2000:126).

Subsequently, a strong call for sensitive care for the earth emerges within this ethic. Thus, as Milton (2002:45) reminds one, the environment is “perceived in relation to ourselves, and ourselves in relation to the environment”; therefore, if the Christian values God and others and themselves, the environment needs to be perceived with the same value as given to humans. Biophilia (the love of all life) is encouraged in this ethical living, and suggests that nature, and other living things, are important for one’s emotional, spiritual and physical health. As Ecl 2:24 “...there is nothing better to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work, then I realised that these pleasures are from the hand of God”. This ethical vision also acknowledges that the destruction of nature deprives humanity of countless opportunities to be fulfilled, and that extinction of species affects an extinction of some of their own emotional experience (Milton 2002:61). This nature affirming-theology requires a nature-affirmed spirituality. This is possibly evident in Celtic Christianity, whose people lived in harmony with nature, understood suffering and death, lived in cosmos not chaos, travelled and marvelled at God’s beauty and rejoiced in all of God’s good creating (Santrime 2000:95-114).

The ethical vision of creation working together with humanity to serve God is found in the theology and history of St Francis of Assisi. This is especially seen in his Canticle, where the key notion is that all humanity’s fellow creatures (whether animate or

inanimate) as brothers and sisters, reflect to humans the face of Christ. All creation does Christ, as all creation is made to glorify Christ.

Praise and glory, honour and blessing
Be yours, O Lord, O Most High, O Most powerful.
Praise and glory, honour and blessing
Be yours, O Most High, O my Lord, be praised.
Let everything you have made, Be a song of praise to you,
Above all, His Excellency the Sun (our brother);
Through him you flood our days with light.
He is so beautiful, so radiant, so splendid, O Most High, he reminds us of you.
My Lord, be praised, Through our Sister the Moon and through each Star.
You made them so clear and precious and lovely,
And set them in the heavens for all to see.
Through Brother Wind and Sister Water, Through Brother Fire and Mother Earth,
Through Sister Death - be praised, a Lord, Be praised.
The Moon and Stars arc clear and dear and fair,
Through them be praised, and through the Clouds and Air
By which you nourish us each changing day;
Through precious Water, pure in every way,
So useful, humble, chaste, receive our song.
Through Brother Fire, robust and glad and strong,
None shines as he shines in blackest night,
How handsome he, how joyous and how bright. O my Lord, be praised!
Let everything you have made Be a song of praise to you
Above all, our Sister, our Mother, Lady Earth Who feeds and rules and guides us.
Through her you give us fruits and flowers Rich with a million hues.
O my Lord, be praised.
(Sheldrake 2001:26-27).

The canticle above paints a picture of a world where all space is reconciled space; there is no room for violence, control or rejection. It echoes the Qohelet's views that, despite the vapour nature of life, humanity can and need to live in enjoyment with creation; for in that they worship God. As Dor Shav (2009:21) argues,

Like fleeting cherry blossoms, almost sacredly ephemeral, the transience of hevel inspires Kohelet's existential transformation. It encapsulates the beauty of sunsets, autumn leaves, or the Impressionist's fascination with fleeting light. For it is precisely the transience of these things that moves us.

This ethic should arise from a refusal to accept the dualism between normative and empirical work, it is both an environmental and social ethics (cf. O'Brien 2004:300-301). That is to say, "Insofar as we have ethical responsibilities to one another—or even to ourselves—as human beings, we are also responsible to the nonhuman world from which we can never be fully distinguished" (O'Brien 2004:301). And this new paradigm is personal, but it is not private and it needs to be shared to the world. Dunn (1999:193-195) raises the important issue of teaching children the wonders and joy of creation, so that they in turn can have a holistic environmental worldview and responsibility for it. She lists some principles to help children develop this awareness; they must interact with bio diverse natural environments (obviously being developmentally appropriate), adults need to reinforce and image this responsibly, they must have opportunities to practise and reflect this responsibility towards the environment (cf. Dunn 1999:209). If a child is taught this vision from a young age, then their ethical response will become foundational with their faith in God.

