

**ENVIRONMENTALISM OF THE POOR  
AND THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF  
PROPHECY**  
**A Contribution to Liberation Ecotheology**

**By**

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**A thesis submitted to  
The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Department of Theology and Religion  
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The University of Birmingham**

**October 2009**

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# ENVIRONMENTALISM OF THE POOR AND THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF PROPHECY

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## ABSTRACT

Ecological theology has too often relied on Creation, Sabbatical and other accounts potentially of Priestly origin, or else has employed a hermeneutic of suspicion derived from ecocentric speculative philosophy. These approaches risk the error of reflecting current or biblical ruling class ideologies. It is argued here that a more appropriate approach to ecological theology is the prophetic tradition read from the critical materialism of political ecology. The relationship between society and environment is both socially constructed and material and political ecology uses dialectical materialist methodology in interpreting this. Such analysis emerges from, and contributes to, a preferential option for the victims of environmental injustices, and a political praxis of environmentalism of the poor alongside environmental justice struggles. The starting point of this theology of liberation is the author's context as an activist in, and action researcher with, environmental justice movements. Three contrasting case studies are interrogated with respect to this theology: environmental justice campaigns associated with Friends of the Earth Scotland; the Bhopal survivors' movement; and a working group on environmental justice within the Iona Community. Insights are derived from this praxis which make a contribution to historic projects which are neither reformist nor utopian but radically prophetic.

## DEDICATION

In memory of the estimated 23,000 people, men women and children, who have died as a result of the gas leak and contamination caused by the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal and the countless others who have suffered from the same logic of pursuing profit by shifting costs onto the environment of the poorest. This thesis is dedicated to all who struggle against this logic in India, in Scotland and throughout the world.

### **Remember the Dead – Fight for the Living**

Slogan painted on the wall of the Union Carbide factory, Bhopal

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors Paul Walker and James Grenfell for all the support, advice and encouragement which they have given me whilst working on this thesis, along with Ian Duffield, John Vincent, Debbie Herring, Christine Jones and all staff at the Urban Theology Unit who have been support and constrictive criticisms have contributed to the completion of this thesis. Many thanks also to Martin Scott for his advice and valuable comments on the draft manuscript.

I am grateful for the camaraderie and spirit of critical encouragement provided by my fellow postgraduate students at UTU. Thanks also to Phil Jakob whose hospitality in Sheffield, both material and in spirit, is always much appreciated.

Many thanks to Kathy Galloway, leader of the Iona community during the time I was working on the thesis whose commitment and challenge is much valued. Thanks also to the members of the 'Place' working group of the Iona Community, to friends and colleagues at Friends of the Earth Scotland and Edinburgh University with whom I have collaborated when working with environmental justice campaigners in Scotland, and to research colleagues in the Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study.

Thanks also to colleagues at Queen Margaret University who have accommodated and encouraged me in pursuing this work alongside my responsibilities of teaching and sociological research.

I am especially grateful to my partner Susan for her encouragement whilst I have been devoting time to work on this thesis, and for the respect she has shown me by her support for me to pursue my passion for theology and Christian discipleship.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## *1.1 Introduction*

Destruction of the environment has reached crisis point. Ecological damage has been increasingly recognised since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This growing awareness has stimulated both a worldwide environmental movement and a branch of theological analysis. Ecological<sup>1</sup> theology (ecothology) is a theological perspective whose point of departure from traditional theology is threefold. First, ecotheology recognises the inter-relationship between human society and its biological and physical environment. Second, this perspective acknowledges the destructive impact which human society is having on the environment. Thirdly, ecotheology includes the moral responsibility which human societies have for the environment. Much ecotheology is derived from biblical creation narratives and seeks to re-establish the createdness of human society with respect to the natural

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, the term environment will refer to all aspects of the human, social and natural environment with which human societies interact whereas ecology will refer only to those aspects which are extra-human (although our knowledge of them is socially constructed), ie biological and physical nature, ecological cycles etc. Ecology also refers to the scientific study of these interactions. Environmental/ism refers to the movement which has emerged from concerns about the damage caused in the environment, Ecologism is a term used by some to differentiate a political philosophy based on the moral primacy of ecology, whereas in this thesis ecologism is regarded as a branch of environmentalism. Ecological theology has developed as a branch of theology which addresses theological reflections on the interactions between the social, natural and spiritual. This thesis follows the common practice of abbreviating ecological theology to ecotheology.

environment. Whilst this has undoubtedly led to some important theological and practical insights, this thesis argues that creation theology is a flawed position from which to develop ecotheology.

By contrast, this thesis will seek to develop an ecotheology of liberation<sup>2</sup>. It will argue that ecotheology must be derived from, and consistent with, theologies of liberation and as such requires as its starting point, engagement with the movements for environmental justice or environmentalism of the poor. An ecotheology of liberation demands a prophetic engagement with the world, arising from the prophetic movements represented in the bible. It will be argued that biblical prophecy generates a response to ecological distribution conflicts which takes the side of those who are dispossessed, and constitutes a model for orthopraxis in ecotheology.

The thesis will follow a classical methodology of liberation theology, starting from the author's political engagement in environmental justice, followed by theological and social analysis, leading to suggestions towards orthopraxis. Details of methodology are provided in the second chapter, but here it is important to describe the three case studies of engagement in the environmental justice movement which will provide the context for the social and theological analysis: Friends of the Earth Scotland's campaign for environmental justice; the Bhopal survivors' movement; and the Iona Community's thematic working group on environmental justice.

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<sup>2</sup> The terms liberation theology and theology of liberation will be used interchangeably.

## ***1.2 Friends of the Earth Scotland's campaign for environmental justice***

For eight years prior to the start of this research (1997-2005), I was employed by the environmental campaigning organisation Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES), primarily responsible for developing that organisation's practice in community action. In 1998, deliberately coinciding with the formation of a devolved Parliament in Scotland, FoES identified itself as a 'campaign for environmental justice', a decision which was to have a significant effect on its practice, especially that of the community action team. Over the period of my employment, the team worked with several working class and poor communities living with high levels of environmental pollution, including Greengairs in North Lanarkshire, surrounded by one of the largest active landfill sites in Europe; Douglas, a peripheral housing estate in Dundee adjacent to a large, municipal waste incinerator; Coalburn in South Lanarkshire with extensive new opencast coal mining; and Grangemouth, the town in the shadow of Scotland's biggest oil refinery.

The phrase 'environmental justice' was taken from the USA. The environmental justice movement comprises a coalition of predominantly black communities campaigning against 'environmental racism', the disproportionate siting of toxic and polluting facilities in African-American and Latino communities or Native American reservations (Bullard 1993). The movement mobilised around the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington DC in 1992, after the publication of research by the United Church of Christ Commission on Racism demonstrated correlations between environmentally toxic sites and racialised groups. The US environmental justice movement has its roots in the civil rights movement rather than mainstream environmentalism, and at times found itself in conflict with these predominately white, middle class professional organisations (such as

Friends of the Earth) whose interests and resources seemed to be more focussed on protection of rare species and wilderness, or the science of global environmental change, than on the environments experienced by poor and black communities.

In Scotland, whilst acknowledging that the roots of environmental justice lie in anti-racist struggles, FoES used the term in a distinctive way, summed up by the campaigning strapline “no less than a decent environment for all, with no more than our fair share of the earth’s resources”. In other words FoES attempted to link the issue of global resource inequalities on which the FoE family had been engaged through its egalitarian interpretation of sustainable development (McLaren et al 1998), with local issues of poverty and the environmental insults experienced by the poorest in Scotland (Dunion and Scandrett 2003).

FoES is a member of Friends of the Earth International, a confederation of independent groups in over 70 countries, each responding to their own political context. Whilst having core values in common, the political and ideological practice of the groups differ, crudely characterised on a North-South spectrum, from Italy’s *Amigos de Terra* who have happily entered into partnerships with commercial organisations with a view to greening capitalist practice, through to Ecuador’s *Acción Ecológica* whose persistent critique and conflict with multinational corporations is militant. At times these divisions caused tensions in the movement, and in fact led to *Acción Ecológica* withdrawing from the FoE International confederation in 2002.

FoES has always played a significant role in the international movement, in some ways disproportionate to the size of the country. During the period I worked for the organisation,

this was particularly so, due to the committed internationalism of Chief Executive Kevin Dunion, followed in 2003 by Duncan McLaren, who also brought with him an international reputation in FoE. FoES was regarded as one of the more politically radical groups in the FoE international family, to the left (at the risk of oversimplifying) of most European and North American groups, although less radical than many Southern groups. FoES's adoption of environmental justice was regarded within this context.

The implications of a commitment to environmental justice for FoES itself were complex. FoES is a small non-governmental organisation (NGO) of between ten and fifteen staff with a membership of approximately 5,000 who are, according to membership surveys, disproportionately white, professional middle class and educated to degree level. By contrast, the communities and action groups with whom the community action team worked were largely working class. It was inevitable that tensions would arise around issues of allocation of scarce resources, work priorities, political strategy and even public image.

In 1997 I was employed to devise community programmes which would connect research work on resource consumption with relevant issues at local community level. After conducting local training and investigations in several communities in Scotland I developed *Resources for the Future*, a package of resources for community workers and activists to be used to integrate community development with sustainable development (Friends of the Earth Scotland 2000, Scandrett 2000). From this, FoES developed a series of projects for communities facing local environmental problems or seeking to develop new sustainable development work, providing training on planning issues, scientific expertise and pollution monitoring and building links with environmental justice campaigns in the global South.

The last of these, the “Agents for Environmental Justice” project provided intensive education to key activists in communities affected by local environmental problems. At its peak, fifty percent of all FoES staff were employed in the community action team and I was Head of Community Action. This development of the community action supporting capacity within FoES corresponded with the reframing of the organisation as the campaign for environmental justice.

The Agents for Environmental Justice project recruited individual activists in a variety of communities affected by environmental damage and who were involved in campaigns and community action to tackle social and environmental problems. These activists were referred to as ‘agents’, and were supported in their campaigns. Attempts were made to link local struggles to wider national and international campaigns and the agents studied on an eighteen month Higher Education Certificate (HE Cert.) in Environmental Justice, validated by Queen Margaret University (QMU) in Edinburgh. The course used popular education<sup>3</sup>, being committed to the environmental justice struggles of the agents, and encouraging dialogue between the knowledge and experiences of these local activists and the knowledge and expertise of FoES’s staff and the academic community (Wilkinson and Scandrett 2003, Scandrett, O’Leary and Martinez 2005). Participation in a local campaign, community or trade union action on environmental justice was a condition of admission to the course. The original agents who participated in this first project have documented their struggles in

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<sup>3</sup> Popular Education in the same sense as ‘popular movement’ or ‘popular struggle’, is derived from the Spanish *educación popular* and Portuguese *educação popular* of its Latin American origins. It is therefore perhaps better translated as peoples’ education or education of the masses. It is defined by the Popular Education Network as education which is: rooted in the real interests and struggles of people; overtly political and critical of the status quo; committed to progressive social and political change, with the interests of a more egalitarian and just society; its curriculum is born from the concrete experience and material interests of social movements and communities of resistance and struggle; its pedagogy is collective and democratic, focused mainly on group learning instead of learning processes of an individual nature; and it aims to form a connection between education and social change. (derived from Crowther, Galloway and Martin (2005)

*Voices from the Grassroots* (Agents for Environmental Justice and Scandrett 2003). In 2005, when I started work on this thesis, I had left FoES and was employed at QMU and continued to be responsible for the HE Cert. in Environmental Justice in collaboration with FoES.

A significant achievement of FoES' campaign for environmental justice occurred in 2002. Jack McConnell, the Labour First Minister of Scotland announced his government's commitment to environmental justice. The motivation for this and the impact on policy is analysed more fully elsewhere (Scandrett 2007a). Research was commissioned by the Scottish Executive which identified a correlation between social deprivation in Scotland and proximity to polluting industries, contaminated land and air and water pollution (Fairburn et al 2005).

The environmental justice movement in Scotland is made up of: communities campaigning in pollution hotspots; communities experiencing both multiple deprivation and environmental damage; activists who identify with the narrative of environmental justice through participation in the Agents programme HE Cert. in Environmental Justice; other environmental activists who make an informed connection between environmental damage and social justice; and Friends of the Earth Scotland itself. Whilst environmental justice is the term most commonly used in the global North and some countries in the South, the more general term of *Environmentalism of the Poor* has been adopted to include the practice of those diverse movements of the poor, exploited and discriminated against peoples who are resisting the destruction and pollution of their environments (Martinez-Alier 2002).

Since leaving FoES my participation in the environmental justice movement has continued, not only through the HE Cert. in Environmental Justice, but also through sociological research into environmental justice movements and extra-curricular environmental justice activism. One issue on which I became active originated in an event which, over 20 years ago, had influenced my involvement in environmental justice in the first place – Bhopal.

### ***1.3 Bhopal: a global struggle for environmental justice***

In December 1984 I was in the middle of a PhD in the department of Plant Science, Aberdeen University. In the early hours of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, a pesticide factory in Bhopal, central India, leaked 40 tonnes of compressed Methyl Isocyanite (MIC) gas, when a tank burst and emptied its contents into the surrounding population. Although there are no accurate records, it is now believed that 8,000 people died from exposure to the gas in the next three days, and the health of tens of thousands more was affected. The following outline of the disaster and its aftermath is taken from Fortun (2001), Chouhan (2004), Hanna, Morehouse and Sarangi (2004) and Eckerman (2005).

The factory was owned by Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), a subsidiary of the US multinational Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), which retained 51% controlling shares. The factory had been established in 1969 to produce pesticides for the developing market stimulated by the Green Revolution. New, high yielding varieties of crop plants had been introduced to Indian agriculture which required high levels of chemical inputs of fertiliser and pesticides. Initially established to formulate the insecticide Sevin from imported raw materials, the Union Carbide factory was modified in 1975 to ‘integrate backwards’ and manufacture the ingredients of Sevin on site. This process required the storage of large

amounts of MIC. Under Indian law, such a facility would not normally be permitted in such a highly populated area close to a railway station, however the City authorities were persuaded to permit the modification, raising suspicions of corruption. The factory was modelled on a similar facility operated by UCC in Virginia, USA, but with significant modifications making use of cheaper materials and labour.

By the early 1980s, the market for Sevin had reached a plateau and the Union Carbide factory was facing financial constraints. Staffing levels were reduced and the investment in training cut back. There was a series of problems and accidents at the factory including five separate gas leaks since 1980, one of which caused the death of a worker. Safety concerns were raised to management and to Madhya Pradesh state government by the site trade union. The issues were taken up by campaigning lawyer Shahawanaz Khan, and by journalist Rajkumar Keswani who published articles in local newspapers and wrote to the Chief Minister.

The leak of MIC in December 1984 was the result of a series of negligent practices carried out by UCIL and authorised by UCC as part of their cost-cutting drive, which turned a routine washing operation into a runaway chemical reaction in gas tank 610. Maintenance staffing levels had been reduced and the resultant lack of maintenance led to multiple blockages in pipes and valves. Valves were made from carbonated steel rather than the more expensive resin required by UCC's own safety manual. The refrigeration unit for tank 610 had been shut down and the temperature gauge was malfunctioning. A safety vent gas scrubber, designed to neutralise any gas escaping into the piping had been switched off two months previously and the emergency backup tank, which should have been empty, was

filled with MIC. There was nowhere for the gas to go except out into the environment. Emergency safety features were also inadequate: a gas flare tower for burning off escaping gas had been dismantled; the water spray system was not strong enough to reach the gas and the manual alarm had been turned down and was audible only inside the factory.

The first thing that local people knew of the gas leak was when a smell, widely described as like burning chillies, started to fill the air. As people realised it was coming from the factory they starting to panic, running away in their thousands, stepping over bodies in the dark, gas filled night. The gas reached the railway station, where many of the poor homeless sleep, railway workers were resting and trains were continuing to arrive and leave. Passing vehicles picked up children, the elderly and sick. Families were split up, children were lost in the confusion. People experienced breathing difficulties, started foaming at the mouth, their eyes and skin burned and their sight was lost. Nearby hospitals were soon overflowing with sick, dying and dead.

In the morning light the devastation was visible. The gas cloud had dispersed. No MIC reached the south side of the city where the rich live because it was absorbed into the Upper Lake which separates the two halves of Bhopal. In the North of the city there were bodies piled up in the streets. Nobody knows how many people died because bodies were quickly disposed of, some of them dumped into the river. For those who survived, the process started of trying to find loved ones, seeking medical help, looking for ways to survive.

Television pictures of piles of bodies, the dying, blinded and lost were broadcast throughout the world. I remember, as many people do, where I was when I saw these pictures for the

first time. I was a doctoral scientist and was shocked that this horror was the result of science. I was also volunteering a few hours a week at a radical bookshop where I had access to some critical literature on the politics of science, and was peripherally active in the radical science movement through the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science<sup>4</sup>. The political nature of scientific research, in which I was starting a career, was overt in the UK at the time, affected by Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal reforms: rolling back the state and making market forces the driving force of policy. Thatcher's plan for science was that it should be geared towards the needs of business: private funding of marketable research was to be encouraged, and state funding reserved for research which was "near market", but not near enough for business to fund it. This was the start of the process, continued by New Labour, of the commodification of academic work in the interests of private profit.

In 1984 there was an ideological battle going on in the political understanding of science. Received assumptions had been that 'pure' science should be left to the uncontaminated curiosity of the scientist detached from the world, and applied science focused on solving the technical problems, like feeding the world. The critique from the Left was that feeding the world is a political rather than technical problem, and that scientists in both pure and applied fields were not neutral, but human beings socialised in an unjust world and with collective interests which they further both materially and ideologically through their social practice - research. The Radical Science Movement had emerged in the 1970s with attempts to develop a 'people's science' in the interests of the oppressed. Such analysis was

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<sup>4</sup> BSSRS at the time was in the process of being bankrupted in a libel case by the asbestos industry when the organisation published *Asbestos Killer Dust* by Alan Dalton in 1979, in which allegations were made – since proved correct – about the industry's role in silencing information about the health affects of asbestos. My own participation in the radical science movement continued from that time to the present through the Hazards campaign.

enthusiastically explored in theological circles such as the World Council of Churches (WCC 1986).

However, the critique of traditional elitist science also came from the Right. In this case it was argued that the vested interests of scientists held back the wealth creating work of business. Moreover the wealth which was being created was being siphoned off through taxes into an ever growing state to feed a complacent and self-serving professional class. Scientists, along with other professionals, were to be forced to face up to the realities of capitalism and either invent things for the market, or else not expect to receive funds.

Against this background, as the images of the dead and dying of Bhopal appeared on television screens, the politics of science seemed to me beyond question. There was clearly a class war going on at the heart of scientific practice. The question for me as a scientist and as a person of faith was what path my discipleship would take. Five years later I had left academic science, moved into a high rise block of flats in a peripheral housing estate in Edinburgh and started studying community education.

Bhopal therefore had a significant impact on me and the discipleship choices I had made, even though I had had no direct contact with the city, or even with India. However, in February 2004 when I was part of the Friends of the Earth delegation at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, I met activists from the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB) and responded to their invitation to participate in a march on the Mumbai headquarters of Dow Chemicals. Meeting Bhopal activists, hearing survivors speak and learning about the ongoing campaigns for justice inspired me to retain contact. Initially this

was simply by setting up a regular standing order to the Bhopal Medical Appeal in London and encouraging solidarity actions through FoES on the anniversary of the Bhopal disaster.

However, in 2006 I was back in India, this time as an academic on a visiting fellowship at the University of Delhi. A potential research project in West Bengal fell through, so with some time and a small travel budget I visited Bhopal. After bouncing some ideas around with ICJB activist Sathyu Sarangi, I drew up plans for a research project. This involved documenting the experiences of the campaigning survivors, using a methodology in which survivors were participants in the research rather than subjects, and the knowledge generated was put to the service of the campaign.

In the immediate aftermath of the gas leak, a number of environmental and health professionals, trades unionists, social activists, Left party cadres arrived in Bhopal to help with administration of relief, provision of health care and provide advocacy. Although there was spontaneous protest from survivors, the vast majority of people were absorbed in the basics of survival amongst the chaos, searching for loved ones, tending the sick, grieving the dead, finding uncontaminated water and food, absorbing the fear of the event and the new, terrifying illnesses and disabilities.

The subsequent history of the survivor movement and the participation of social activists is complex and formed the focus of my research. Within three years of the disaster, most of the principal campaign groups were formed. The first tranche of social activists who responded to the human crisis formed themselves into the *Zehreeli Gas Kand Sangarsh Morcha* (Poisonous Gas Disaster Struggle Front) ('Zehreeli Morcha'), led by Alok Pratap Singh.

This group played a significant role in establishing neighbourhood committees which enabled the effective distribution of aid, gathered information about deaths and illnesses amongst the affected communities and provided basic levels of health care. In the absence of reliable data on the health impact of the gas, some encouraging signs were emerging from the use of Sodium thiosulphate injections which encouraged the body to excrete cyanide. Zehreeli Morcha established a peoples' clinic, in which volunteer medics administered Sodium thiosulphate, and data were gathered regarding its affects. After less than a month of operation, the police forcibly closed the peoples' clinic, arrested the organisers and volunteers and confiscated the confidential data. Crucial in the early years, Zehreeli Morcha disintegrated less than two years after it was formed as activists disagreed over tactics and politics and left or were expelled.

Before 1984, Balkrishna Namdeo a young activist was working in Bhopal with people who had no source of income from their own labour. These were the old, widows, severely disabled, all those who were destitute or would be without the meagre state pension or below poverty line (BPL) rations. The gas leak considerably swelled the number of people in this destitute pension-entitled category, and in 1985, Namdeo formed a separate wing of the organisation to respond to their needs: the *Gas Peedit Nerashrit Pension Bhogi Sangarsh Morcha* (Gas Affected Destitute Pension-entitled Struggle Front) ('Pension Morcha'), which continues to be active on issues directly relevant to these groups.

The year following the disaster, the government established workshops for the economic rehabilitation of the gas victims. One such workshop trained women in the cutting and sewing of cloth. After twelve months, in 1986, the workshop closed down and the women

were expected to seek work or set up businesses with their new skills. The women refused to accept that this constituted adequate rehabilitation. They formed a union under the name *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women Workers' Union) ('BGPMUS') to defend their jobs and to seek improved working conditions. Under the leadership of Abdul Jabbar Khan, an articulate, local gas-affected activist, the union defended jobs, succeeded in extending rehabilitation and started to take on compensation and wider issues affecting all gas affected people. At its peak the BGPMUS had a membership of several thousand.

Also in 1986, one of the social activists, Satinath 'Sathyu' Sarangi, who had abandoned a PhD in engineering to respond to the gas crisis, was expelled from the Zehreeli Morcha and formed the Bhopal Group for Information and Action ('BGIA') whose function was to provide research and support to the independently forming survivors' groups. Sathyu was to establish the Sambhavna Trust to provide health care for survivors in 1995.

In 1987, women employed at another government project manufacturing stationary and paper products established the union *Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karamchari Sangh* (Gas Affected Women Stationary Workers' Union) ('Stationary Sangh') under the leadership of two articulate women Champa Devi Shukla and Rashida Bee.

Two additional solidarity groups were also established in the early years. In 1985 the International Coalition for Justice In Bhopal (ICJIB) was formed in the USA by public interest lawyer and academic Ward Morehouse. And in India in 1989, the *Bhopal Gas Peedit Sangharsh Sahayog Samiti* (Bhopal Gas Affected Peoples' Struggle Cooperation

Committee) (BGPSSS) formed, comprising an alliance of trades unions and civil society organisations affiliated to the Communist Party.

Namdeo's Pension Morcha, Sathyu's BGIA, Jabbar's BGPMUS, the BGPSSS, Champa Devi and Rashida Bee's Stationary Sangh continue to be the major players in the survivors' movement. Over the years they have formed alliances with one another and with the solidarity groups in different combinations and split over tactics and politics. The formation of Sambhavna Trust became a focus of division in the movement due to its dependence on foreign donations. Funding came from Greenpeace and the book royalties from Dominique Lapierre's popular narrative *Five past midnight in Bhopal* (Lapierre and Moro 2002) and also from many British individuals who responded to advertisements in the Guardian to donate to the Bhopal Medical Appeal (BMA).

In 2002 the International Campaign for Justice for Bhopal (ICJB) was created from an alliance of BGIA, Stationary Sangh, Students for Bhopal (SfB) in India and USA, US based activists from ICJIB and other individual activists from across the world. They were soon to be joined by a small, short lived orphans' organisation Bhopal Ki Awaaz (Voice of Bhopal). In 2008 a group of children associated with ICJB decided to form their own organisation known as Children Against Dow Carbide.

To complete the current picture two more events need to be mentioned. In 2005, a group of BGPMUS supporters, unhappy with Jabbar Khan's leadership, broke away from the union under the leadership of Sayeed Irfan to form the *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush*

*Sangarsh Morcha* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women's and Men's Struggle Front) (BGPMPMSM) and joined with the ICJB.

More significantly, Champa Devi and Rashida Bee were awarded the Goldman prize for environmental campaigning. This honour projected the activists onto the world stage, raising international awareness for the cause and providing them with considerable financial backing. With the award they established the Chingari Trust (Chingari = flame / glowing ember, taken from a popular protest chant of Bhopali women *gas peedit jo nari hai, phul nahi chingari hai* (gas affected women are not flowers but flames)). The Trust provides social care to the large numbers of severely disabled children born of gas affected women, supports economic rehabilitation and presents an annual award to a woman in India noted for fighting corporate crime.

However, the new-found international fame and access to resources caused a division in the Stationary Sangh with a number of the members splitting to form a rival union, the *Gas Peedit Mahila Stationary Karamchari Morcha* (Gas Affected Women Stationary Workers' Movement) ('Stationary Morcha'). Whilst the Stationary Sangh stayed within the ICJB, the Stationary Morcha left and focussed more exclusively on workplace terms and conditions.

In 2009, the movement largely comprises three players. The ICJB is an alliance of BGIA, Stationary Sangh, BGPMPMSM, the international activists including SfB and Greenpeace, what remains of Bhopal ki Awaaz, and the Children Against Dow Carbide. ICJB is internationally well connected and focussed on high level lobbying and satyagraha campaigns, and is linked to the two non-campaigning service delivery organisations

Sambhavna and Chingari trusts. The two main rival groups are BGPMUS and the Pension Morcha, each of whom mobilises considerably more survivors and focuses on bread and butter issues of compensation and basic rights, and the BGPSSS which uses its union and Left links to provide solidarity to the survivors.

### ***1.4 Environmental justice and the Iona Community***

Both the work of FoES in building an environmental movement in Scotland, and the Bhopal survivors' movement, are struggles for environmental justice in which the victims are significant actors. There is no explicitly religious element to these struggles, although nearly all the Bhopali activists are practicing Hindus or Muslims and amongst the environmental justice activists connected to FoES were Protestants and Catholics, Muslims and Jews, Buddhists and New Age Deep Ecology adherents as well as atheists and agnostics. The third case material of my involvement in environmental justice struggles is an ecumenical Christian worshipping community of which I am a member: the Iona Community. I convened a working group around the theme of 'Place' between 2006 and 2008, which focused, among other things, on the Iona Community's response to issues of environmental justice.

The Iona Community was established in the 1930s by George MacLeod, laird of Fuinary turned socialist, former military officer turned pacifist, and minister of Govan Old Church of Scotland. MacLeod was concerned not only with the poverty, suffering and wasted skills of the working class in Govan as the shipbuilding industry collapsed, but also with the apparent irrelevance of the Church faced with this crisis. He took a group of unemployed skilled craftsmen from Govan and young, trainee Church of Scotland ministers to the island of Iona

to finish the rebuilding of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Abbey. The men shared a common life on the island, the ministers labouring for the craftsmen and then leading them in worship. Together, work and worship were seen as integrally related.

Iona had been the centre of Celtic Christianity in Scotland from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century when St. Columba founded his original abbey, and retained historical, spiritual and symbolic importance to the Church at various times since. MacLeod's purpose in the project of rebuilding the Abbey was to develop a theological praxis in which the church might respond to the social and political challenges of the time through engaging in the life and work of the working class at a time of economic hardship. The ministers who were part of this experiment, and those who joined in subsequent years, became the forefront of new forms of ministry in industrial mission, in the slums and peripheral housing estates, in the cold war peace movement and in colonies struggling for independence and constructing post-colonial states.

In the period since its founding, the Iona Community has undergone much change whilst seeking to hold to its founding principles. Membership became increasingly open, initially to ministers of other denominations, then to lay men and finally also to women. Leadership shifted from MacLeod, the charismatic patriarch, to a 7-year appointment elected by the membership. The first female leader; poet and liberation theologian Kathy Galloway was elected in 2002. Increasingly, membership came from outwith Scotland and, also from 2002 was open to people from Europe outside of Britain.

As structure and membership has changed, so has culture and practice. New members, who undergo a two year 'new members programme' before joining, tend to be more or less equal numbers of men and women, with ordained people in the minority. Approximately half of the membership lives in England and a small but growing and influential network has developed in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Members who are not ordained ministers are largely in the professions, including community workers, youth workers, academics, teachers, doctors, social workers, administrators, musicians and writers. Many are active in issues concerned with the 'new' social movements, including feminism, gay rights, anti-racism, environmentalism, disability rights and the peace movement. To some members there is a concern that these commitments come at the expense of engagement with the poor and issues of class and inequality, an argument which reflects concerns elsewhere on the left.

The Iona Community has established and continues to run or support a number of projects under its auspices. Best known are the residential centres on the island of Iona, at the Abbey and MacLeod centre which provide themed and 'open' led weeks of shared living, reflection and activity, largely to young people and adult Christians from the liberal and radical traditions. The centres are staffed by employees and volunteers from throughout the world. The costs involved in participating in these weeks (and the cultural capital required to volunteer for a term) leads to a regular anxiety about the centres excluding the poorest, which is partially addressed through a cost-subsidy system. Camas, another centre on neighbouring island Mull, focuses primarily on giving socially excluded young people, and occasionally adults, the opportunity of a week of supportive community living in very basic conditions combined with outdoor activities such as kayaking and abseiling. In addition, the

youth development team carries out youth work in a variety of contexts including with a young offenders' institution. Wild Goose resource group develops musical and other liturgical resources for Churches and Christian gatherings, led by John Bell, and Wild Goose Publications publishes this material, as well as books of poetry, prose, politics and devotional reflections.

At various times there have been other projects. The Community previously employed a justice and peace worker, and in that position Helen Steven provided and facilitated non-violence training and support to several generations of activists. In recent years, the Community has been invited to 'accompany' communities facing particular periods of social and political stress, including in Palestine and in a community living with widespread HIV infection in South Africa.

When I joined in 2004, membership of the Iona Community involved commitment to the following five-fold rule:

1. Daily prayer and Bible-reading
2. Sharing and accounting for our use of money
3. Planning and accounting for our use of time
4. Action for justice and peace in society
5. Meeting with and accounting to each other

This rule has emerged through the community's history and is supported by a narrative explanation in the annual membership booklet. However, the expectation is that individual members calculate their own method of interpreting and upholding this five-fold rule and account for how they uphold it annually within family groups of members in the same

locality and also with the leader of the community. There is also one (or sometimes two) week per year, community week, when many members gather on the island of Iona with their families, to meet, discuss, pray and worship together.

Since joining the Iona Community I have taken an interest in the interaction between environmental commitment and community membership. There are many other members for whom environmental and ecological justice is a primary motivation and practical expression of their commitment, and indeed some with considerable specialist expertise in the area. My contribution was by no means superior or particularly insightful, although arguably it has been distinctive.

In my first community week as a full member I was asked to devise workshops on environmental commitment. I raised the idea that, just as members account to one another for our use of money and time, we should also account to one another for our use of the earth's resources. The workshop focused on calculating the carbon dioxide emissions from travel in a typical year, and extrapolated from that to the estimated carbon dioxide emissions from other sources. Whilst a very crude method, it provided the opportunity for people to consider resource consumption at a more fundamental level than simply money, and did indeed capture the imagination of some of the members to develop this further in their family groups. The idea that the Community might account for its use of the earth's resources, and if so, how it might do so, developed some momentum and found its way into the thematic working group which I convened from 2006 to 2008.

I also participated in running themed weeks related to environmental issues for two years running. The first week was in collaboration with Kathy Galloway on the theme of Covenanting for Economic and Environmental Justice, an idea which emerged from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The following year I led a week alone, on the theme of ecology and prophecy.

In 2004 under Kathy Galloway's leadership, the community agreed that it would collectively focus on particular themes for two years at a time. The first two years would focus on Poverty, followed by Place for two years and following that Peace. I volunteered to participate actively in the Place theme and convened the working group on Place from 2006-8. My experience of reflecting on environmental justice in this context forms a detailed component of the case study in this thesis

### ***1.5 The theological context***

A few other points need to be raised about my role in this thesis. The work constitutes my own reflections as a disciple, an intellectual and a participant in various struggles for environmental justice. I am not ordained, nor am I a leader, employee or even a member of an institutional church or denomination. I have found myself working alongside people of different faiths and none. My practice is that of a disciple in a social movement, and I make no claim to speak of the ministry or mission of the church.

Secondly, this is a work of theology, drawing on some of the tools of social science. I am qualified in natural sciences (Biology) and community education. I am employed to teach Sociology by Queen Margaret University, and have been accepted as a postgraduate student

in theology by Birmingham University. Both have required an element of risk, for which I am grateful. However, the world of practice for environmental justice is not neatly divided into natural science, social science, theology and pedagogy. It involves analysis and interpretation, commitment and moral judgement across all these disciplines and others.

In the following chapter, the methodology of this research will be explained, integrating theology of liberation with the social science of political ecology.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

### ***2.1 Theology of Liberation***

This thesis follows the classical methodology of the theologies of liberation. Liberation theology emphasises the epistemological importance of the social context. The social, political, economic context of the theologian (or more generally of the Christian disciple) determines, shapes or sets parameters on the nature of the theology. Theological reflection moreover leads to an informed engagement with the social and political reality of the time, its trajectory is towards a liberating praxis. Where the social context of the theologian is that of a privileged class, there must be a suspicion that their theological work would tend to reinforce that privilege. This puts a special responsibility onto the Christian disciple as theologian to engage with a political practice in the interests of the poor, exploited or discriminated against. For a Christian disciple such as myself - not poor, exploited or discriminated against, with a middle class background, the privilege of education and enjoying a chosen career - there is a particular risk of unwitting collusion with oppressive

ideology. My responsibility is to be alongside those who experience exploitation in their struggle for liberation. There is a responsibility to ‘become organic to’ the exploited classes (after Gramsci 1972). Hence this thesis has started with the context of my engagement with the struggles for environmental justice and alongside the environmentalism of the poor.

This social context makes a theology of liberation possible. As Gutierrez (1974) explains “Theology is reflection, a critical attitude. Theology *follows*; it is the second step.” (page 11, italics in original). However, the tools required for theological reflection are also drawn from the social sciences. In order to understand and interpret the context, to identify oppressions and discern strategies for liberation, it is necessary to use the disciplines of sociology, economics, political science and in this thesis also political ecology. Boff distinguishes between hermeneutic mediation and analytical mediation, the former deriving from the theological tools of faith and the latter from the human sciences (for example Boff 1997). The final moment in classical liberation theology is action, in which the lessons of critical analysis derived from theology and the social sciences are put into practice through historical projects of political engagement with the poor. The objective of liberation theology is therefore orthopraxis, in which critical reflection and political practice are integrated in a project of human liberation.

A critique of classical liberation theology methodology has recently been developed by Petrella (2006) who argues that by drawing a distinction between hermeneutic and analytical mediations, theology is divorced from social sciences, with the result that political praxis draws on only social analysis, leaving theologians with little to add, but to refine their irrelevant theological categories. Petrella’s argument is that liberation theology lost its way

following the collapse of ‘actually existing socialism’ in the Soviet Union, largely because of internal flaws in the treatment of the relationship between theology and social theory. What Petrella calls the canonical view in liberation theology, whilst originally criticised for its overdependence on Marxism, has subsequently suffered from its underuse of any social theory, having defined the theological task outside of the realm of social theory.

In contrast to the canonical position, Petrella describes a marginal position within Latin American Liberation Theology which integrates the social sciences more systematically with theology. Whilst supporting these theologians for using this integration to denounce idolatry in the social sciences (in particular economics), Petrella criticises them for not constructing new historical projects. Petrella argues that it is in the integration of theology and social sciences to construct historical projects wherein lies the future of liberation theology: in practical politics which lifts the poor out of their poverty. Without this, liberation theology is destined to become irrelevant speculation or the idolatry of conflating God’s kingdom with the socialist revolution.

Petrella’s alternative proposal draws on the social theory of the Brazilian Roberto Unger, which regards “society as frozen politics” (Petrella 2006 p.97). In other words, social institutions exist as snapshots on a process of political contestation and can continue to be contested in the interests of the poor without unacceptable compromise of principle. What is required of liberation theology is “institutional imagination”, to work with the social institutions available rather than perpetually rejecting them. He advocates “revolutionary reform: the step-by-step change of the formative context of society” (Petrella 2006 p 108)

and challenges liberation theologians to develop historical projects from their theological resources which will make a difference to the poor.

Petrella's methodological critique concerning the separation of theology and social sciences is well made, although problems remain with his alternative Ungerian approach to the construction of historical projects. His approach fails to provide the analytical tools for distinguishing between 'revolutionary reform' and mere 'reform'. It is argued here that it is not necessary to abandon Marxism as a core social science in liberation theology, although it is necessary to apply a critical analysis of Marxism in the light, not only of the failure of Marxist revolutions, but also the apparent inability of Marxism to address the ecological crisis. Fortunately, a number of Marxist social scientists have been doing exactly this with the result, not of abandoning Marxism, but of a critical and selective engagement with that body of theory. Thus the methodology of this research will follow the approach of classical liberation theology, but will also address the problem addressed by Petrella of the integration of theology and social science with the purpose of developing 'revolutionary reform' historical projects.

## ***2.2 Materialist Social Theory & Environmentalism of the poor***

The theoretical foundation of this thesis is a materialist analysis. The environment is both socially constructed and in the last instance material. It is socially constructed because what we know as the environment is constantly filtered through social processes and understandings of nature, science, beauty, wilderness etc. It is material because there is a reality behind our social construction which, in the last instance, will determine what is possible within the context of life on earth. It is necessary to understand the social construction of pollution – for example the socio-economic processes by which conflicting

groups serve to define this or that substance as polluting - but at the same time it is necessary to know the physical impact of pollution, irrespective of social context. The action of asbestos fibres on lung tissue really does cause fatal illness (mesothelioma) irrespective of how this is understood socially. But understanding the social meaning of mesothelioma enables us to analyse how social differences between those who suffer and those who diagnose the illness has served the interests of capital invested in the asbestos industry.

Segundo (1984) has pointed out that the use of materialism in theology has often led to misinterpretation, and that 'materialism' might more helpfully be termed 'realism'. Materialism is sometimes erroneously equated with atheism, or opposed to faith. However, the opposition to materialism is idealism. An idealist ontology is based on the understanding that society is constructed from ideals or spirit, or that the economy is simply a product of ideas or that material conditions are entirely independent of social processes. Marx argued that idealists such as Hegel ignore the fundamental need of societies to produce for material existence. Idealism leaves unanswered the question of how the social organisation of production is manifest through continuing poverty and material want alongside wealth. The epistemological implications are that ideas become reified, and idealist theory obscures the material interests of the theorist. Thus, any theology of liberation must start from a material analysis if it is to provide a corrective to the tendency for theologians loyal to ruling interests to use theology to reproduce power relations.

The relationship between the material and social conceptions of the environment, as between economy and society, is not deterministic but dialectical. Marx's 'dialectical conceptualisation' understands phenomena in terms of their historical relations. All

phenomena have emerged from historical forces and contain the possibility of their future formation. In order to understand the environment, or the economy, or society it is important not to confuse its appearance with its essence, the latter involving the internal forces which have brought it about in its current historical form. As Allman (2007) describes it, Marx was particularly interested in the “dialectical contradiction (which) is an internally related unity of opposites”. If we are to understand the relationship between the economy, society and the environment then, it is important to explore how the internal contradictions are dialectically related in such a way to produce the particular relations we experience in this historical moment.

Social action retains a degree of autonomy from the economy and is able to affect change in the economy within limits. The materialist analysis recognises that the economy sets constraints and provides opportunities for social action and the freedom and autonomy of social action is able dialectically to influence economic conditions.