One needs to again affirm that the combined impact of the challenges to Christendom and modernity has profound implications for the church, the nature of its ministry, its mission in the postmodern world, and the ways in which the next generation of leaders needs to be equipped for these new challenges"(Gibbs 2005:18). And thus the first ethical tradition to be re-worked and investigated should be the faith tradition one has used to define their values. Environmental ethics need to be recovered from the Christian tradition, as well as acknowledging that these same traditions have at some time contributed to the degradation of the environment (cf. O'Brien 2004:312). The churches

worship and sacramentalism needs to become more focused on the environment. A service can begin horizontal, calling humanity to concentrate and acknowledge firstly the world around and then only seek God through it after one has have worked to truly understand the earth as it is (cf. O'Brien 2004:305). The church has to recognize that currently they are in the midst of a cultural revolution and that nineteenth-century (or older)' forms of church will not communicate clearly to twenty-first-century cultures. This will obviously impact the manner and the way in which ethics are done (cf. Gibbs 2005:17).

This critique of the Christian tradition should make clear where some theologians and church leaders have missed the point by allowing, exemplifying or encouraging thought patterns and deeds that have encouraged environmental destruction. Additionally, as this postmodern ecotheological ethics grows, it should highlight the Truth claims made by theologians against which no criticism was allowed, and thereby contributed to the absolutist, simplistic ways of thinking that make dualisms so ready to adopt (cf. O'Brien 2004:312). It is wise to allow and encourage a commitment to allow any belief to be subjected to criticism as long as that critique will advance the discourse and lead to a greater understanding (cf. Bereiter 1994:7). When people are opposed to this criticism, they should be reminded that the Qohelet used similar tactics to expose the fallacies of thought in his day, and to present an ethic that is not destructive.

The ethical challenges that are faced are not simplistic, and so simplistic and easy solutions are not the answer. One needs to realise that all items and causes are linked, and

as society changes, so too should the solutions. Denying this fact would be going against the teaching of the Qohelet and the willingness of postmodernity to live the questions rather than find the answers. The tools and solutions that were developed in the Christian tradition for ethical issues of the past cannot apply directly and without translation into the current contemporary issues; one needs to adequately attend to the particularity of the historical situations (cf. O'Brien 2004:309).

So in concluding this chapter, the biblical and postmodern thoughts from the previous chapters was used to demonstrate and develop a strong environmental ethic that countered the modernistic worldview of controlling creation. The relationship between God, creation and humanity was examined, as was the notion of the cosmic Christ to show a picture against dualism. The vision of humanity and creation living together in community as part of a 'new' vision and ethic within the postmodern worldview was presented as the concluding argument and basis from which the new ethic can emerge. This new vision is completely non-dualistic, and relies on a panentheism vision of creation as well as utilising the I-En's understating. By having an understanding that the *earth will remain* long after humanity is gone gives a perspective that allows a postmodern influenced Christianity to serve creation.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was, in light of the current environmental crises, to investigate the modern worldview that has influenced Christian theology negatively regarding the environment, and by using scripture (specifically Ecclesiastes), to present a different environmental ethic based on the postmodern worldview, which is presented as being compatible with a Christian ethic in relation to creation.

This task was accomplished by firstly investigating one area in which the environmental crisis is being experienced, that is the issue of global warming and its impact on global climate change. This was shown to be largely a result of air pollution and carbon emissions. The current and future scenarios of its effects were explored (including issues around plant and animal extinctions, marine ecosystems, and the changing landscapes as a result of the changing climate). A conclusion was drawn that the extreme extent of the environmental degradation leads to an urgent call for action to be taken—that is, for a new ethic to be developed. With this knowledge in mind, the stage was set for an exploration about the worldviews that are behind this destruction. This enabled a deeper investigation into these two worldviews, their developments, their characteristics, and their ethical consideration and impact on the environment.