This relationship between society and economy particularly in the dominance of capitalism is still best understood in the original work and subsequent tradition of Marx and Marxism<sup>5</sup>. Capitalist society is fundamentally divided between two forces representing the interests of the accumulation of capital (bourgeois class) and the interests of humanity (working class). This conflict occurs because the value of humanity’s creativity and productivity is commodified in the labour market and expropriated for the purposes of capital

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<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the issue of the destruction of the environment in economies organised on Marxist principles. There has been considerable environmental damage in the major communist systems of the Soviet Union before 1991, and China before its embrace of capitalism in the 1990s, mostly worse than in capitalist countries. This may partly be explained by the speed of industrialisation in these countries, but also, a more significant problem lies in the interpretation of Marx’s use value. Just as Capitalist economies reduce all values to exchange value, so the former ‘actually existing’ Communist economies reduce all values to use value. Other ways of valuing the environment are incommensurable and therefore either devalued or undervalued in both systems.

accumulation. The extraction of surplus value is a defining feature of capitalism such that workers are dehumanised by the logic of capital accumulation. Marx described this conflict of interests between capital and humanity as between the *forces of production* (the capitalist economic system) and the *relations of production* (the class structure which emerges from it and which contains the seeds of its own destruction).

As Marx pointed out, capitalism is the most effective and productive economic system ever developed and it has generated considerable wealth, nearly all of which is owned by a small number of people. Capitalism also depends for its continuation on the cooperation of those whom it exploits, partly by ensuring that sufficient groups of workers have interests in common with capital, and that these interests exceed (or appear to exceed) their interests in their own humanity. Cooperation is also maintained through *alienation*, the process in which workers are separated from the fruits of their work and creativity, and through *commodity fetishism*, in which commodities appear as if they are autonomous rather than products of human labour and creativity. Alienation and commodity fetishism serve to reinforce one another in a vicious cycle (Marx and Engels 1967; Marx and Engels 1969a, 1969b).

Within this system of oppression, women are doubly oppressed by the same economic system. Women and men are both exploited as workers whose surplus value is extracted in the interests of capital accumulation. At the same time, women disproportionately carry a reproductive role in the economy, maintaining the homes, communities, caring and nurturing workers and their families. These capitalist relations of oppression are in addition to, and interact with, the patriarchal relations of oppression which maintain preferential access to power for men. A similar form of oppression occurs against the ecological

environment which provides resources, waste management and reproduction through ecological cycles, and indeed the social environment, which affects the health and wellbeing of humanity. The connection between capitalist exploitation of women and of the environment has been an important insight of ecofeminist theologians.

Marx believed that crises in capitalism would eventually lead to a revolutionary situation in which workers would recognise their collective interests in overcoming the system of economic exploitation. They would then take control of capital, end the extraction of surplus value and create a classless society in which all of humanity would enjoy the fruits of their own creativity. Work would no longer be alienating and material conditions would be met by the common endeavours of society. Communism would therefore be the endpoint of history. In no society has this revolutionary situation occurred in the way Marx expected. Revolutions, whilst having mixed success, have thus far not been able to create the classless society of liberated humanity. Moreover, capitalism has demonstrated high levels of adaptability in discovering or creating new ways to overcome crises.

Liberating action therefore is constantly faced with the tension between improving conditions within the constraints of an exploitative capitalist system, and thereby reinforcing the conditions of cooperation between the exploited and the system of exploitation, or else working for the uncertain future of humanisation. At best this tension is dialectical and can contribute to transforming social and economic conditions, at worst it is a compromise which serves to obfuscate the reality of oppression. It is this tension which Petrella (2006) hopes to overcome with his 'revolutionary reform', although he does so by abandoning Marxism.

Some of the most significant critiques of Marx lie in the failure of any proletariat to achieve a revolution, both from Marxists and theologians of liberation. For Miranda (1980), Marx's early writings, regarded as his more humanistic work, come close to a theologically compatible Marxism. Segundo (1984) seeks to integrate Marxism and theology more thoroughly through the lens of ideology. Kee (1990) argues that the weakness in theologians' use of Marx lies in their unwillingness to take on Marx's materialist critique of religion – i.e. that religion creates God as a transcendental projection of the ideology which has emerged from the material conditions. Thus there remain considerable resources within Marxist theology to address Petrella's (2006) demand for historical projects.

Whilst the economy is primary in the dialectical relationship with society in a materialist analysis, there is a more fundamental factor which constrains, shapes and gives opportunities to the economy: ecology. Ecology constitutes the material and energy resources, the natural cycles and interactions between components of the earth including humanity. The primary connection with ecology is via the economy – the use of natural resources for materials and energy, of natural cycles for energy and waste absorption (There are clearly also other, non material relations between society and ecology, in particular aesthetic, ethical and spiritual). Thus the material base should properly be understood in ecological terms, as a throughflow of materials and energy within thermodynamic limitations (Martinez-Alier 2002).

A model for measuring the ecological limitations for different resources used by Friends of the Earth is the 'environmental space'. The environmental space for any resources represents

a globally equitable per capita use of a particular resource, within the limits set by the stock or flow rate of the resource, the ecological damage in extraction and the absorption rate of the waste stream (Friends of the Earth Scotland 1997, McLaren et al 1998, Carley and Spappens 1997).

These ecological limitations are also social, since they are valued by groups in society, often in ways which are incommensurable with the financial accounting process through which economic values are normally established. Thus, environmental limits to the economy are set by material ecological conditions, for example stock scarcity or waste toxicity, and also socio-environmental conditions, as deterioration in the environmental quality of locations is resisted in ecological distribution conflicts such as environmental justice movements (Martinez-Alier 2002).

The capitalist economy tends to treat the ecological environment as a means to the accumulation of capital. This has a similar effect on the environment as it does on humanity. First the environment is treated as a site for the extraction of surplus value through externalising costs. Capital accumulation is maximised by shifting costs off the economic balance sheet onto ecological factors – through the exploitation of nature or the dumping of wastes or intervention in natural cycles. Second, ecological features are commodified. Raw materials are allocated an exchange value on the basis of a crude version of the capitalist supply/demand equation. An ecological object or service which has the appearance of a commodity attains a ‘second nature’ (O’Connor 1998).

Economics has recognised the unintentional damaging effect on the environment and humanity caused by the economic activities of firms, and these are referred to as negative externalities. An externality is an impact, the costs or benefits of which are not costed, therefore do not appear in the balance sheet of an economic actor (a firm, a state, a consumer), have no impact on prices of products and therefore provide no feedback to the behaviour of economic actors. In ironic reference to Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market, Jacobs (1991) has called this the 'invisible elbow', unintentionally knocking things over and causing havoc.

The relationship between the economy and the environment can be understood as a contradiction in capitalism of equal moment as the contradiction between capital and labour. This 'second contradiction' is between on the one hand the forces and relations of production, and on the other the *conditions of production*, which include ecology, the environmental conditions of humanity, the community role in reproduction (J. O'Connor 1998). According to James O'Connor, just as the contradiction between capital and labour leads to crises of overproduction and the emergence of labour movements, so the second contradiction leads to crises of underproduction and the emergence of so called 'new' social movements, including the environmental movement, urban community action movements and the women's movement.

The concept of value has been challenged by the understanding of the relationship between the economy, society and ecology. Marx's concept of value was based on the distinction between use-value – the value to workers for the use of the product – and the exchange-value – the price which may be obtained for a commodity in capitalist trade. Surplus value

constitutes the difference between the two. Exchange-value has been used by some environmental economists to allocate a price for nature in a capitalist economy, thereby *internalising externalities* and linking the interests of capital to the interests of ecology (See for example Pearce et al 1989).

Ecological economists such as Joan Martinez-Alier (2002) have problematised the concept of value since neither use-value nor exchange-value adequately expresses the values embedded in ecology. On the contrary, values are multiple, diverse and incommensurable and cannot be reduced to price or any other single measure. Value emerges from and is expressed by social conditions.

The value of a forest may be expressed by a lumber company as the price which would be obtained from the wood, minus the costs associated with extracting it. An environmental economist might want to add the costs of replanting with native trees and rehabilitating the land, thereby making the price of the commodity higher. They might also ascertain from local residents or conservation organisations how much they would be prepared to pay to protect the forest, which could be compared with the net price of the wood – so called ‘contingent valuation’. But it would still be expressed in price. Contingent valuation methods are particularly crude mechanisms for assessing the aesthetic value of the forest, and there is no acceptable mechanism for assessing the value of the livelihood and culture of the forest dwellers, the spiritual value to their shamans or the intrinsic value of biodiversity (M. O’Connor 1999). Value must be understood as a multiple and complex phenomenon which may be expressed in price but may also be expressed in other forms and defended with social action.

Joan Martinez-Alier (2002) has developed a theoretical analysis of environmentalism of the poor, rooted in the incommensurable valuations recognised in ecological economics. Ecological distribution conflicts occur where there are negative environmental externalities throughout the material cycle of economy. There are community campaigns adjacent to extractive, manufacturing and waste disposal industries, and along the infrastructure of distribution (eg action against quarries, factory pollution, toxic dumps and incinerators, road networks and supermarket developments), against the external effects causing damage to the locality. Similarly, there are conflicts over the displacement of externalities onto the workforce in these industries, through trade union campaigns over health and safety and the workplace environment. These conflicts are not spatially restricted, since extraction of raw materials, manufacturing of commodities, consumption and waste disposal can all occur in different parts of the globe – and indeed the impact of externalities on the global commons and resource base is increasingly recognised. There is also a temporal dimension, an ecological debt, as the legacy of past externalities continues to impact negatively on communities throughout the world (Southern Peoples Ecological Debt Creditors Alliance 2003, Simms 2005).

Ecological distribution conflicts therefore occur where there are economic externalities which test the ecological and environmental limitations of the economy. Martinez-Alier (2002) argues that environmentalism of the poor is a distinctive strand of the environmental movement which emerges when the value of the environment is expressed in terms incommensurable with cost-benefit measurements and protest movements resist. Whilst the rich might be able to demand a high price for the protection of their environment, the poor

lack such leverage, so refuse to engage in an exercise which is stacked against them. Other excluded groups, such as people of colour in the USA, or indigenous people the world over, lack the power to use price to protect the values of civil rights, culture or the sacred, which often leads to social conflict. In a market, the poor can only sell cheap, so sometimes refuse to sell at all and fight back instead. Environmentalism of the poor concerns ecological distribution conflicts involving environmental valuation incommensurable with finance.

There is an epistemological and therefore pedagogical implication to this analysis. Gelpi (1985) has argued that social conflicts are important sources of curricula in lifelong education, since they expose contradictions in the underlying political economy (see also Griffin 1983). Hence the theoretical justification for the ‘agents for environmental justice’ project using popular education. Popular education is based on the pedagogical theories of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator who was strongly influenced by, and influenced in turn, liberation theologians.

Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) was designed in the context of literacy education for poor peasants in Brazil in the 1960s. For Freire, traditional educational methods, what he called ‘banking education’, defined these learners solely in terms of deficit – they were illiterate. The ‘banking educator’ simply had to fill up the empty vault with the skills of reading and writing. But as Freire pointed out, the illiteracy of these peasants is socially produced, along with their poverty, disenfranchisement, lack of access to resources, and internalisation of inferiority in the context of an unequal social structure. Education in this context is highly political: by ignoring the context, ‘banking education’ implies that illiteracy is merely a skills deficit, that the social injustice has nothing to do with it. The

‘banking educator’ therefore implicitly reinforces the unjust status quo. By contrast, pedagogy of the oppressed starts from the recognition that learning and political context are intrinsically inter-related and that the educator’s political sympathy should be with the oppressed.

Although designed for literacy education, the methodology in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been widely adapted for other contexts of learning. The methodology starts from the assumption that learning is a two-way interaction between teacher and learner, that education occurs through a dialogue between the two. The learners have something to contribute to the learning context. They have skills, knowledge, experience and context which they can contribute, whilst at the same time the educator has other skills and knowledge, including their literacy skills which the learners want to gain. Together, the educator and learner must engage, not just in a process of transfer of skills from one to the other, but a dialogue about what skills are useful for the learners in their context.

Environmentalism of the poor may therefore be understood as an environmental ‘cry of the poor’ and hence provide a rich source for liberation theological reflection. Environmental justice, or more generally, environmentalism of the poor, constitutes a significant context from which to interpret political economy and ecology and wider aspects of social justice.

### ***3.3 Petrella’s critique and historical projects***

Ivan Petrella’s (2006) critique of classical of liberation theology methodology is based on the segregation of theology from social theory, the latter usually drawn from Marxism, which leads liberation theologians into the idolatry of utopianism or irrelevance. According to Petrella, liberation theologians treat capitalism as a unified and all embracing evil which

allows no space for institutional action for the poor, but only wholesale overthrow and replacement with the alternative unified and all embracing good of socialism. In the absence of historical projects, this analysis becomes paralysing because no project becomes adequate to such a revolutionary task.

Petrella's historical project analysis draws on the social theory of Roberto Unger, who argues for an 'alternative pluralism'. Unger argues that there are no fixed structural forms or historical epochs but rather a wide range of different institutional arrangements which are constantly shifting in response to the power struggles of social actors. Society constitutes a snapshot of political struggles which appear fixed and unchangeable, as "frozen politics". In other words, social institutions exist as snapshots of a process of political contestation and can continue to be contested in the interests of the poor. The task is to map the existing institutions and imagine how they can better meet our ideals in practice. Once mapped, a process of criticism can reveal contradictions which serve to 'unfreeze' the politics and lead to the 'revolutionary reformist' historical projects.

The first problem with Petrella's analysis is how to differentiate between his 'revolutionary reform' and mere reform, the "humanisation of the existing structure" (Petrella 2006 page 108). How is it possible to know whether any historical project is one or the other, whether it is moving politics in the direction of the interests of the poor, or else accommodating the interests of the poor whilst reinforcing the privilege of the rich, or both. European social democracy, and the political theology which it has generated, has often been criticised by liberation theologians for that reason. Petrella does not provide tools for differentiation, even though such potential tools exist, as described below.

The second major critique of Petrella is his adoption of Unger in favour of Marxism as a social theory on which to base liberation theology's historical project. His rejection of Marx, or liberation theology's use of Marx, seems to be based on the mainstream liberation theologians' response to the collapse of actually existing communism rather than any systematic critique of Marx. Petrella suggests that Segundo's work "can be seen as providing the closest historical analogy to the position developed in [Petrella's] book" (page 35). However, he criticises Segundo, not because of his use of Marxism but for his inability to use that Marxism for constructing historical projects. Segundo (1984) argues for dialectical materialism as an appropriate method for a theology of liberation.

From what we have seen so far about dialectic, the key to Marxist orthodoxy, God can be judged only as an integral element of historical projects or processes, as qualifying them in one way or another. (Segundo 1984 page 211)

and again

... there is an open-ended spectrum of possibilities where we find a process of antagonism between two opposed intentions or tendencies ... Now it is precisely this fact which makes dialectic, not the *contemplation* of the mechanical and necessary succession of historical events, but rather an orientation towards praxis, towards changing the world. (Segundo 1984 page 213)

Interestingly, Cornel West, who in the 1980s was already predicting the kind of critique which Petrella has developed, warned that "the fading of the zenith of liberation theology reflection" would lead to "a new kind of theological evasion, a refusal to take seriously the difficult task of specifying Christian identity in a pluralistic world" (West 1984 page 394). West is an advocate of 'prophetic pragmatism', with certain resonances with Petrella's revolutionary reformism. West criticises Segundo for essentially abandoning praxis for philosophy, and argues that Segundo's *Faith and Ideologies* (1984) is "caught between neo-Kantianism and Mannheimian sociology of knowledge". Nonetheless, despite this allegation

of epistemological inconsistency, West embraces Segundo's defence of dialectics. Indeed, West claims that dialectical methodologies are not so much borrowed from Marxism by theologians, but rather are inherent in and emergent from Christian theology. For example Martin Luther King's methods are

rooted in the dialectical mediation of the dualistic character of the self (spirit/nature) and world (history/eternity) – a mediation both King (in an Afro-American context) and Hegel (in a German Lutheran context) inherit from Christian thought. (West 1984 page 430)

The fertile debate between Christian theology and Marxism is well established and already touched on. Arguably it is not necessary to abandon Marxism in order to be able to recognise pluralism within capitalism (and indeed socialism) and to engage in struggle within capitalism, or “revolutionary reform”, on historical projects which do not simply reproduce but contribute to the transformation of capitalism into socialism. The work of Gramsci allows us to recognise the relative autonomy of the social-political sphere and the diversity of struggles within it, without abandoning altogether its dependence on the economic structure of capitalism<sup>6</sup>. Gramsci's (1972) understanding of hegemony allows for society to be understood as ‘frozen politics’ whilst retaining the significance of the economic base. Raymond Williams (1973) coined the term the Long Revolution to describe the struggle for hegemony throughout the cultural and political sphere. However, for Williams, as a Marxist, this takes place in the dialectical relationship between culture / politics and the economic base.

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<sup>6</sup> Petrella does draw on Laclau and Mouffe's postMarxist political theory in support of his Ungerian approach, which is based on Gramscian analysis but goes further in disconnecting the sphere of political struggle from the materialist dialectic of Gramsci.

Petrella's complaint is that Marxist inspired liberation theologians cannot recognise the diversity within capitalism which would allow them to acknowledge elements which can be reformed.

For Unger, the abstract concept of capitalism is merely a blanket term that gets in the way of detailing and understanding the particularities of each social order. He argues that the very concept 'capitalism' is either too general or too specific, too inclusive or too exclusive, to possess descriptive or explanatory power. (Petrella 2006 page 100).

He then illustrates the diversity which exists within capitalism and the strengths and weaknesses of their outcomes.

In fact Marx himself acknowledged variation within capitalism. However, all forms of capitalism have as their unique attribute the tendency to commodification of production and labour. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we could also add the commodification of social services, education, indigenous knowledge, natural goods and services and even the atmosphere. In addition, all forms of capitalism extract surplus value from commodified labour. So long as capitalism continues to seek new frontiers for commodification and to extract surplus value, it will continue to be idolatrous and exploitative.

Moreover, many Marxists and others who draw on Marx have proposed 'historical projects' arising from the conditions of actually existing capitalism and democracy in the west, ranging from William's Long Revolution, through Marcuse's shift to sexual liberation as a mechanism for undermining capitalism, to Habermas' exploration of discursive democracy (eg. McLellan 1979). Marxist feminists have looked to alternative historical projects which take into account the weaknesses of classical Marxism and alternatives from feminism and other radical social theory (eg. Mitchell 1966).

Amongst theorists who draw on Marx to address the ecological context, we should include Andre Gorz (1989) and Pat Devine (1988) who might be regarded as presenting historical projects. Goldblatt (1996) regards Gorz as the most systematic incorporation of ecological limitations into social theory. Gorz's project lies in workers achieving control of work, which he analyses as comprising autonomous and heteronomous work. Heteronomous work is that which is required for society to meet collective needs and over which workers have little control. Autonomous work is carried out through creativity or love or inquisitiveness, and over which the worker has a high level of control (this may include, for non professionals, horticulture, craft, the arts, childcare, care of vulnerable adults or animals, study and intellectual debate).

Gorz argues that prior to the development of capitalism, heteronomous work was organised around the home, field or workshop and times spent on this work was determined by material need – in productive times, it was not necessary for workers to work longer than the time needed to earn a living. As wage labour developed under capitalism it was necessary for capitalists to make a surplus from the work of workers who thereby lost control of the amount of time spent in work, hence the regulation of time at the factory. Capitalism has also led to a highly skewed distribution of heteronomous work, in which, broadly, the less control a worker has over their work, the lower is their pay and the longer hours they work. Meanwhile, an elite is paid well for work over which they enjoy high control, and many unemployed are unable to spend time in autonomous work through lack of income. In the transition from post-capitalism to socialism, Gorz argues for worker action to shorten the working week and redistribute heteronomous work amongst the population, shifting

workplace conditions towards liberating time for autonomous work, and separating work from income, the latter which should be seen as a citizen's right.

Pat Devine's historical project lies in democratising the economy at the level of the enterprise. Writing at a time when public ownership of the means of production was at its peak, largely through the nationalised industries and utilities and municipal socialism, and before it was sent into reverse through the privatising reforms of Thatcher and Blair, he sought a form of economic democracy in which companies would become institutionally accountable to their key stakeholders, in particular the workforce, neighbourhood, suppliers and customers, as well as to wider social good (examples which privilege each of these stakeholders might include worker cooperatives, community businesses, provider and consumer cooperatives). Devine argued that the mechanisms of regional economic development be used to stimulate the development of diverse forms of social ownership and accountability and prevent the regression into accountability solely to capital-owners. I have explored how these and other forms of historical projects may be applied in community-based sustainable development in Scandrett (1999)

Whatever critique may be levelled at Petrella, he is correct in requiring an integration of theology and social theory which can provide a practical way forward for liberation by creating historical projects. However, it seems that by abandoning Marxism and dialectical materialism, he is ignoring the most powerful tool in the social sciences for developing historical projects whilst also moving towards the overthrow of capitalism.

The objective of Petrella's work is the integration of theology and social science in the construction of historical projects. He says that of the classics of liberation theology, Segundo goes furthest in this in his analysis that all faith depends on ideology, in the sense of the process and practice of carrying out faith. Petrella adds that social sciences are necessary for the practical implementation of theology in historical projects. However, despite volumes of literature on the relationship between Marxism and theology – not least Segundo's own approach – Petrella opts for Ricardo Unger, a non-Marxist social theorist for the development of historical projects. The reasons for his rejection of Marxism as a tool for generating historical projects is not as well established as his critique of liberation theology's use of Marxism not to generate them.

Since the liberation theologians were not attempting to replicate the Soviet Union before the Berlin Wall, nor China before Tianamen Square, nor even Cuba's continuing Latin American socialism, then it is unclear why Marxism should be rejected as a generator of historical projects appropriate to the contexts of the liberation theologians. Petrella's rejection of Marxism and embrace of Unger seems to be based on the criterion of usefulness in constructing a historical project for liberation theology. It is surprising that he does not devote more space to the reasons for his rejection of Marxism, which is the social science which most liberation theologians use, at least in Latin America.

The methodology used in this thesis is based on classical liberation theology, in which the starting point is the material context of engagement in struggle alongside the oppressed. The second stage of theological and social analysis is derived from dialectical materialism, especially as adapted by ecological Marxists. Taking on elements of Petrella's critique of

liberation theology, efforts will be made to integrate theological and social analysis, and to put these to work to identify historical projects which are neither utopian-idolatrous, nor reformist-incorporated, but rather 'revolutionary-reformist'.

This analysis allows us to generate criteria which can be applied to an ecotheology of liberation. First ecotheology must be materialist, in the sense of starting from the material reality of the productive forces and their impact on the distribution of power in society, and in the sense of rooting this social and economic reality in the ecological materials and processes from which it derives. Second it must be dialectical. The relationships between social, economic and ecological conditions are complex and dynamic, inter-related to one another and hold together contradictory tensions which propel them through history. Third, ecotheology must be centred on the environmentalism of the poor and environmental justice, i.e. those struggles and conflicts over the distribution of ecological resources and destruction which follow social inequalities and are often articulated in languages incommensurable with financial measures of value. Fourth, the integration of theology and social sciences must lead to historical projects which are revolutionary-reformist.

The next stage in the thesis is to analyse where other scholars have attempted to integrate ecotheology with liberation theology.

## **CHAPTER THREE: ECOTHEOLOGY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGIES**

### ***3.1 Introduction***

This thesis is a contribution to an ecotheology of liberation. My starting point is my social location as a Christian disciple active in the environmental justice movement, which was described in chapter one and followed, in chapter two, with an elaboration and justification of the methodologies of liberation theology and political ecology. Chapter two ended with the argument that environmentalism of the poor and the struggle for environmental justice should be seen as central to an ecotheology of liberation because such social movements are socio-political expressions of resistance to capitalist exploitation of the environment.

A theological approach to environmental orthopraxis should involve: a critical response to my social location in struggles for environmental justice; a dialectical materialist analysis of these struggles which locates them with respect to contradictions in the relations and conditions of production; and therefore the centrality of environmentalism of the poor / environmental justice struggles in theological reflection. This chapter assesses some theological approaches from the literature which incorporate these components.

The classical methodology of liberation theology was outlined in chapter 2. It is summarised in one of the texts of theology of liberation of the environment which will be addressed in this chapter:

Liberation theology's starting point is the anti-reality, the cry of the oppressed, the open wounds that have been bleeding for centuries. Its first step is to honour reality in its more stark and problematic side... This is the moment of *seeing*, of feeling and suffering the impact of human passion, both personal and social. This is an overall experience of compassion, of protest, of mercy and of a will to liberating action. This entails direct contact with the anti-reality, an experience of existential shock. Without this first step, it is difficult to set in motion any liberation process intended to change society.

The second moment is the analytical *judging* in a twofold sense, in the sense of critical knowledge (analytical meditation (*sic*)) and the sense of illumination on the basis of the contents of faith (hermeneutic mediation) ... The third moment is transformative *action*, the most important moment, for that is where everything should culminate ... Finally, there is the moment of *celebrating*. (Boff 1997 page 109-10, original emphasis)

The presentation of the methodology in this form highlights the epistemological difficulty presented by an ecotheology of liberation. If the essential first step is to see the oppression, feel the suffering and hear the cry of the oppressed, in what sense is it possible to do so when the object of oppression is the environment? Whilst it may be recognised that the oppressive relations which act against ecological systems have the same source as those oppressive relations against the poor, it is impossible for the environment to 'do theology'

whereas the poor can. How is it possible to take the next step of liberation theology from the perspective of the oppressed, when the oppressed is not human, does not have social agency? This is not an ethical question of the legitimacy of the environment to theology, a subject which has exercised many theologians. This is an epistemological question concerning the methodology of the theology of liberation. If theology is to be done by human beings, in what sense is it an ecological theology.

This chapter will address this question from the perspective of four contrasting attempts to resolve this dilemma. The first is the non-liberation theology perspective of deriving theology from traditional (elite) sources and applying it to the environment. In recognition of the significance of the environmental justice movement, this will be illustrated by an analysis of environmental justice by one of the foremost ecotheologians writing in the English language from a non-liberation theology perspective: Celia Deanne-Drummond. The second approach to this dilemma is to recognise the common source of oppression of the poor and the environment, then adopt a liberation theology approach to the oppression of the poor and project a parallel, speculative theology from the perspective of the environment. This is the approach of Leonardo Boff whose *Cry of the Poor, Cry of the Earth* adds a cosmological ecotheology to his classical liberation theology. The third approach to the dilemma is to identify a social group who have an epistemological advantage by being oppressed not only by a common source but through a similar mechanism as is the environment. This is the approach of ecofeminism which is based on the analysis of patriarchal exploitation of both the environment and of women, thereby giving women a unique position from which to do theology from an environmental perspective. In particular this allows for an ecocentric hermeneutic of suspicion from which

to read the bible. This chapter will illustrate this through the ecofeminist liberation theologies of Mary Grey and Rosemary Radford Ruether, which apply such an ecocentric hermeneutic of suspicion in different ways. A final approach to the dilemma is presented in which the ecological perspective is used as a corrective to an anthropocentric liberation theology through an integration of liberation theology with process theology. This approach is employed by George Matthew Nalunnakkal who uses the book of the Covenant to correct the dominant anthropocentrism of Exodus. It is argued that, despite their insights, none of these fully fulfil the criteria above.

### ***3.2 Non-liberation ecotheology - Deanne-Drummond***

Before exploring literature which seeks to integrate ecotheology and liberation theology, it is useful to demonstrate the value of adopting a liberation theological approach to ecotheology. This thesis has argued that environmentalism of the poor, or environmental justice, forms the basis for an ecotheology of liberation. Environmental justice has recently been treated theologically from a decontextualised and ahistorical theological perspective by Celia Deane-Drummond, the former editor of the journal *Ecotheology*. Whilst acknowledging the origins of environmental justice discourses in the movement of that name, Deanne-Drummond does not position herself with respect to this movement and her exposition is rooted in the policy-based discourse on environmental justice of the US Environmental Protection Agency, the classical theology of virtue and the liberal contractarian political philosophy of John Rawls.

Deanne-Drummond has proposed a Christian theologian's view of Environmental Justice and the Economy (Deanne-Drummond 2006, see also Diefenbacher 2006). Her approach is to start from the general, universal, classical approaches to justice and seek to apply these

both to the environmental problematic, and also to the specific case of the environmental justice movement. A distinctively Christian theological approach, she argues, augments liberal secular arguments of justice with classical theological understandings of virtue. Particularly in relation to the economy, she argues that

a theological critique of market economics also needs to recover a virtue ethic approach that includes justice considered as a virtue together with temperance and prudence ... both a critical appraisal of the principles of justice and its broadening base [to include an ecological dimension] *alongside* attention to the correlated habits of mind, or virtues, are needed in constructing an adequate Christian approach to an inclusive vision of justice. (page 294-5. emphasis in original)

Her understanding of virtue draws on both secular philosophy and Christian sources. In particular, justice as a virtue is a “quality of mind that permits justice as principle to be expressed in different ways.” (page 297) Justice as a virtue is something which is discerned through the corresponding virtues of prudence - “taking counsel, judging and acting according to the common good” (page 300) and temperance - differentiating between needs and wants, and prioritising the former.

Deanne-Drummond’s point of departure is the secular liberal philosopher John Rawls (1972). Her critique of Rawls’ difference principle is derived from its inability adequately to include ecological (including global and intergenerational) concerns. This is not the place to assess Rawls’ philosophy and its application to theological or ecological analysis, suffice to acknowledge that his approach to intergenerational justice has been critiqued by Barry (1978), who extended Rawls’ difference principle to far future generations.

Deane-Drummond’s principal critique of market economics is based on the attempts to price environmental goods and services. This is argued on several bases: the quasi-religious nature

of the market economy and its blasphemous usurping of spiritual values; the attempt to reduce human and ecological values to financial exchange values in cost benefit analyses; the selling of ‘indulgences’ for which there is no ownership in compensation-based valuations; the presumption of relativism in costing as opposed to proscribing destructive practices etc. She then considers economic systems which might be adopted as alternatives to the market, which include self-sufficient small regions (such as bioregionalism), and ‘intermediate mediating strategies’ which are designed to move pragmatically from a market based system to a radical alternative. She specifically argues that this pragmatism does not constitute reformism because it is not committed to remaining within the market system, but provides no indication as to how this distinction can be maintained, beyond recourse to the virtues of justice, prudence and temperance of those who make the decisions.

Having developed an argument from universal arguments concerning justice, she addresses the environmental justice movement and claims to environmental injustice in policy – in particular policy makers who are wedded to market solutions. The implication, which is undeveloped in her argument, is that addressing environmental injustices within the framework of liberalism and the market economy will inevitably undermine the latter. I would suggest that market-led economics has shown considerably more resilience to attempts to undermine it than Deanne-Drummond implies. Moreover, drawing on the movement which emerges as a primary point of resistance to environmental injustice at such a late point in her argument constrains its role to an adjustment to liberal, market dominated solutions which she has already comprehensively and rightly critiqued. For Deanne-Drummond:

The environmental justice movement is also important to consider [in addition to virtues in economic decision making] not only because it raises important practical

issues related to Christian humanitarian concern for the poor, but also as a case study in offering a more intermediate practical strategy towards more idealistic ecological sustainable economics. (page 307)

For Deanne-Drummond therefore, the role of the environmental justice movement is to resolve practical issues once the theoretical principles of justice have been discerned from philosophical principles. I suggest that this betrays a methodological flaw which undermines her argument.

First, Christianity does not merely adopt a humanitarian concern for the poor, but, as she argues elsewhere, a rather stronger “option for the poor and excluded embedded in the teaching of Jesus” (page 307). The environmental justice movement is a collective expression of the environmentally poor and excluded, and therefore central to the Christian analysis, not a mere case study of a universal principle.

Second, again as Deanne-Drummond points out “The central Christian belief in the incarnation of Christ demonstrates God’s affirmation of material existence”. However, the incarnation also demonstrates the primary *engagement* of God in the material, the particular, the historical. An analysis from Christian theology therefore, I would argue, should start from the experience of the environmentally poor and their material conditions and historical struggles. Materialist analyses which start with the environmental justice movement, and its resistance to economic externalities and the logic of the market include Martinez-Alier’s (2002) environmentalism of the poor, James O’Connor’s (1998) ecological Marxism and Andrew Dobson’s (2003) ecological citizenship.

Moreover, not only should analysis start from the experience of the environmental justice movement, so also must practice. Christian orthopraxis requires the assessment of general and universal claims to theory from the perspective of the poor and their struggles for justice. We are not left with a sense of Deanne-Drummond's own social position or participation in a world of injustice. It may well be that she is engaged in environmental justice struggles – she does not tell us, despite the bearing it has on her theology. However her theology emanates from the assumption of universalism which is the hallmark of the defenders of privilege.

If we return to Deanne-Drummond's advocacy of justice as a virtue to be exercised alongside the cardinal virtues of prudence and temperance, we can learn from Dobson's (2003) analysis of 'citizenship virtue' which is derived not from common territoriality (as traditional civic republican and liberal notions of citizenship have been), nor from a Christian ethic, but from the "relations of actual harm" which link us all together through a global system of exploitation. This means that citizenly virtue is an asymmetrical and non-reciprocal relation of rights and responsibilities. Virtue is a responsibility of citizenship for those who cause harm to others simply through their lifestyle, which is most people in the western world. On the contrary, those who have been harmed through this relation express their citizenship through rights demands. Deanne-Drummond draws on moral philosophy rather than political philosophy for her understanding of virtue which, according to Dobson, makes it weaker: moral choices are admired rather than required. Deanne-Drummond's virtue of justice is a chosen state of mind, something which is admired when it is practiced or in those who practice it consistently, rather than something which is emergent from the

experience of humanity in a conjuncture of exploitative global markets<sup>7</sup>. Whilst Deanne-Drummond distinguishes between distributors and recipients of justice, in order to include in her discussion of justice non-humans and future humans without the complication of contractual reciprocity, she does not extend this distinction to contemporary human inequality. Her argument for justice seeks to include the poor and excluded, without recognising that their poverty and exclusion is itself a denial of justice resulting from the same economic system which delivers a privileged everyday lifestyle for the rich minority.

Deane-Drummond's is not a theology of liberation. Although her paper contains a useful critique of the capitalist exploitation of the environment, it is difficult to identify the voice of the poor or oppressed whose struggle makes up this movement; there is no sense of where the author stands in this material struggle, and what political engagement she has; thus the context one is left with is one which is determined by the politics of pragmatic policy, rather than prophetic liberation.

Herein lies a tension. As described in chapter 1, Petrella (2006) critiques liberation theology because it abandons the task of generating historical projects. However, Deanne-Drummond adopts a theology which leaves aside the material conditions of its production, but advocates a pragmatic politics of 'intermediate mediating strategies' (Deane-Drummond 2006 page 302). Both aspire to a politics which is practical but not reformist, and radical but not utopian. A liberation theology of environmental justice needs to address this tension if it is to generate historic projects which are not merely pragmatic, and a theology which is materially grounded without collapsing into social science. This requires a dialectical

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<sup>7</sup> Rather confusingly, Dobson refers to this moral approach as the 'Good Samaritan' approach although the purpose of this parable almost certainly emphasises that the protagonist is a Samaritan – and therefore a stigmatised outsider - rather than that he is good (Scandrett 2008, 2009a).

theology. Environmental justice is a contested discourse borne of struggle, and the position of the narrative with respect to the wider political struggle will determine the ideology embedded within (Harvey 2006, Scandrett 2007). In the absence of such contextualisation, an activist in environmental justice struggles requires alternative theological resources, not least in the literature of liberation theology.

The relationship between liberation theology and ecotheology has been addressed in three ways: by attempting to graft ecological thinking onto ‘classical’ liberation theology (eg Boff 1997); by an ecofeminist hermeneutic of suspicion; and by correcting the biblical centrality of the anthropocentric Exodus with the Book of the Covenant.

### ***3.3 Grafting ecotheology onto liberation theology – Boff***

Of the ‘classical’ Latin American liberation theologians, the writer who has taken the environment most seriously is Leonardo Boff (Boff 1997). Judith Ress (2006) describes a defining moment in Latin American Liberation theology when, at a theological congress in Brazil in July 2000 (*Sociedad de Teología y Ciencias de la Religión*), a dispute emerged over Leonardo Boff’s expansion of the theological category of ‘the poor’ to include the earth. Boff’s views are expounded in English in *Cry of the Earth Cry of the Poor* in which he attempts to marry liberation theology with what he calls the emerging paradigm of a ‘new cosmology’.

He draws for this new vision on writers of the Deep Ecology movement and complexity theory, which challenges the reductionist Enlightenment view about the earth as inanimate physical matter which can be adequately described, and therefore fixed, by the application of scientific rationality. On the contrary, the earth is understood as a complex, harmonious,

interacting, living and spiritual being – referred to, originally by Lovelock (1979), as Gaia, the earth-goddess of ancient Greece. The earth - its material substructure, oceans, atmosphere, natural cycles, living ecosystems, human social systems, spirituality and ‘noosphere’ (the system of human creativity and imagination) – tends towards homeostasis as it maintains a dynamic and self correcting process of integration.

Boff draws on Teilhard de Chardin’s (1959) theology to ascribe purpose to this developing system. Gaia’s emergent complexity is progressive, creating life as self-organising matter (*autopoiesis*) and then creating human life as Gaia’s own self-reflective mind. “Consciousness... becomes co-creator of the universe. The more consciousness there is, the more creation there is, the more evolution accelerates, and the higher order develops. That has been the case since the great initial explosive expansion.”(page 57) It is this higher order which we are being drawn towards which is union with what Christians call God, although for Boff’s cosmogenesis, this also encompasses the transcendental of other religions: Sophia, wisdom, Krishna, nirvana.

It is the immature rebelliousness of Gaia’s consciousness – her human co-creators – that is causing a threat to the homeostasis and the destruction to the earth’s ecology – including and especially that part of the ecology which is the poor. However, Gaia in her wisdom is bringing forth a new, emergent paradigm (Capra 1982) which is the birth of a new ecological order emerging from the creativity and spiritual enlightenment of humanity. Boff calls this process cosmogenesis – the emergence of a new cosmology which includes our harmonious place in it – and he identifies this cosmogenesis as an article of theological obedience, a new covenant with God.

This theology is rich and beautiful, but its contradiction lies in its essentially speculative nature and idealist implications. Although Boff clearly articulates a materialist theology of liberation epistemology starting with the material conditions of the poor, it is hard to escape the speculative idealism of Boff's cosmogenesis. His ecotheology draws heavily on the Deep Ecologists, for whom "...the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom" (Naess 1973 page 96) and therefore difficult to engage with in rational critique. The Deep Ecology principles of self-realisation and biocentric egalitarianism are "*ultimate norms* or intuitions which are themselves not derivable from other principles or intuitions" (Devall & Sessions 1985 page 66, original emphasis). Deep Ecology demands an article of faith which, it seems, contradicts the methodology of liberation theology.

Although Boff regards the poor as 'the most threatened beings in creation' and the cry of the earth and cry of the poor as "two interconnected cries ... [with] ... the same root cause" (page 110), it is hard to escape the tension between these two cries when they are based on different epistemological principles. This concern seems to be shared by liberation theologians. Ress has described Leonardo Boff's reception in Brazil in 2000, which

caused a major altercation between him and his brother Clodovis Boff at one of the plenary sessions. Clodovis Boff represents those liberation theologians who find Leonardo Boff's embracing of the new cosmology dangerous to liberation theology's traditional commitment to poor and downtrodden *people*. ... There is a growing fear among some liberation theologians that the concrete lives of the poor will no longer be the locus of their theology and that the issue of the poor seems to be losing its theological and ethical prominence. There is also fear that the traditional concerns of liberation theology will be watered down by new paradigms, such as the new cosmology. (Ress 2006 page 34)

Boff treats ecotheology and liberation theology as parallel, mutually reinforcing projects. This is then not a liberation theology of ecology, but a grafting together of two theologies – one materialist and the other speculative. This may be a valuable project, but it inevitably relies on the kind of theology which liberation theology rejects: spiritualised, speculative, idealist theology, reified from its material conditions.

Boff attempts to resolve this contradiction by advocating a paradigm in which the conventional categories of material and spiritual are themselves integrated. The universe is spirit and matter since its beginnings, and conscious spirituality (eg religion) emerges from the universe through the evolving *autopoiesis*. Christ, as the original *Logos*, as the person of Jesus and as the eschatological omega point, is the incarnational event which resolves the material/spiritual contradiction. Christian faith therefore has a crucial place in the universe's evolution: "... the spearhead of cosmic consciousness. Faith sees in the omega point of evolution the Christ of faith, he who is believed and announced as head of the cosmos and of the church, the meeting point of all beings." (Boff 1997 page 178). In support, Boff quotes Teilhard de Chardin "Doubtless I should never have ventured to ... formulate the hypothesis rationally if, in my consciousness as a believer, I had not found not only its speculative model but also its living reality." (Boff page 178, from Teilhard de Chardin 1959 page 294).