Firstly, the modern worldview was explored, specifically in terms of its development, its definition and by examining some of its key characteristics in greater detail. The concept of the controlling ethic that exists within modernism was highlighted, and it was shown how this controlling ethic has impacted on the environmental destruction. The influence that modernism has had on Christianity was also explored, especially on issues on a dualistic worldview developing and thriving in the Christian environment. At times the Christian modern worldview was shown to even be supporting the modern worldview in its quest for control. It was thus concluded that the modern worldview has failed at protecting creation; especially as this current ecological destruction was largely caused by the underlying values, controlling ethics and the controlling instinct that are present in the modern worldview. Thus, a new worldview has begun to and is emerging, one which seeks to view ethics, life and the world in a light that is radically different from that above.

postmodernism was then discussed as the worldview that has arisen as a protest against modernity. The development of the postmodern worldview, as well as defining characteristics, functions and the ethics of postmodernism were examined. Certain key characteristics were further explored, such as the theory of deconstruction as an antidote to modernism's emphasis on control. Three challenges that postmodernity presents to the modern worldview were also discussed. These three, the intensifications, inversions and unmasking, illustrated the breadth, scope and influenced that postmodernism has within the world. The Christian response to postmodernism and the ethical implications of these responses were also investigated. It was concluded that the opposition it presents to the

modern worldview (especially its non-controlling nature) offers a new alternative to the modern worldview. It was also concluded that Christians can operate within the postmodern worldview, while not adopting all aspects of it. This enabled the discussion to progress to what the scriptures say regarding creation care.

On the basis of these two worldviews, wisdom literature (specifically that in the book of Ecclesiastes) was explored by investigating the context in which the text was written (in terms of the author, date and historical setting, literary expression and structure). After this, parallels between postmodernism and Ecclesiastes were drawn. The vaporous nature of life and the concept of *The Earth Remaining Forever* was further explored as common themes between postmodernism and what the author of Ecclesiastes was presenting. The concept of vapour was used as an illustration to show how the Qohelet also spoke out against a controlling ethic. In Utilising Ecclesiastes 1: 1-18, the ethical themes that the author of Ecclesiastes used were explored and paralleled to similar views found in postmodernism. In fact, it was shown that Ecclesiastes was speaking to a postmodern generation, as a vision of creation and humanities relation emerged in which the vapourness of human life is embraced with a love and care of creation. This laid a foundation from which a new understanding and ethic of God and creation could be explored.

Together, these biblical and postmodern thoughts were used to illustrate and develop a strong environmental ethic that countered the modernistic worldview of controlling creation. The relationship between God, creation and humanity was explored, and the

concept of the cosmic Christ was used to illustrate a counter-picture to the modernistic dualism. The vision of humanity and creation living together in community as part of a 'new' vision and ethic within the postmodern worldview was presented as the concluding argument and basis from which the new ethic can emerge. This new vision is completely non-dualistic, and using a panentheism vision of creation which utilises the I-Ens understating of all creation, will be able to bring real, practical ethical response to the way creation is treated. By having an understanding that the *earth will remain* long after humanity is gone gives a perspective that allows a postmodern influenced Christianity to serve creation.

So as a final conclusion, the issue and ethical dearth of true environmental ethics as been explored that has resulted in the world being in the major ecological ethical crisis that it is in. The final outcome of this research was achieved; that is, to integrate aspects of postmodern thought with the book of Ecclesiastes and the concept of the Cosmic Christ to present a theological ethical basis for which a Christian can view and act towards creation. Ultimately, creation will continue its dance with the creator with or without humanity's help or hindrance; the greatest success and the most devastating failures of human action on the environment will not last (cf. Leithart 2008:70). *The Earth will remain forever*, and this is the ethic that can begin to save and change the world.

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