However it is hard to escape the conclusion that this theology is essentially idealist. The clearest evidence in Boff's work for the charge of idealism is in his call to action. The mechanism for changing the world for Boff comes through a change in consciousness, which is given ontological priority over material conditions. Boff's integral religion is attractive for critiquing the hegemony of monotheism, but despite its apparent inclusiveness

it becomes a religion of proselytism and conversion to a superior 'insight'. In a telling section, Boff's 'pedagogy for globalisation' turns out to be teleological rather than dialogical. Despite the wealth of pedagogical materials associated with liberation theology, not least Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1972, Boff prefers a process of persuasion. "Having a new cosmology is not enough. How are we to spread it and bring people to internalise it so as to inspire new behaviours, nourish new dreams, and bolster a new kindness toward the Earth? That is certainly a pedagogical challenge." (page 119). This can be contrasted with Freire's pedagogy:

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realise that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of 'banking' or of preaching in the desert. (Freire 1972 page 68, original emphasis).

Boff's 'creation-centred theology' raises critical questions in liberation ecotheology, between ecocentrism (or cosmocentrism) and anthropocentrism. The usual meaning of ecocentrism is to view and judge the world from the perspective of the whole of its ecology, rather than from the perspective of humanity alone, which is anthropocentrism (O'Riordan 1976, Pepper 1996). One of the fundamental claims of liberation theology is that theology reflects the ideology of the socio-economic position in which it is produced. Most traditional theology is produced by the academic or ecclesial elite, whose interests (and the interests of the ruling class in society) are reflected in the theology produced. An authentic theology however should reflect God's preferential option for the poor, and should therefore be produced by the poor in their struggle for liberation, and those Christian disciples who stand alongside them. It is this materialism which is distinctive to liberation theology.

When this epistemological assumption is applied to ecotheology it becomes problematic. Modern ecocentric philosophy, such as Deep Ecology and Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, is highly speculative and the product of an intellectual elite. A case needs to be made that these philosophies do not reflect the interests of powerful groups in society. It is difficult to regard them as materialist, as the theological reflections of the poor, of ecology, or even of those who stand alongside ecology in its struggle.

### ***3.4.1 Hermeneutic of suspicion 1: Ecofeminism***

Leonardo Boff's theology is unusual amongst the 'classical' liberation theologians in taking seriously the environmental threat. Aruna Gnanadson (2005) points out however that these classical liberation theologians are predominantly male, whereas those female and especially feminist liberation theologians, such as Ivone Gebara, Judith Riss, Anne Primavesi and Gnanadson herself, have been more sensitive to the integration of ecological concerns with those of the poor. Indeed, it is in ecofeminism that arguably this integration has been most thorough. Judith Riss (2006) for example describes the emergence of ecofeminism in Latin America in the context of the realisation by women that traditional liberation theology retained an androcentric and patriarchal substructure. Ecofeminist theology attempts to derive a liberation theology of ecology from the common experience of oppression of women, the poor and nature. On the basis of this 'epistemological advantage' which women experience, the bible, and theology more generally, is read with an ecocentric hermeneutic of suspicion.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (2005) argues that ecofeminism derives from the "interconnection between the domination of women and the domination of nature" which occurs on an

ideological-cultural level [in which] women are said to be ‘closer to nature’ than men, more aligned with body, matter, emotions, and the animal world [and on] the socio-economic level, women are located in the spheres of reproduction, child raising, food preparation, spinning and weaving, cleaning of clothes and houses, that are devalued in relation to the public sphere of male power and culture.” (page 91).

Radford Ruether summarises a range of theological traditions which may be included in this category of ecofeminist, including those drawing on neo-pagan, African traditional religion, Hindu as well as Christian and post-Christian resources.

Mary Grey (2003) has gone further than many ecofeminists by arguing that scripture was originally ecocentric but has been “read in a way that stimulates and condones anthropocentrism” (page 12). In that sense she makes a case for what Horrell, Hunt and Southgate (2009) call a ‘Recovery’ reading of the bible, to rediscover the original ecological meaning. She argues there was what Thomas Berry calls a ‘turn from the earth’ “when Greek humanism combined with the biblical traditions to create a pervasive anthropocentric view of the universe.” For example, in her commentary on Psalm 8 vs 5-8 she argues

from the context of poor farming communities in Palestine, struggling to make a living from difficult terrain, but with a life-style which treads lightly on the earth (*sic*), this text can be read as encouragement. It can be seen as dignifying the life of the poor farmer, inviting him to take a wider view of creation and his own part in it, glorifying God as creator.

But when the same text is read from contemporary western and northern contexts, given our overwhelming and exploitative ecological footprint, it can both justify and encourage continuing domination of nature (Grey 2003 page 13)

Despite this view of an ‘original’ ecocentric scripture, she does not attempt to recover that original text but rather, like Radford Ruether, reads the text through a hermeneutic of suspicion, “an invitation to reread the Bible from within the context of endangered species,

the disappearance of the rain forest, our over-consumption of meat and loss of biodiversity in agriculture.” (page 200).

Grey’s liberation theology arises from her engagement with political practice in the UK and in Rajasthan, India, especially through the NGO ‘Wells for India’ and their Gandhian Indian partners GRAVIS. This organisation combines an empowering approach to the most vulnerable in this desert environment, especially women whose role it is to provide water, with a non-violent resistance to the dominant approaches of the state and private provision of water.

Grey’s thesis is that the current social and ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual crisis caused by the ‘turn from the earth’ and resulting in epistemological dualism; the unbalanced masculine emphasis on the rationality of the Enlightenment and science; the separation of Eros and Psyche so that sexual desire and emotional longing are disjointed; and a replacement of longing with addiction to repeated, immediate and superficial gratification as provided by the market. For this spiritual crisis she advocates a solution which is also spiritual, starting from a ‘return to the earth’, recognising ourselves as integral with the ecosystem, and living life accordingly. This leads to a joyful and simple lifestyle undamaged by the demands of the market for consumption and addictive behaviour.

The political implications are strongly, although not uncritically, Gandhian, requiring a return to the simple village community and adopting *satyagraha* (life-force) in non-violent resistance to the forces of globalisation. The political practice which emerges from such ecological spirituality involves “the deliberate, willing adoption of a simpler lifestyle that

does not depend on exploiting poor communities” (page 178). In the western context this takes the forms of ‘ecological lifestyle and creation spirituality groups’. In her concluding focus on the emergence of prophetic communities, Grey highlights the following:

First must be the extraordinary consciousness-raising and campaigning of the Jubilee 2000 movement ... Secondly, there are many specifically Christian religious groups embodying the prophetic dimension today. The Taize and Iona ... communities ... explicitly seeing community as ecological community.(page 178)

It is difficult to fault the thrust of this argument, although in chapter 5, the prophetic practice of the Iona Community in particular will be scrutinised in more detail. The resources of Gandhi and *satyagraha* are certainly valuable practices of resistance.

However, the question is not whether these activities are good in themselves, but rather how they contribute to the liberating work of God in history, transforming the destructiveness of capitalism. If, as is argued in this thesis, the spiritual, emotional, epistemological crisis which Grey argues lies at the root of social and environmental destruction is not in fact the root problem, but an ideological reflection of the needs of capitalism – the culture-ideology of consumerism as Sklair (2003) refers to it – then the root problem lies elsewhere, in the economy. Ecological lifestyle and creation spirituality tend to reinforce the individualism of capitalism and become either incorporated or bypassed by the forces of capitalism, rather than forming part of a movement for resistance. Do these movements, through force of will and spiritual conversion, have the capacity to form the radical transformative historical project which is required? The interesting question is this latter one, analysing what has this potential, and how it might be realised. For this it is necessary to ask why these movements emerge at this point in capitalist development.

Grey's ecofeminist liberation theology, despite drawing on her own political practice, remains dependent on idealism in identifying roots of the social and ecological crisis and in therefore proposing transformation. The same critique as was applied to Gandhi by Marxists might be applied to Grey, which is that of romanticism. Chatterjee (1999) points out that Gandhianism relies on a contradiction between the utopian ideal and the practical politics. Whilst *satyagraha* remains the moral ideal of soul-force, none the less the practical politics of organising a mass movement against colonial rule required something a little more pragmatic and experimental, *ahimsa*, which can be engaged in without sullyng the perfection of *satyagraha*.

At once there is a recognition of the disjuncture, the failure of politics to reach Utopia could be attributed to the loftiness of the ideal, noble, truthful and inherently unreachable, or else, equally credibly, to the imperfections of the human agency.” (Chatterjee 1999 page 109).

The true *satyagrahi* when faced with the dilemma would always follow the path of the unreachable utopia. Embracing the contradiction between moral ideal and practical politics is indeed a prophetic strategy, a theme which Grey explores elsewhere (2000). However she remains committed to the idealist diagnosis of the spiritual disease at the core of environmental destruction.

What if we were to turn this analysis around and apply a Gandhian response to the material causes of environmental destruction, to turn Gandhi on his head? Thus instead of seeking a practical politics out of a moral ideal, to what extent can *satyagraha* act as an antithesis to the ecological contradictions in the economy? Thus ‘ecological lifestyle’ may emerge from engagement alongside the struggles for environmental justice, rather than being a self-chosen driver of socio-spiritual transformation. For Gandhi, the Truth emerges from God and then we have the difficult task of translating it into practical

politics, wherein lay Gandhi's genius. However, a materialist interpretation would accept that truth emerges from history and our task is to expose the contradictions inherent in it. The logic of environmental injustice in economic cost shifting is confronted by a morality of incommensurable valuation.

Grey's use of scripture is metaphorical, poetic and mystical rather than analytical. Much as Gandhi regarded the debates on history and authenticity of the Gita as interesting but of no consequence to the self-evident Truth revealed in those scriptures, Grey's use of the bible implies a self-evident ecocentric truth which pre-figures the 'turn from the earth'. In this respect, Grey encounters the same problem as the Deep Ecologists, that their ecocentrism is axiomatic.

The tension between materialism and idealism which ecofeminism apparently resolves through the identification of women with nature through their common exploitation by patriarchal economic and social systems, also leads to a problem for ecofeminism itself. The extent to which women's closeness to nature is material or culturally constructed is itself controversial amongst ecofeminists. If ecofeminism is to be a theology of liberation, it must presumably reside on a materialist interpretation of the interconnections of women and nature, which leaves it open to the charge of essentialism. On the other hand, if the association between women and nature is socially constructed through their common experience of being 'othered' by patriarchal structures of thought, then the claim to grounding theology in material struggle is challenged. Women engaged in struggles against patriarchy legitimate their theology in the material conditions of that struggle. However the claim to any epistemological advantage to speak on behalf of non-human nature is

weakened, becomes nothing more than an analogy, scarcely more justifiable than the speculation of the Deep Ecology movement.

### ***3.4.2 Hermeneutic of Suspicion 2: The Earth Bible Project***

Finally, an attempt at developing a hermeneutic of suspicion directly from the perspective of the environment has been developed by the Earth Bible project. This is strictly an approach to reading the bible, rather than a theology, although it does seek to contribute to ecotheology through this methodology. This project, which has resulted in a series of publications since 2000 (Habel 2000), recognises the anthropocentric nature of the bible and attempts to read the text from the perspective of an ecojustice hermeneutic. The approach treats 'Earth' as a subject in the text, rather than an object which the text may be about. As such the bible readers seek to identify the ideology underpinning the relationship between the writers and their environment, and judge this on the basis of justice.

The Earth Bible team which has been responsible for developing this approach have clearly positioned themselves in the tradition of liberation theology. "Liberationists stand with the oppressed poor as they read; feminists stand with oppressed women as they read; we stand with oppressed Earth in our dialogue with the text." (Habel 2000 page 34). The ontological problem of not being the Earth is apparently addressed through a set of 'ecojustice principles' which guide ecojustice hermeneutic readings (Earth Bible Team 2000). These six principles are: intrinsic worth; interconnectedness; voice; purpose; mutual custodianship; and resistance. Conradie has described these principles as a heuristic key, in the sense that they are not biblical in their derivation but are "the product of previous attempts to construct a relationship between text, tradition and context" (Conradie 2006 page 308). In their

discussion of the principle of voice the Earth Bible Team comes closest to addressing the ontological problem:

There is a growing consciousness among many biologists, ecologists, feminists and theologians that Earth is a living entity, both biologically and spiritually. Deep Ecologists argue that Earth functions more like a living organism than a machine governed by rigid laws. According to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Earth is itself alive, sustaining and regulating its own environment. Sallie McFague (1993) uses the metaphor of the body of God to describe Earth as a living entity ... Whether or not one opts for a particular view of earth as a living entity, our growing consciousness of earth as a subject can no longer be dismissed. Those who have experienced earth in this way are committed to hearing the voices of Earth... Just as humans may communicate through body language, the various components of Earth may communicate their presence and intent through alternative forms of language we might call 'Earth language'... Earth-sensitive humans may mediate the voices of earth to the rest of humanity. Ecologists like David Suzuki, who claims to be in tune with Earth, echo the cries of the denuded forests and the polluted seas in our hearing." (Earth Bible Team 2000 page 46-8)

As is clear from this quotation, the ontological and related epistemological problem of reading from the perspective of Earth is not resolved but addressed through unsubstantiated assertion ("There is a growing consciousness ..." "our growing consciousness ... can no longer be dismissed"), falling back onto other speculative philosophies (Deep Ecology, Gaia), using metaphorical theology in non-metaphorical ways, or recourse to an esoteric elite of 'Earth-sensitive humans'. Some of these pluralistic philosophical positions are useful heuristics for a hermeneutic of suspicion based on Earth as subject in the text (as discussed in chapter 4), and the achievements of the group in progressing a biblical critical methodology appropriate to the ecological crisis are considerable. However it must remain a heuristic device whilst the ontological problem of not being Earth is not resolved. To claim that this method reads the bible from the perspective of Earth is over-stating their case.

It is therefore also questionable whether ecojustice hermeneutic constitutes a liberation theology methodology. In an interesting comment, Habel (2000) explains that the Earth

Bible team seeks “to stand with the oppressed Earth community as our kin in this crisis. The degree to which any one of us as members of the Earth community have personally experienced the ‘lived reality’ of Earth’s domination and suffering may vary.” (Habel 2000 page 32). Such a vague positioning leaves the suspicion that the team has not prioritised identification with victims of environmental injustice.

### **3.5 Integral Ecotheology – Nalunnakkal**

A distinctive approach to liberation theology of ecology comes from George Matthew Nalunnakkal (1999), who in his *Green Liberation: Towards an Integral Ecotheology* has attempted to integrate liberation theology with process theology. He argues that the over-dependence of Latin American theologians on Marxism has led to an anthropocentric approach. In Nalunnakkal’s India, this dependence on Marxism has already been challenged by Dalit theology whose experience of caste oppression has questioned the Marxist emphasis on class. Nalunnakkal’s response is to attempt an ecocentric liberation theology which uses process theology, which moreover is justified with reference to the Sabbatical tradition in scripture.

Nalunnakkal’s view is that the Latin American liberation theologians have, through their dependence on Marxism, located their theology disproportionately on the Exodus story. This Exodus story then becomes the paradigmatic vehicle for the liberation of the poor in history, the central message of God’s salvation. But, Nalunnakkal argues, there is another salvation story represented by the book of the Covenant and the Sabbatical tradition. A detailed assessment of the potential role of the book of the Covenant and the claims of the Sabbatical tradition is given in chapter four. What is interesting about Nalunnakkal’s theology is that it seeks a biblical grounding in a way which generates the beginnings of a dialectic between

the different scriptural traditions. Covenant is understood as a corrective for Exodus. Without undoing the insights of the Latin American liberation theologians, the particular context of the struggles for liberation in India are used as the material basis for integrating the ecological analysis into the liberation analysis.

The context of Nalunnakkal's theology is modern India, characterised by capitalist development in the midst of widespread ecological devastation and poverty, especially of Dalit and tribal people. The model of development in India is described as damaging to the poor and the environment which is experienced by the poor as disappropriation of land to the extent that "a theology of creation should also be a theology of land" (page 255). In his project for an integral ecotheology relevant to India he draws on liberation theology, Dalit theology and ecofeminist theology, and seeks to integrate these with Process theology. Process theology resonates well with Hinduism in India, especially its emphasis on panentheism (God in creation) and kenotic anthropocentrism (human self-emptying). What Process theology introduces is the notion of God in process, so that God is within the materiality of nature, emancipates and constrains human action through natural limitations, is changed by human action as nature is changed by culture, and, moreover, God suffers in damaged nature.

Nalunnakkal's theology can be critiqued however on several fronts. The first is the inconsistent use of the term ecocentric. The second critique lies in the rather superficial dismissal of Marxism on the basis of a narrow reading of Marx, without recognition of the contributions which recent Marxist scholars have made to feminism, Dalit liberation and ecology. And the final critique lies in the use of process theology.

For Nalunnakkal, the most sustained critique of Latin American liberation theology is that it is anthropocentric and is therefore unconcerned about the destruction of nature.

One of the major drawbacks of almost all liberation theologies is their anthropocentrism – the human-centredness – in their theological reflections ... While the focus on the poor and the oppressed in the Third World is a step in the right direction, the failure to see nature and animals as ‘fellow oppressed’ or as the ‘new poor’ is to be deemed a serious flaw in liberation theology ... no serious efforts have been made to liberate the theology of liberation from anthropocentrism ...one of the reasons for this neglect is the use of Marxist tools of social analysis. (page 90)

Despite the emphasis of this critique, Nalunnakkal does not explore the concept of anthropocentrism in any detail, nor is the case for ecocentrism justified. Indeed the terms are used by Nalunnakkal inconsistently: at times ecocentrism refers to theological reflection from the perspective of threatened nature, and at other times the suggestion that human beings should be more concerned about nature. In particular, his tendency is to conflate epistemological anthropocentrism/ecocentrism with normative or moral anthropocentrism/ecocentrism. Epistemological ecocentrism, to see the world from the perspective of ecology, has no convincing justification. Any attempt to understand the world from the perspective of non-human actors must necessarily be filtered through human knowledge of nature. The closer we get to a materialist analysis of nature, the more we need to recognise that our knowledge of nature is socially constructed. We can not know the world from the perspective of nature in the way that poor and oppressed humans can know the world. So we rely on what we do know about nature and project what such knowledge might be *as if* it were from the perspective of nature.

But whose version of what we know about nature do we use? Scientists? If so, which scientists? It is the nature of science that knowledge is constantly contingent and contested. Gaianists? Deep ecologists? Romantics? Intelligent-design-fundamentalists? On what grounds do we select from these ways of knowing nature? It is clear that some forms of knowledge are preferable to others, but the criteria for selection are as much social as they are scientific, and so subject to the usual socially embedded interests.

A strong version of normative ecocentrism is potentially worse since it would hold, as Wilfred Beckerman (1994) has argued, the marginal position that the interests of non-human nature may in certain contexts come before the interests of human beings. In a conflict, say, between access to clean water for a human community and survival of a rare beetle, it would be difficult to justify the latter, unless of course you are the one who voluntarily denies yourself clean water! Normative ecocentrism is possibly more justifiable in a weaker version, which is to act in a way that recognises the intrinsic value of nature. Even so, it is not possible to ascribe intrinsic value to nature except through social categories – high levels of biodiversity, sacred mountain, rarity of subspecies, beauty of landscape. There is more integrity in arguing for an ecologically enlightened anthropocentrism than an ecocentrism, and this is what Nalunnakkal ends up doing.

From the perspective of an ecotheology of liberation however, there is always a problem to add nature into the same category as the poor. Environmentalism of the poor is itself not consistent on the eco/anthropocentrism debate. The ‘Principles of Environmental Justice’, published by the US environmental justice movement at the First People of Color

Environmental Leadership Summit include both approaches in its first two affirmations (People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991):

- 1) Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.

This presumably reflects the diverse views even within the North American movement, not least between Native Americans and urban African Americans.

Whilst there are ecocentric views amongst the environmentally dispossessed, so there are also anthropocentric, and both perspectives are also present amongst the ruling classes. Indeed, following Martinez-Alier (2002) it can be argued that ecocentrism may in some circumstances be used as a language of resistance articulating incommensurability to financial cost-benefit analysis. However, so might anthropocentric languages be used in different circumstances.

Despite advocating ecocentrism throughout his thesis, Nalunnakkal's concluding proposals for systematic theology appear to advocate 'kenotic anthropocentrism', the human vocation to 'have dominion' over creation through becoming its servant, just as Jesus demonstrated Lordship through service and sacrifice.

Jesus self-emptied his power and dominion and became a servant for the sake of both human as well as non-human creation. It was on the cross that Jesus' 'kenosis' reached its culmination. This follows that our self-divestiture of dominion should lead us to 'cross bearing' ('necrosis'), to an identification both with the suffering humanity and the groaning creation. In other words, a 'kenosis' for the sake of the endangered nature and a 'necrosis' (sharing in the struggles) for the exploited should go together in India where ecological destruction and victimisation of the poor go hand in hand. (page 265)

This theology, derived from Process thought is important and is more consistent with liberation theology than is his imprecise advocacy of ecocentrism. Where he comes closest to defining ecocentrism in his description of Process theology, it actually turns out to be closer to a form of environmentally sympathetic anthropocentrism such as kenotic anthropocentrism since “process theology, while affirming the intrinsic worth of nature, also employs a ‘positive discrimination’ of values when choice is to be made in terms of social justice.” (page 238)

Liberation Theology’s anthropocentrism is blamed by Nalunnakkal on their insistence on Marxism which, he argues also weakens their usefulness to feminists, Dalits and tribal people as well as ecologists. He is, however, premature in rejecting Marxism in Liberation Theology on the grounds of its inability to address gender, caste and the environment. As we have seen, Marxist methodology has proved to be more adaptable than Nalunnakkal gives credit, as would be expected of a dialogical theory. Feminism has in fact critically engaged in and contributed to Marxism (Mitchell 1966, Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright 1979) Writers associated with the subaltern studies group in India have adopted Marxist approaches to the study of low caste and tribal movements (Guha 1997), and Gadgil and Guha in India (2000), as well as European and North American writers such as Ted Benton (1989), Andre Gorz (1989), David Pepper (1993) and James O’Connor (1998), have in many ways sought to enrich Marxism with critiques drawn from political ecology (see for example Lange and Strange 2000).

Nalunnakkal’s embrace of Process theology does contribute insights to his theology of liberation. Process theology emphasises the interdependent and dynamic nature of human-

creation-creator relationships and affirms God's imminence without negating God's transcendence. This is also a materialist theology in the sense that God is material, embedded in the interactions and interdependencies of the stuff of matter. However it is also a speculative theology in the sense that God is conceptual and "supplies all entities with the basic conceptual aim" (page 231, after A.N. Whitehead) and therefore idealist. As such it runs the risk of overlooking the material interests of the theologian in the production of theology, despite his legitimate claim that "in the Third World countries, the ecological concerns can only be discussed and approached from the perspective of the oppressed and the victims." (page 273)

Here is not the place for a critique of Process theology but rather to comment that Nalannukkal's use of this theology does bring important insights to an ecotheology of liberation. His understanding of ecocentrism appears to be corrected by Process theology whereas his commitment to the epistemological primacy of the oppressed appears to be *despite* his embrace of Process theology. Moreover, Nalunnakkal draws on Process theology to

correct one of the serious anomalies of ideologies like Marxism, committed to the classless society. Once 'revolution' is achieved, then it tends to absolutise the resulting system which leads it to be uncritical of its own pitfalls. The 'once-future-possibility' becomes unchangeable once it is achieved. Process theology, on the other hand transcends this, as future is never static, but is in process. The future is fully and radically open to the lure of God. This is the dimension of hope. (page 243)

This is indeed an important critique of Marxism and claim for Process theology. However, it is not an original claim and has been identified previously by liberation theologians whose use of Marxism, or more precisely dialectical materialism, is more thorough. Both Miranda (1980) and Segundo (1984) have claimed that Marx's theory has a closer affinity with

theology than with many forms of Marxism, through the strength of the dialectical analysis which undermines such absolutism. Miranda (1977b) has claimed that many Marxists betray Marx in their adherence to economic determinism.

many Marxists quite evidently are professing the pre-Marxian materialism of Feuerbach, whose most important political and philosophical thesis was that material conditions determine human behaviour and inescapably mold our attitudes... Marx takes a different direction, stating that the educator itself (namely the material conditions) has to be educated and re-educated by the revolutionary ... [P]resent-day Marxists ... should clearly acknowledge the contradiction and choose between Marx and materialism. (page 6-7)

Nalunnakkal stops short of engaging a dialectic between liberation theology and Process theology with the result that his 'integral theology' offers the two in parallel, essentially cherry-picking between the two theological traditions. Although Process theology offers theological insights such as kenotic anthropocentrism to liberation theology, the outcome is not greatly different from the 'grafting' approach of Boff.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

The basic dilemma of an ecotheology of liberation lies in the inability to do theology from the perspective of the environment. Despite claims to ecocentrism, it is impossible to derive a theological perspective from the environment as an oppressed subject. The attempts of the theologians described here to impose traditional theology onto environmental justice; to draw on Deep Ecology as a source of ecocentric thought in parallel with the poor; to build a hermeneutic of suspicion from the common oppression of women and the environment; and to apply process theology as a corrective to anthropocentric liberation theology, have all been found wanting. The appropriate resolution to this dilemma is not to seek a liberation theology from the perspective of the environment, which in any case exists in dialectical

tension between material reality and social construction, but rather to develop such a theology from that section of the poor which is environmentally oppressed. In other words, we need to identify those whose experience of poverty has made the environment in which they inhabit, like all damaged environments, a sink for cost shifting.

As described in chapter two, the logic of capitalism shifts costs onto the environment of the poor as they occupy the conditions of production. This may be regarded as an intrinsic contradiction in capitalism which at certain junctures may have more significance than the contradiction between productive forces and relations. Where the environmentally poor resist this process, the sources of a liberating struggle against the causes of environmental destruction may be identified. In that context it is the perspective of the environmentalism of the poor which is central to the ecotheology of liberation.

In developing this argument further it will be necessary to explore the use of biblical material by the various theologians. It is difficult to come to any conclusion other than that the biblical resources are anthropocentric. The authors we have looked at so far have addressed this problem in various ways. Boff, whilst rooting his liberation theology in the biblical Exodus tradition, seems happy to abandon scripture when it comes to his emergent cosmogenesis, which is a revelation of the Christ through Gaia herself. Ecofeminists such as Radford Ruether, Gnanadson and Ress have resolved the problem of an anthropocentric bible by reading it with an ecocentric as well as feminist hermeneutic of suspicion. Mary Grey has asserted that scripture was originally ecocentric but been distorted by the 'turn from the earth'. Nalunnakkal has started from the anthropocentrism of the Exodus tradition

but argued that the book of Covenant, which incorporates Creation and Sabbatical traditions, provides an ecocentric corrective to this.

Throughout these discussions authors have assumed that ecocentric approaches are superior to anthropocentric. It is difficult to sustain this argument however. For human beings to adopt an ecocentric position requires a projection of what it might be like to see the world from the perspective of the entire ecosystem. The fundamental error which these authors have adopted is to confuse materiality and social construction of ecology. Boff has applied a social constructivist understanding of ecology and assumed that materiality can be included within this. The ecofeminists have responded to the common socially constructed oppression of women and the environment by assuming that the resulting material oppression of women gives a special insight into the material oppression of the environment. In both cases, theologians have had to make a speculative leap into Deep Ecology's axiomatic insight, which abandons a claim to materialism. Nalunnakkal has adopted vague terminology which allows him to include within the term ecocentric, both the sabbatical injunctions to fallow years for the benefit of slaves, domesticated and wild animals, and also the speculations of Process theology.

However, a more convincing argument, based on a materialist understanding, is that both ecocentric and anthropocentric approaches are cultural-ideological forms which have arisen in different material contexts, and are emergent from social movements and class formations in particular socio-economic conditions. It has been noted that both ecocentrism and anthropocentrism are to be found in environmental justice struggles and ruling class narratives. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the particular conjunctions in

which ecocentric or anthropocentric, or indeed other world views, have emerged at different times in history, amongst different classes and class fractions, and for different purposes. However for the present purposes, it is sufficient to assume the anthropocentric position of the current dominant worldview, and that of the biblical text as it has reached us.

In various ways, these approaches bring together ecotology and liberation theology with important and critical outcomes, both theoretically and practically, although it has been demonstrated that none do so unproblematically. They present an additional question into my argument, which concerns how scripture is to be used in liberation ecotology orthopraxis. The following chapter will address this problematic. Biblical practice criticism and social movement theory will be used to assess the potential contribution of creation, Sabbath and prophetic narratives in scripture and the prophetic material of Amos and Mark will be analysed with an ecological interpretation of materialist socio-historical criticism.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF PROPHECY**

### ***4.1 Bible Practice Criticism***

The previous chapter analysed the various ways in which liberation theology and ecotheology have been brought together. These approaches differ methodologically, but also in their use of the bible. Horrell, Hunt and Southgate (2009) have constructed a typology of biblical use in environmental hermeneutics, which would categorise most of the scholars in our assessment as ‘resistance’ readings – applying either a supplement or a hermeneutic of suspicion on the basis that the bible is lacking in environmental values. The partial exception is Mary Grey whose assertion that the bible was originally ecologically sensitive before the ‘turn from the earth’ brought through Greek humanism, would categorise her hermeneutic as ‘recovery’. Nonetheless, she is still led to judge the bible poetically on the basis of an

ecocentric intuition. Harrell et al. (2009) call for an ecological hermeneutic which goes beyond their categories of recovery (rediscovering lost environmental values) and resistance (reading environmental values against the text) to “enable a positive, creative, yet also critical re-reading of the tradition ... in dialogue with scientific understandings of the world, just as feminist and liberationist hermeneutics use the tools of social scientific and political analysis” (page 20-21). What these authors seem to have overlooked is that the dialogue between social and natural sciences is already a key component of environmentalisms of various kinds. What is at issue is the material interests embedded in these different disciplines.

This chapter will explore the use of the bible in ecotheology of liberation in more detail. In particular it will explore the alternative sources of biblical material used by ecotheologians of liberation, in particular the key biblical narratives: Creation; Sabbath and Prophecy. For this purpose Bible Practice Criticism will be adopted. This approach draws on materialist social analysis of the Bible and will be developed into a political ecology reading of the text. However, the purpose of Bible Practice Criticism is not only hermeneutical, but practical in the context of the political praxis of Christian communities and disciples (Vincent 2005).

Bible criticism has taken as its focus the historical Jesus and his listeners/disciples in their social context, and the writers of scripture and their listeners/disciples. Vincent (2007) has argued for a similar focus to be made on the readers/disciples of our time and social context, how they are living out their discipleship commitment and what they are doing with the biblical material – their ‘outworkings’. Such a methodology Vincent calls Gospel (or Bible) Practice Criticism.

He has initiated a methodological approach through the pages of the Expository Times (Vincent 2001, 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) which is appropriate to the use of biblical material in liberation theology. He proposes a series of analytical frames (situation, practice, endogenous, political) to be applied both to the biblical text and to the current context in which disciples are engaged (Vincent 2005a). Here I will apply a situation analysis of the text from political ecology and an interpretation from social movement theory. This will be followed in this and the next chapter by a consideration of implications of the endogenous analysis (“the content, the core, the pith, what comes up from inside” Vincent 2005c, page 35) of the text in the case studies of praxis for environmental justice.

As explored in chapter three, much ecotheology, including that which links with liberation theology, is based on the Biblical Creation narratives. Whilst Creation narratives have served to present humanity and nature as fellow creatures, this occurs within a ‘natural’ and God-given hierarchy which serves to reify nature, to present socially constructed nature as if it were self-existent, what James O’Connor (1998) has called ‘second nature’. Brueggemann (2001) has suggested that the purpose of the Creation narrative was concerned more with the defence of the Israelite monarchy and ruling class, than with the fellow creatureliness of humanity and nature. A hierarchy which is embedded not only in theology but also in nature reifies social inequality and prevents social change. Brueggemann contrasts this with prophecy, which serves to unsettle social reality, critique hierarchy and injustice, lament imminent disaster and envision a utopian possible future. Thus, a more appropriate starting point for an ecotheology is the prophetic trajectory.

The previous chapter argued that the case for reading ecocentric sentiments in biblical narratives is unconvincing. Applying an ecocentric hermeneutic of suspicion has stronger justification although it carries the material interests of the class from which speculative ecocentrism emerges. By contrast, reading the bible from the perspective of the environmentalism of the poor, leads to a political ecology hermeneutic. In order to avoid embedding ruling class interests into ecotheology, a prophetic exegesis must always be tested against the material reality of the environmentalism of the poor.

This chapter will start by exploring how the creation narratives have been used, in both advocating and critiquing theological reflection on the environmental crisis. It is argued that Brueggemann is right to critique creation narratives as reflecting ruling class ideology, and that ecotheologies based on creation suffer the same weaknesses as some branches of secular environmentalism with similar ideological leanings. Second, the chapter will explore the Sabbath and Covenant tradition. A number of scholars have argued that the Sabbath constitutes a valuable source of biblical material in support of environmentalist theology. In particular, George Matthew Nalunnakkal, whose integral ecotheology has been analysed earlier, has argued that the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-3) provides an important corrective to the anthropocentrism of liberation theology's emphasis on Exodus. This approach has some value, although the relationship should be regarded not so much as a corrective as a dialectic. The covenant tradition should be regarded as secondary to the Exodus-prophetic tradition. Both the Exodus-prophetic tradition, and the Creation-Covenant tradition should be treated dialectically as outcomes of political struggle.

Having identified prophecy as a fruitful source of ecotheology of liberation, this chapter will explore how the prophetic material may be read in order to resource orthopraxis for environmentalism of the poor. Prophetic books do not, on the surface, contain much comment on ecology, and where they do they do not appear to reflect an attitude sympathetic to modern environmentalism. However, the prophetic material needs to be read using a combination of socio-historical criticism and literary criticism. First, it is argued that the economic sources of the social injustices which the eighth century prophets condemn have their origins in ecological distribution conflicts. Second, this material should be read as the outcome of the cognitive praxis of social movements. The prophetic material may then be seen as a biblical environmentalism of the poor. The implications of this conclusion are developed using material from two prophetic movements: Amos in the eighth century BCE, and the Jesus movement of the first century, as reflected in the parables of Jesus in Mark's gospel.

By way of a disclaimer, it should be highlighted that this is not a work of biblical studies and does not attempt to develop original insights from biblical material in original languages. Instead I will draw on a few selected scholars whose methodology is compatible with my own.

## ***4.2 Creation, Sabbath and Covenant***

The focus of much debate in Creation theology has been on two verses: the Jahwist Genesis 2:15 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it / work it and take care of it' and the Priestly Genesis 1:28 'fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ... over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (*The Jerusalem Bible*)

Aruna Gnanadason (2005) traces the changing interpretation of the injunction in Genesis 1:28 within the ecumenical movement as it became increasingly aware of environmental damage. In the 1960s, ecumenical theology took a clearly anthropocentric view, combined with a commitment to justice against *laissez faire* capitalism. The exploitation of nature through science was seen as a necessary aspect of human liberation both in the instrumental sense of harnessing natural laws in technology, and in the spiritual sense of desacralising nature.

In Lynn White Jr's famous, though contested condemnation (White 1967), the Judeo-Christian emphasis on exploitation of nature through the Genesis imperative of subduing and having dominion is the foremost cause of ecological devastation in the world. White argued that the conditions which allowed for the development of modern science were derived from two distinctive attributes of Judaeo-Christian religion: the belief in progressive, linear time from creation to end time; and the dualism of man and nature resulting in a hierarchical order of creation.

White particularly focused on a technological development of seventh century CE, a plough which dug and turned the layer of soil. This plough required teams of oxen to pull, rather than individual family oxen, thereby collectivising work and changing the dimensions of productive capacity. "Distribution of land was based no longer on the needs of a family but, rather, on the capacity of a power machine to till the earth. Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature." White argued that only in a Christian society would this be possible. This, and

several other technologies, he argues became possible around the seventh and eighth centuries CE as a result of the success of the Latin Christian worldview in occluding pagan views which lacked such teleological and dualistic dimensions. White's thesis has been critiqued by historians and theologians and has stimulated much defensive theological work, but has also had an important impact on shaping the terms of the debate around the meaning of the creation narratives in Genesis.

In his classic commentary, von Rad (1961) describes the creation story as written after the exile following generations of "distillation of all mythical and speculative elements" by the priestly class. He describes what remains as concentrated, pure theology and clearly separates the theology of Yahweh from that of Babylonian and Canaanite creation myths. However, there are implications for this when seen from the perspective of current knowledge of environmental concerns. "The world is orientated toward man, and in him it has its purest direct relation to God. The simplest consequence of this statement is that man, therefore, cannot seek his direct relation to God in the world, in the realm of nature." However, for von Rad, there is significance in the placing of ancient speculation about origins into a course of 7 days - creating is a historical practice: "the events that are recorded happened once and for all and their results are irrevocably permanent". (von Rad 1961 page 62-4)

Whilst von Rad situated creation in history, in particular within the context of redemption, Westerman (1971) has attempted to reclaim the primacy of creation. He argues that the undermining of creation is derived from the Enlightenment rather than the redemption history of the people of Israel and claims that "Once theology has imperceptibly become

detached from Creator-Creation, the necessary consequence is that it must gradually become an anthropology and begin to disintegrate from within and collapse around us” (Westerman 1971 page 92). In the context of liberation theology, a more thorough integration of theology and social sciences is a solution to such disintegration.

Gnanadason describes how attitudes to nature based on creation have been increasingly understood as stewardship. Moltmann (1985) argues that ‘dominion’ in Genesis 1:28 is not the same as ‘domination’, and that humanity is not the crown of creation, the Sabbath is. Radford Ruether (1992) links ‘dominion’ with ‘stewardship’. “God, finally, is the one who possesses the earth as his creation. Humans are given usufruct of it. Their role is the secondary one of care for it as a royal steward, not as an owner who can do with it what he wills”. Stewardship moreover draws on the language of landownership, an essentially conservative social hierarchy in which the land is conserved through stewards appointed and employed by land owners. Nalunnakkal rightly critiques the narratives of stewardship for their implicit acceptance of ruling class ideologies. Indeed, this may have been the purpose of the priestly class responsible for the production of this text.

To Gnanadason, for Christianity to become an ‘earth faith’ it must embrace ecocentrism. However, both the Jahwistic and Priestly creation narratives are underpinned by a hierarchy of nature in which human beings have a central role even if subservient to Sabbath and as stewards. Neither can be described as ecocentric. Thus the implications for her are that creation should remain the central plank of an ecological theology of liberation, but needs to be read through an ecocentric hermeneutic of suspicion. This is also the approach taken by Matthew Fox in his *Creation Spirituality* (Fox 1983, 2006).

Nalunnakkal claims that liberation theologians' over-emphasis on Exodus as a defining narrative in Christian orthopraxis can be corrected by integrating the book of Covenant. Not only, he argues, is the Exodus naively read at face value as the authentic origins of the people of biblical faith, but it also relies on only the J and E versions of the biblical story. For Nalunnakkal, the political-nationalist narrative of the Exodus is corrected in the Hebrew Bible by the P narratives of the covenant, Sabbath and Jubilee. Following Moltmann's insight that the Sabbath, and not humanity, is the crown of creation in the P creation account, Nalunnakkal argues that the Sabbath and Jubilee traditions of Exodus 23:10-13 and Leviticus 25 reflect an integration of the demands of social justice with that of ecocentrism. In particular, Exodus 23:

For six years you may sow your land and gather its produce, but in the seventh year you must let it lie fallow and forego all produce from it, those of your people who are poor may take food from it, and let the wild animals feed on what they leave. You shall do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. For six days shall you do your work, but stop on the seventh day, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the son of your slave girl have a breathing space, and the stranger too. (*The Jerusalem Bible*)

Despite the availability of food for wild animals, there is a clear hierarchy here in which the (human) poor take priority over the wild animals, *contra* Nalunnakkal. Mary Douglas (1999) explains the cosmology of the ancient Hebrews in terms of a complex of hierarchies centred on the holy of holies, with both human beings and animals arranged in hierarchies of purity. For human beings the hierarchy involves Levites, then clean individuals, then unclean individuals and finally non-Israelites, whereas the parallel for animals categorises those suitable for sacrifice at the top of the hierarchy, followed by those suitable for the table, then those unsuitable for table and finally abominations.

Whilst arguably Exodus 23 does demonstrate an early concern with parts of nature which are not of immediate use to people, it does not judge the world from the perspective of nature and its interests. This is not an ecocentric position in the recognised sense of the word. Indeed, the Sabbath, and the jubilee Sabbath of Sabbaths, primarily concern land as property (interpreted more generally as resources in Deuteronomy 15).

Guillaume (ND) argues that the Priestly writings should be understood as two distinct sources: Pg (*Priesterschrift Grundschrift* Priestly groundlayer) which he dates from mid 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and Ps (*Priesterschrift Supplements* Priestly supplements), a post-exile redaction derived from the Priestly class with interests in its own preservation. The earlier Pg, is the attempt to establish a theologically consistent calendar based on the Sabbath and cycles of seven, in contrast with contemporary lunar calendars and competing creation myths. For Guillaume, this is more compatible with post-colonial theology in which he includes theologies of liberation and ecology.

the full import of the Genesis creation narrative is missed when the Sabbath is considered as a mere appendix. While other creation narratives circulated with no connection to the Sabbath, Pg turned the creation story into the aetiology for the Sabbath, transforming the full moon Sabbath into the seventh day Sabbath. The Sabbath is thus the crown of creation rather than humanity. Pg's creation is no anthropocentric text. The aim of Pg's creation account is the setting up of a new rhythm serving as the basic unit of a different calendar. (Guillaume ND page 31)

This is not the place to enter into the recent debates concerning the validity of the JEPD schema, nor the reliability of further subdivisions. If Guillaume is correct, and the Covenant tradition in Pg is the product not of an elite priestly class but of early astrologer-bureaucrats intent on calendar development, it begs the question of why they would insert an interpretation of the Sabbath which is so radically redistributive. It is possible that those with an interest in establishing a calendar and the power to do so, and sufficient learning in

cosmology and mathematics to develop it, also have interests in a radical redistribution of resources including ecological resources. It is certainly likely that Pg, even if its coherence is accepted, is a product of struggle. Guillaume hints at such a possibility.

The insistence upon the uniqueness of the Sabbath may in fact be polemical, developed in reaction to the natural self-sanctification of clergies who make a living out of holiness. Redactors who derived their income from temple machinery had every interest in establishing the connection between Sabbath and their temple. And yet, they did not prevail over Pg's strict limitation of divinely conferred holiness to sabbatical rhythms only. All attempts at connecting the Jerusalem temple to Genesis 1 retain a sense of special pleading." (Guillaume ND page 39)

Guillaume's division of P into two at least gives us the possibility of separating the elitist additions from the more redistributive elements and starting to identify a dialectic *within* P, and the possibility of accepting, with Nalunnakkal, an integration of radical elements of P with those in J and E. Indeed, there remains the possibility of a more nuanced analysis than Nalunnakkal's. A dialectic between the Prophetic-liberation and the Priestly-creation trajectory is too crude, but so too is an attempt to integrate them. We should expect the Priestly-creation trajectory itself to be a product of struggle.

For Duchrow and Hinkelammert (2004), the Book of the Covenant, including the sabbatical traditions, were an account of the economic reform exacted from ruling elites by the prophetic movements of the eighth century onwards. Such movements linked the tenure of natural resources - the land and all its products - with social exploitation. The combination of innovations in agricultural technology and property ownership of this period led to social conflict between landowning creditors and smallholding or dispossessed debtors, reflected in the prophetic movements' demand of justice for debtors. Such demands, which may or may not have been enacted, are treated by the prophets as synonymous with fidelity to Yahweh. They include the sabbatical 'rules of seven' "and a number of other economic laws

combining social and ecological criteria with theological ones” (Duckrow and Hinkelammert, 2004 page 18). For these authors, although including some proto-ecological aspects of recognition of wild nature, the primary function of the Sabbath is economic redistribution.

The Sabbath, according to this version, is a key tool in the economic, social and ecological reform and redistribution as demanded by the prophets – i.e. a reordering of the political economy and social ecology in terms of Yahweh’s justice. By contrast, the creation version of Sabbath may be interpreted as reifying a hierarchical creation, by framing the Sabbath as the crown of creation (cf. Moltmann 1985) which serves to naturalise hierarchies: animate over inanimate, human over animal, male over female, clean over unclean, God over all. It is often assumed that the creation version of Sabbath has precedence over the judicial, but perhaps a more realistic interpretation is that both versions, like all literature, are results of struggle over meaning, reflecting struggles in society, in this case between ruling classes (rich-creditor-monarchy-urban elite) and subaltern classes (poor-debtor-prophetic-rural peasant).

Thus the Book of the Covenant, with its sabbatical and jubilee traditions, may be understood at least in part as a kind of post-exilic document of class compromise. It may draw on an older sabbatarian tradition with more egalitarian roots, in which the pro-poor prophetic movement, in its position of relative strength following the exile of the ruling class, has achieved a redistributive economic settlement in exchange for a continuation of the royal order. The success of the prophetic movement’s incorporation of this book resides in its

inclusion in Scripture, albeit probably in a compromised form, rather than its adoption or implementation as economic practice, for which there is no evidence.

It seems possible that such a ‘Sabbath controversy’ would have been an ongoing site of ideological struggle between rival factions, who we might call royal-creationists and prophet-liberationists, the former tending to side with hierarchy, stability, naturalness, the eminence of God and crowning of Sabbath; the latter with justice, transformation, apocalyptic and the imminence of God.

### **4.3 Prophecy**

In contrast to the sabbatical and creation traditions, Dorothee Soelle (1975) argues that a distinctive insight of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is that the creation myths are secondary to, and dependent on the liberation trajectory of the Exodus. Von Rad (1972) has demonstrated that the Hebrew scriptures can only be understood through the primacy of the Exodus, which is the founding myth of the people of Israel. Ancient Israel’s knowledge of their createdness was only possible because of their liberation from slavery by Yahweh. They needed to know that they were liberated before they could know that they were created: liberation comes prior to creation. Whilst ancient Israel most likely comprised a number of marginal, outcast, hill dwelling tribes in addition to the liberated slaves, the Exodus story seems to have been central in the formation and self-understanding of the people of Yahweh (Albertz 1994). As Miranda (1977b) has it:

The creation of the world was not mentioned in Yahweh’s original self-description. Moreover, the authors of the Bible took for granted that the normal course of the world’s history had no connection with Yahweh and that he could not be held responsible for things that occurred before his intervention. This is clearly proven by the fact that Yahweh breaks into human history to correct it radically. (Miranda 1977b page 22)

Thus in Soelle's account, knowledge of and action for creation must be seen through a liberation-centred theology. This allows for an ecological liberation theology which, for Soelle (1975), is enacted through the activities of work and love: creative activities which are enslaved by patriarchal and capitalist exploitation, alienation and commodification.

Walter Brueggemann (2001) also argues that the Creation narratives are part of a royal trajectory which is designed to stabilise and 'naturalise' existing social relationships including monarchy, social hierarchy and injustice. Creation theology therefore reflects elements of this royal trajectory. Certainly some of the language used is royalist. Radford Ruether describes humanity's role in creation as that of a "*royal* steward, not as an owner who can do with it what he wills".

#### ***4.4 Political ecology of prophetic context***

The Bible is not an ecological book, nor does it tell an ecological story. Eagleton (1976) has pointed out that the ideology of a text is demonstrated by what is left out, rather than what it includes. The settlement of Canaan by the peoples that made up the Israelites almost certainly involved considerable deforestation of the hill country of Ephraim, Judea and Galilee. Joshua 17 suggests that forest clearance was an integral part of the settlement

Joshua said to the House of Joseph, to Ephraim and Manasseh, 'You are a large population and one of great strength; you shall not have one share only but a mountain shall be yours; it is covered with woods, but you must clear it, and its boundaries shall be yours, since you cannot drive out the Canaanite because of his iron chariots and his superior strength.'

Borowski (2002) notes that forest clearance "continued throughout the period of the Judges ... Remains of almond wood [a species normally cultivated for fruits, not for timber] in [archaeological site] Fortress III (eighth to seventh century BCE) at Tell el-Ful suggest that by that time most of the coniferous forest had disappeared". Despite such widespread

damage to what is now regarded as ecologically important vegetation, this impact is not amongst the many condemned by the prophets.

With the benefit of hindsight and developed ecological knowledge, we can now recognise that Palestine is, and was, a richly diverse region, being a topographically and geographically diverse narrow strip of land in the interface of four different vegetation systems (Zohary 1982). Unlike pantheistic and animistic cults practiced by many tribal societies, the cult of Yahweh, like its principal rival cult of Baal, was strongly divorced from nature. Ecocentric theology is not biblical.

#### **4.4.1 The Amos movement**

Of the literature which originates in the eighth century BCE's intensive period of prophetic activity, the Book of Amos is the earliest (Gottwald 1985). It seems to be widely accepted that the character Amos lived at that time and spent time in both Judah (where he originated) and Israel (where his prophecy occurred). Opinions vary as to how much of the book originates with Amos or the disciples close to him, but even those who take a minimal approach allocate at least some of the social criticism to the prophet himself, and others to the movement which honoured him. Wolff (1977) restricts Amos' words to Amos 3-6. Coote (1981) has argued that the book comprises three separate redactions of which Amos A is contemporary with the prophet of which the most severe social criticism are likely to include the prophet's words; Amos B is later additions which confirm and amend the words of the prophet on the basis of historical occurrences, and Amos C is a post-exilic addition including the utopian prophecies, included to give hope to a demoralised remnant.

The eighth century BCE is part of a period of political-ecological change. The divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel were exerting significant political power, reaching its zenith under Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE). Israel expanded its territory, regaining lost land and extending its borders in the north and east, controlling virtually all the trade routes between Egypt and Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean Sea ports. The country enjoyed stability, and wealth accumulated very rapidly in the hands of an emerging class of royal and military officers (Thomas 2003). Brueggemann (1993) argues it is a period of ‘confrontation of kings and prophets’ and between the historical trajectory of David-Solomon and Moses respectively (the prophets in question being Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah). According to Albertz (1994)

The object of the (prophets’) attack is the unbridled economic expansion of the great landowners, who put estate alongside estate until they are the sole property owners in the land (Isa.5.8); their greed for more and more land, which forces out the small farmers and their families from the ancestral properties (Amos 8.4; Micah 2.9f) and disregards the principle of ancient Israelite property law: ‘a man and his house, a man and his inheritance’ (Micah 2.1f). There is criticism of the heedless manipulation by the upper classes of the law of pledges and credit: for only tiny debts they require grievous pledges from the small holders (Micah 2.9) and drive them into slavery for debt, even sell them off as slaves (Amos 8.6; 2.6). In the view of the prophets the whole system of pledges and leases which the ancient law of credit gave them (Amos 5.11) is downright robbery and plunder (Isa. 3.14; Micah 2.2; cf 3.2f; Jer 5.27; Ezek. 22.29), and slavery for debt is terror and oppression (Amos 3.9f; 4.1) .... The prophets also demonstrate the injustice of Israelite jurisprudence: the upper classes dominate local justice and prevent judgements from being objective by intimidation and bribery (Isa.5.20, 23; Amos 5.10); the claims of the small farmers are rejected (Amos 2.7; 5.12), and even when a rich man has committed a crime punishable by death, the court avoids condemning him by putting pressure on his poor opponent to let him get off with payment of compensation (Amos 5.12). In the eyes of the prophets, local justice is simply a partisan instrument of oppression for the ruling classes.

The roots of this oppression were economic and ecological, primarily in relation to ownership of the primary means of production (the land) and the ecological impact of those productive forces. Coote (1981) has contextualised the period as the result of transition from patrimonial to prebendal land tenure, where patrimonial designates that “families or clans

held domain over estates granted to them by Yahweh” and “prebendal domain is exercised by officials of a state by virtue of grants from a sovereign who holds ultimate ownership of the land. The officials therefore control not the land, which is owned by the sovereign, but the income from the land.” This transition and the growing power of the monarchy and bureaucracy is critiqued by the prophetic movements as punishment from God.

Chaney (1987, 1993) describes the changes in landownership and agricultural intensification which occurred in the highlands during the eighth Century. Highland landholdings had been part of the original settlement and had been held in peasant families since before monarchy. Lowland holdings, once conquered, were gifted by David to ‘new aristocrats’ in return for support for the expansionist war effort. Thus, it was easy for the lowland elite to intensify on their own land, but more difficult on traditional village landholdings in uplands. Highland landownership was more complex. There were some longstanding family-owned olive orchards and vineyards which were easier to convert to intensive production and to control, through collateral, by urban elites. Communal cereal fields were taxed in kind, leading to incentives to terracing and converting to trees.

The desire to increase ownership or control of land and therefore revenue from crops by the monarchy forced peasants into intensification from which they received no benefit. It also led to greater dependence on centralised administration and markets, increasingly located in urban centres. Under increased intensification in the highlands, lean years led to borrowing from ‘rent capitalists’ using land as collateral and increasing the trend to latifundisation.

Intensification meant a shift away from an agricultural system which provided subsistence to the peasant's family and was oriented towards diversity and sufficiency.

Traditional agriculture in the uplands were (*sic*) designed to spread risk to the farmers, and not to accumulate surplus. Arable fields were used in rotation, cereal crops alternating with periodic fallow, supplementary grazing and leguminous crop growing. Sheep, goats and cattle were herded as a 'disaster bank on the hoof' which could make use of more marginal land and marginal labour (young and old). Animals carried surpluses into lean years and fertilised fallow fields. In amongst arable fields, and on steeper slopes, olives and vines provided storable fruits. This low level 'inefficient' agricultural production was good for spreading risk and surplus which is suitable for subsistence agriculture. Reduced surplus also had the benefit of reducing produce taxes. (Chaney 1993)

Throughout the eighth century, as the freehold plots were foreclosed and absorbed into the large estates, there was a shift in agricultural production towards the cash crops of olives and vineyards, for the production of oil and wine as tradable commodities. Conversion of agriculture was driven by an increase in import/export trade and indirectly in transit trade due to growing wealth of elite landowners. Agricultural production increased through the labour of the peasantry, but this was converted into luxury goods which were consumed by the elite. The peasants, dispossessed of their land, worked seasonally as day labourers. Wages were determined by the price of the commodity and intensive periods of work alternated with unemployment, and often destitution. This agricultural intensification hit the highlands hardest. The new system in the highlands maximised production (and therefore tradable produce and rent) and minimised protection against risk in variable environment.

Jobling and Loewen (2000) have attempted an Earth Bible reading of Amos (see chapter 3) using an ecojustice hermeneutic of suspicion. Notwithstanding the methodological problems, the method has produced some interesting outcomes. They present three ‘sketches’ towards an Earth reading of Amos. The first starts from Coote’s (1981) division of the book into three redactions and suggests modern ecological parallels: Amos A reflects the modern environmentalists’ predictions of doom, Amos B, the recording of irreversible damage already caused, and Amos C, the remnant (non-human, or ‘ecologically righteous humans’) following ecological devastation. Their second sketch is closer to the analysis presented here, focusing on the prebendalisation of the land although highlighting the urban-rural conflict: urban rich, separated from the land, conspicuously consume the produce of the land. The third sketch looks at the metaphorical use of nature in the text identifying trends of fear, plenty and contemplation. In these metaphors they suggest a transition from a magical to instrumental understanding of nature in the ideology of ancient Israel.

In the political ecology approach outlined here, the focus remains with the class conflict in the book of Amos and the social critique of the Amos movement. Perhaps the most powerful exposition of this analysis lies in Amos 2.6-8. Thomas (2003) provides a useful review of the debates in the literature concerning the meanings of this text in its socio-political context. The following is a summary of the principal arguments from the literature derived from Thomas’ review and include translations of Amos by Thomas (Thomas 2003 pages 183-199):

According to Thomas, “because they sell the righteous (innocent) for (on account of) silver” (2:6b) probably refers to debt servitude, the practice of wealthy private and state sector

landowners forcing indebted peasants to sell themselves into slavery or indentured labour because of their inability to repay debts. Others interpret this as the corruption of judges who metaphorically sell the innocent by taking bribes. Both interpretations emphasise the innocence, even righteousness, of the indebted poor in court as plaintiffs or petitioners for mercy. “And the needy for a pair of sandals” (2.6c) probably refers to those whose ancestral land has been lost as a result of small debts. Here the emphasis is on the neediness or defencelessness of those who are sold, as well as the very small sums of money which the needy cannot access, and which the wealthy are unwilling to forgive. Thomas suggests that ‘the needy’ are specifically marginal agriculturalists.

The phrase “trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth” (2.7a) indicates humiliation, denial of any rights or dignity to the poor, lowly, weak, helpless. Thomas suggests that ‘the poor’ here are small freeholders whereas “push the afflicted (brutalised) out of the way” (2.7b) refers to the denial of justice and entitlements to tenant farmers (‘the afflicted’).

Thomas explores a range of possible interpretations of this disputed clause “a man and his father go into (have sexual intercourse with) the maiden” (2.7c), including the use of temple prostitutes; the exploitation of young women without protection of father or husband; a father seducing or raping his son’s lover; widespread promiscuity (‘a man and his father’ possibly being an expression for ‘all men’); the abuse of a hostess or serving girl at a feast; or the forcible taking of the daughters of indebted peasants as sex slaves. Sexual exploitation is based purely on her gender and unmarried status, although given the class-consciousness

of the rest of Amos it is feasible that the reference is to the elite taking the daughters of the poor for sexual purposes, either in lieu of debt or to humiliate the indebted poor.

Thomas argues that “lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge” (2.8a) refers to the abuse of garments taken by wealthy creditors as a pawn or collateral against a debt. Regulations relating to the giving and taking of pledges were designed to protect the poor, so that they were not left naked or suffer the cold at night. Similarly, “in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed” (2.8b) may be penalties for non payment of debts, sequestrations of property or forced tribute, rent or taxation, either in-kind as wine or else traded with other forms of payment. One thing which is emphasised is the idolatrous practice implied by the term ‘their’ God.

These verses are clearly a condemnation of the exploitation of the poor peasantry by the elite. However it is more than that. The hedonistic and sacrilegious lifestyle of the rich is not condemned for its debauchery, but rather for its dependence on extracting value from the poor through the system of debt. It isn’t so much that the rich are drunken, greedy, promiscuous and idolatrous, but that they are so directly at the expense of the poor and their indebted status. It is the forced extraction of surplus value which is the issue here. The Amos text is explicitly accusing the rich of eating the poor’s food, drinking the poor’s wine, lying on the poor’s cloth, perhaps also raping the poor’s daughters. And this indebtedness arises directly from the political ecology, the distribution of ownership and control of the ecological means of production.

The direct relationship between the wealth of the rich and the exploitation of the poor in the context of modern globalisation is illustrated by Dobson's (2003) conception of 'relations of actual harm' (see chapter two) which makes Amos particularly relevant to the case studies. The Iona community, as Europeans, exploit the poor of the world no matter how austere their lifestyle whereas the Bhopalis are victims of the same system from which the global North benefits. FoES environmental justice activists are hybrids, being both exploited and exploiters with the potential to identify and resonate with both sides of Amos's critique.

#### **4.4.2 The Jesus Movement: Mark**

The movement which formed around Jesus of Nazareth during the latter part of his life and the decades following his death is also a prophetic movement. Mark's gospel is the earliest documentation from this movement and, as Myers (1988) has pointed out, the Gospel writer seeks to position the document within the tradition of apocalyptic prophecy. One half of all quotations in Mark are from prophetic writings excluding Daniel – mostly the later prophets who adopted apocalyptic form. A further eighth are from the apocalyptic prophet Daniel (Myers 1988 page 98). In the introductory prologue to his gospel, Mark quotes a fusion of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1a and attributes it to Isaiah which Myers argues is a polemic against mainstream scribal belief that true prophecy had ended: Jesus is presented as the successor to these prophets.

In Mark's gospel, as in the book of Amos, changes in ecological systems were condemned because they exploited the poor, which from the context of the environmentalism of the poor, forms the basis of a prophetic ecotheology.

The political ecology of first century Palestine continued to be based on the intensification of production from the land, and the corresponding exploitation of the poor. In comparison with eighth century BCE, the exile may have slowed down the process of land acquisition and centralisation, although Herod the Great, and to a lesser extent Herod Antipas, was notably ruthless at seizing estates and peasant lands. More especially, since Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine and subsequent rule by Egyptians, new Hellenistic technologies were introduced in both agriculture and bureaucracy (John 2002). The latter made more complex bureaucratic layers possible and facilitated the development of cities, and increased the, albeit fragile, control throughout society. The former involved techniques of irrigation, composting, and fertilising, with the result of deforestation and increased use of the most marginal land.

Politically first century Palestine is complex, with Roman occupation, direct rule in Galilee, indirect in Judaea, additional layers of power bases, tiers of retainers, puppet high priests, compromised parties, every group trying to balance the complexity of loyalties in patron-client relationships. This complexity increased pressure on the poor whose tax burden would be needed to support a more complex and corrupt bureaucracy. At the same time, as Myers points out, this period is one of intense political conflict with various rival collaborationist, reformist, oppositional and revolutionary parties, leading to the establishment of nationalist revolutionary government in Jerusalem in 66 CE, controlled, after internal power struggles by the Zealot party, and finally collapsing in 70 with the sacking of the city and destruction of the temple.

Analyses of Mark's gospel have tended to focus either on the context of the historical Jesus or that of the author's community of disciples, and Vincent (2001) argues that addressing both contexts is a useful tool in providing resonance with current discipleship practice. Here, I will draw on materialist political readings of the gospel by V.J. John (2003), William Herzog (1994, 2005) and Ched Myers (1988). All these authors employ methods of historical and literary criticism as well as materialist sociological exegesis, and situate their analysis in material contexts. V.J. John employs socio-literary criticism with a view to exploring the historical Jesus' 'ecological vision', especially from the perspective of John's native India. Herzog's interest is in the pedagogical practice of the historical Jesus who he approaches by testing hypothetical versions of the oral tradition, in particular the parables. Myers employs 'literary sociology' to analyse the gospel as literature aimed at a community of disciples around the time of the conflicts leading to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, and analyses this material in the context of modern day USA.

In Vincent's (2005c) elaboration of Gospel Practice Criticism, he focuses an analysis of Mark 2 on the historical Jesus, the Markan community and present day disciples in inner city Sheffield. Of particular interest here, in light of the discussion above concerning the 'Sabbath controversy' between prophet-liberationist and royal-creationists, is Vincent's (2005a, 2007) exposition of Mark 2: 23-28, the plucking of corn on the Sabbath. The narrative is described as a provocative stunt, an "'acted parable' of the replacement of Sabbath by humanity (v.27), and the Son of Israel by the Son of All People (v. 28) (Vincent 2007 page 329)" He draws attention to the apparently mundane version of 'son of man' (of humanity) in the couplet in verse 27-8, compared with the more direct references to Daniel's 'Son of Man' elsewhere in the gospel. Also Mark's reference to David the saviour-king is as

a disreputable and sacrilegious outlaw. Moreover the relationship between the Son of Man in Daniel 7 resonates with that between Jesus and his disciples, the instigators of this stunt (Vincent 2005a). The presentation of lived contradictions (Messiah-outlaw, Son of Man son of humanity, elect of Israel-selected disciples) is lived out in Jesus and his disciples, during his life, during the time of Mark and today. It is feasible that this action had the function of positioning the Jesus movement on the side of the prophet-liberationist perspective in the Sabbath controversy (Sabbath for humanity) and in confrontation with the royal-creationists.

Myers divides Mark's gospel into two, symmetrical and mutually referential books. In the first book, Mark's argument for revolutionary change is contextualised in the struggle for land as understood by the peasant farmer, whereas the second book focuses on the overturning of the temple order. In the land struggle book, parables featuring the natural environment are significant (see also John 2002), a feature also used in Miller's (2006) argument for the Gospel as a resource for ecological consciousness.

The parable of the sower is usually interpreted as an adulteration of Jesus' original by the early church (e.g. Jeremias 1972). Since parables are a form of discourse in which two stories – one in the narrative and the other in real life – collide in unexpected and therefore challenging contexts, then they should not be interpreted as allegories. Most scholars have therefore tended to ignore Mark's interpretation in verses 13-23 in search of Jesus's own meaning. V.J. John's (2003) approach follows this quest for the historical Jesus and interprets the agricultural parables as a lesson in the role of nature in the Kingdom of God.

The agricultural process served as a sign of the divine activity of the Kingdom of God. Patient waiting as against instant success, providential care despite human helplessness and plenitude against poverty and starvation, testify to a reversal of normal experiences of a peasant community. (page 237)

The appropriate relationship between human endeavour, natural processes and God's work would have been assumed by the peasants of Jesus' and Mark's Palestine, and therefore could be used for metaphorical purposes to illustrate the counter-intuitive nature of the Kingdom, but for John this relationship needs to be emphasised today. Appropriate agriculture should follow natural processes and divine blessing, and therefore requires patience rather than intensive intervention from humanity. Such a kingdom will produce a bumper harvest unheard of by the oppressed Galilean peasants.

Also following historical criticism, Herzog's (1994) political reading of the gospels argues that Jesus uses parables as an oral pedagogical device similar to Freire's (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He suggests that extracting Jesus' probable oral transmission of the parable from the early church redaction allows us to see speech patterns which suggest Jesus' original meaning. In the case of the parable of the sower, this focuses on violent interventions in agricultural practice – birds devouring, sun scorching, thorns choking (Herzog 2005). Herzog suggests that the context of the original parable is likely to have been violent opposition to the word of God from Jesus' enemies with the parable providing reassurance and glimmers of hope that the 'harvest' is in God's hands.

However, Myers argues that this misses the point of how Mark is drawing on Jesus's sayings in the oral tradition, and using them for the purposes of the movement. He argues that parables are used by Mark for their political purpose to Mark's readers, and doing so in order to connect the Jesus movement to the prophetic movements: "Mark appears to have adopted parable-as-political-criticism from Ezekiel" (Myers 1998 page 172).

In Myers' version of the parable, the harvest which the seed on good soil produces is hyperbolically high for symbolic purposes. Such a harvest (thirty, sixty, a hundredfold) would be beyond the experience and dreams of the peasant:

This 'agrarian eschatology' ... has a specifically subversive function... The parable's harvest thus symbolically represents a dramatic shattering of the vassal relationship between peasant and landlord. With such surplus, the farmer could not only eat and pay his rent, tithes and debts, but indeed even purchase the land, and thus end his servitude forever. "The kingdom is like *this*," says Jesus: it envisions the abolition of the oppressive relationship of production that determined the horizons of the Palestinian farmer's social world. Such images strongly suggest that Mark is articulating an ideology of the land, and the revolutionary hopes of those who work it. (Myers 1988 page 177)

Of course, these interpretations are not incompatible. It is possible that Jesus drew on assumptions about natural, divine and human intervention in agricultural practice which we can learn from today, to tell a parable in the context of violent repression of the movement to encourage patience, hope and steadfast perseverance of their discipleship, whilst the same story might be used by the writer of Mark's gospel, to advocate an ideology of land redistribution and emphasise the discipline required to achieve it (standing up to Satan, courage in the face of persecution, denial of riches). Paradoxically however, the time of writing of Mark's gospel probably experienced as much if not more violence than in Jesus' time.

Given the processes of intensification which had allowed the technologies of irrigation and fertilisation to be implemented, many of the peasants of first century Palestine would be cultivating very marginal land. Sowing seed on paths, rocks and rough vegetation would be a typical experience of those pushed onto marginal land by latifundisation. Sowing on good soil would have been exceptional. What the writer does not say is who owns or controls the

soil onto which the seed is sown, nor whether the good soil is ‘naturally’ good or improved by fertiliser or irrigation. For many of Jesus’ followers and possibly Mark’s readers, most good soil is likely to be targeted by the rich for growing export crops. Additionally good soil might be the result of improvement by technologies which only the rich could access. It seems conceivable that the peasants who hear the parable would assume that the good soil doesn’t belong to the sower but Jesus’ implication is that the harvest – the fruit of labour, nature and God (not ownership) - does.

The issue of human intervention to improve crop yield is particularly pertinent in the context of environmental justice struggles. Most of the environmental injustices which movement activists are tackling are a result of technological intervention in order to appropriate resources and increase yield for the owners of that technology. Fish farming campaigns in Scotland and pesticide production in India’s green revolution are cases in point. In the modern world, the parable does not seem to work in the way John suggests, since we know that birds can be shot, stones ploughed up and herbicides applied to the weeds so long as you can afford the technology and have no cares about a poisoned and industrialised future. We might even be suspicious of the high yields from the good soil!

FoES environmental justice activists might be more inclined to recognise the appropriation of resources in the name of ‘development’ implicit in the sowers being forced onto marginal land whereas the Bhopal movement might also recognise and be suspicious of the technological intervention. In both cases however the response might be to reclaim the land or at least the harvest from the land which rightly belongs to the sower, nature and God, not the landowners with their technology. For the Iona Community however, with greater

distance from the causes and results of ecological destruction, the connection might be more with Mark's explanation, focusing on the discipleship practices of lifestyle change, witnesses and lobbying, the risk of distraction which come from personal costs, or from the lure of comfort, and the hope that these small actions might bear fruit with God's help.

#### ***4.5 Reading prophecy as cognitive praxis***

Carroll (1992) raises some critical questions regarding the use of reconstructions of the sociology of ancient Israel on the basis of scant evidence, to read off moral guidance in the present. His essential critique is that the moral guidance comes from the socio-economic reconstruction, rather than the texts themselves. So, for example, Latin American liberation theologians bring class analysis to the text and then read class analysis back out of it. Carroll argues that popular morality is more complex than a class analysis allows for, both in contemporary Latin America and, most likely, in ancient Israel. However, the tools which he applies, and the conclusions which he is left with – morality as interconnected narratives and symbols, disconnected from material conditions - lose sight of any material analysis at all and accept idealism or postmodern relativism too easily. Taking how the bible is used today as his alternative starting point seems to overlook the ways in which ideology is internalised. In the absence of this critical hermeneutic, the bible becomes an ideological tool of oppression.

Whilst the evidence of socio-economic structures in ancient Israel is, admittedly, scant, it is real. Moreover, that we know little about these socio-economic structures does not mean that there were no structures at all, or that these structures had no impact on moral narratives. We can have some confidence in our tools of analysis which allow us to reconstruct ancient

Israel. The point, however, is well made concerning the tendency to read off the text what has been read in through the analysis – a fault of which critical materialist readings can be as guilty as bourgeois idealist readings.

It is possible to read the prophetic texts as remnant literature from a social movement. The prophetic texts may be considered as the result of social movements which were sufficiently successful as to have some of their literature preserved. Later generations have regarded this literature as significant enough to edit their own spin into it, to venerate it and to make use of it in liturgical practice.

There is an extensive theoretical debate on the sociology of social movements. The analytical tool which is useful for our purposes is that of Eyerman and Jamison (1991) who have interpreted social movements as practitioners of cognitive praxis; in other words their political practice serves to generate new forms of knowledge in response to social conditions. This knowledge becomes incorporated into the dominant culture, at which point social movements might cease to be movements, having achieved their objectives.

Looking at social movements as cognitive praxis means seeing knowledge creation as a collective process. It means that knowledge is not the ‘discovery’ of an individual genius, nor is it the determined outcome of systemic interactions within an established Research and Development system. Knowledge is instead the product of a series of social encounters, within movements, between movements, and even more importantly perhaps, between movements and their established opponents.” (Eyerman and Jamison 1991 page 57).

This analysis is particularly valuable for understanding the prophetic movements, whose literature may be treated as new knowledge embedded into the culture of the community’s sacred texts. This literature is evidence of their partial success and is all we have remaining of their praxis.

If we are to treat the prophetic movements of the eighth century BCE and the first century CE as social movements in this sense, then the biblical texts may be regarded as relics of cognitive praxis, i.e. knowledge which has successfully been incorporated, and the writers of the texts may be regarded as movement intellectuals. We are not looking for the articulation of individuals, whether Amos or the author of the book of Amos nor Jesus or the author of Mark's gospel, but of the social movements whose cognitive praxis was articulated, and the social forces which gave rise to the movements and left an impact in a people's sacred literature. We can then ask questions like: What knowledge in the text was the result of cognitive praxis? Why has it survived? Why was it taken seriously enough by later generations to edit and preserve it?

Raymond Williams (1972) has suggested that culture which emerges from social movements typically can be oppositional (challenging the dominant culture), alternative (finding a niche outside dominant culture) or incorporated (absorbed into dominant culture). In the latter case, the tendency is for dominant culture to incorporate that which is compatible with the interests of the ruling class, thus alliances are built in which new class fractions join the ruling alliance, at least partially. The prophetic texts could have remained oppositional if in alliance with (or at least tolerated by) later victorious forces. Did Amos' movement collude with Assyrian victory over Israel? Was the Markan text sufficiently coded to escape destruction by Rome? They could have remained or become alternative, either tolerated by elites or else sustained underground and then rediscovered following the exile / destruction of the temple, or else sustained by comrades outside Palestine. More likely, it was incorporated and even in its earliest form was a compromise. In a compromise, it is possible

that traces of the original pro-poor social movement can be identified. Mosala (1993), for example, argues that in Micah, only 4 verses reflect the ghost of the struggle out of which the text was developed

while the oppressed and exploited peasants, artisans, day labourers, and underclasses of Micah's Judah are entirely absent in the signifying practice that the wider text of Micah represents, something of their project and voice has almost accidentally survived in [Micah 1:8-9 and 4:3-4]. (Mosala 1993 page 291)

Rather than posing Brueggemann's Exodus-Prophetic narrative against the Monarchic-Creation narrative, it may be more appropriate to deal with each of these narratives dialectically. Using Guillaume's schema, Pg may be regarded as posing a Sabbath-centred creation theology in which the flood works out the dialectic (see above), but Ps is a revisionist attempt by the Priestly class to incorporate elements compatible with their interests (ahistoricism for example). This dialectical reading also addresses a major problem with the prophetic-exodus narrative, in which the liberation struggle with Egypt leads not to the promised land, but to ethnic cleansing of Canaanites and replicating monarchic hierarchies. As Guillaume argues:

Pg has the potential to overcome the shortcomings of the use of the Exodus motive by Liberation theology as it is plagued by the fact that the final text of the Exodus does not leave the liberated Hebrew slaves in an Egyptian society where slavery and oppression would have been a thing of the past but settles the former slaves in Canaan by wiping out its former inhabitants at the instigation of the very God who organized their liberation. The universalism of the 'preferential option for the poor' is severely curtailed by the canonical 'chosenness of Israel'. (Guillaume page 134)

If a similar dialectic between 'preferential option' and 'chosenness' is going on in the prophetic-exodus narrative, then perhaps a more nuanced dialectical reading of the bible is possible. It is in this context of these complex dialectics that we should be reading the

position taken by Jesus (eg Sabbath was made for humanity), and similarly the positions taken by current communities of faith – and of no faith.

The text here is treated as a product of dialectical forces with material interests. Ruling groups certainly retain power, not least the power to document. But the hegemony of the ruling groups is always tempered by the balance of power and stability of class alliances. This is constantly challenged by the popular devotional practice of the people and the cognitive praxis of protest and revolutionary movements (Williams 1972). As such, the lessons it provides are likewise to be embedded in the political struggles of current social movements and the devotional practice of worshipping communities. This is the context which will be developed further in chapter 5, of two social movements and one worshipping community in which my practice is engaged.

#### ***4.6 Liberation ecotheology of the poor***

In conclusion therefore, this argument provides some of the key factors in a liberation theology of the environmentalism of the poor. First, it starts from the experience of being alongside the poor and others whose social disempowerment make them victims of negative externalities and environmental injustice. It places the experience, valuation and struggle of such communities at the centre of the theological discourse. However it also recognises the complexity of global interconnected ecological-economic systems such that, for example, the poor in Scotland are both environmental victims, and also disproportionate consumers of global resources to the detriment of the poor in other parts of the world.

Second, a theology of liberation founded on the environmentalism of the poor will involve a materialist social analysis of political ecology. Here it is helpful to understand the current

ecological crisis in terms of the ‘second contradiction’ of capitalism between, on the one hand, the forces and relations of production, and on the other, the conditions of production. Negative externalities in these conditions unite mainstream environmentalism with environmentalism of the poor, and with feminist, urban and other social movements.

Third, its primary theological resource will be prophecy, rather than creation. This is not to reject creation theology but to acknowledge the dialectic between prophecy and creation which is embedded in the bible, and especially in the work and movement of Jesus. The focus here is the prophetic works of the eighth century BCE (especially Amos) and the first century Jesus movement (Mark). Moreover, this biblical material is read as the product of social movements, as the output of cognitive praxis which has emerged from particular socio-economic, *ecological* conditions. The biblical materials are therefore read through a political ecology lens, seeing the ecological challenge in terms of the impact on the poorest. This is an anthropocentric reading, which is not to reject the insights of ecocentrism, but rather to understand any paradigmatic ideology as contingent on its material context.

Finally, a theology of liberation from the environmentalism of the poor will have orthopraxis as its ultimate objective of the way theology is done. In the next step in theological development therefore, the social and theological material will be tested against the practice of engagement with social movements engaged in struggles for environmental justice. In my case, this is practiced through pedagogy, research and political activism. The next chapter recounts some of these practices which address context in which they are being done.

The theological discussions in this chapter and the previous one have sought to integrate the insights of social analysis into theological reflection. The criteria of praxis relevance, dialectical materialism and the centrality of environmentalism of the poor have been applied to a range of theological approaches, which has generated insights into liberation ecotheology: an elite ecotheology of environmental justice; a parallel liberation theology and ecotheology; an ecocentric hermeneutic of suspicion; and an ecocentric corrective to an anthropocentric liberation theology. None of these have been able to fulfil the criteria which this study has established. An assessment of the biblical resources has followed, which has allowed us to add additional criteria: the centrality of prophecy and the opportunity for developing a more dialectical approach to the use of biblical material. Biblical practice criticism requires an integration of these theoretical insights with practice in the development of orthopraxis, which will be explored in the context of struggles for environmental justice.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CASE STUDIES**

### ***5.1 Introduction***

The analytical material explored in chapters two to four has identified a theological approach to the environment which identifies the prophetic role of an environmentalism of the poor as a dialectical response to contradictions in the conditions of production. In this chapter, the dialectics of prophecy are explored through the case studies outlined in chapter one. This will take the form of a critical reflection on events and my activities prior to the commencing of this thesis in 2005 as well as how the systematic analysis of the theological implications of an environmentalism of the poor have influenced actions since. It is necessarily selective, but designed to explore the praxis inherent in the research.

This chapter will explore the dialectics of prophecy implicit in the environmental justice strategy of FoES between the class interests of FoES members and those of directly affected communities; in the tension between communities experiencing acute and chronic environmental injustices and the engagement in popular education and informal learning in these contexts; and in the non-violent approach to climate justice at the 2005 Gleneagles G8 summit protests. It will identify potential prophetic elements between survivors of the

Bhopal gas disaster and solidarity activists; within the movement over historic projects; and in the resistance to global capitalist expansion. And finally it will seek to interpret prophetic insights between the class interests implicit in the tension between lifestyle change and political transformation in the theology of accountability in the Iona community.

Through analysing the three case studies, questions are raised about the narrowness of possibility for prophetic action by the professional middle class in the overdeveloped world, and the necessity to analyse and then contradict the interests of that class. There are, however opportunities for solidarity action in support of the interests of oppressed classes in the construction of prophetic alliances.

## ***5.2 Case Study 1: Friends of the Earth Scotland:***

### **5.2.1 Community Action and Environmental Justice strategy**

The relationship between the community action team in FoES and the organisation as a whole between 1997 and 2005 highlighted a number of the contradictions inherent in the organisation's adoption of an environmental justice strategy. Reflecting theologically on these contradictions should enable them to be seen historically and help to discern a prophetic response.

As noted in chapter one, FoES, as with most environmental NGOs, has a membership largely drawn from the educated professional middle class. It is proudly dependent for a high proportion of its resources on this membership, which affords the organisation considerable independence. The membership has the capacity to influence policy, and staff

are ultimately accountable to the membership. There is thus a potential inbuilt power structure which could reflect the middle class interests of the membership, or at least provide a buffer to strategic directions which challenge middle class interests.

The environmental justice strategy as it developed in FoES was to build a support base in the communities most affected by environmental injustices, primarily working class, poor and socially disadvantaged through racial discrimination or geographical disenfranchisement. Not all of the communities or activists with whom FoES worked were poor. There were a number of middle class supporters who were convinced of the class nature of environmental injustice and became active in solidarity with directly affected communities. Even amongst the directly affected communities themselves, not all were poor, and amongst the activists, many were better educated or more privileged than the communities in which they worked. As one of the activists wrote:

The population [in Strathnairn, affected by quarry development] is generally affluent on a nationwide scale ... with little unemployment, multi-car ownership, few working class people and a majority of owner-occupied homes – the usual indicators of wealth. There is relative poverty, as seen in occupants of tied houses on the laird's estates...

Reluctantly, I have come to the conclusion that the Strathnairn community is neither socially excluded, neither is there an overriding social effect resulting from environmental degradation ... I need to be convinced that we are a *bona fide* case of environmental injustice. (Fenton 2003 p. 38-9)

This is where a materialist historical analysis is necessary for understanding the nature of environmental justice. The groups with which the FoES community action team worked were connected to each other as victims of the cheapest externalising of social and environmental costs. Whilst the activists and their communities were largely poor but not universally so, and the nature of environmental cost varied, the overall connection between activists and communities grew from a recognition of a common source of oppression.

Fairburn et al (2005) analysed data on correlations between indices of deprivation and environmental damage in Scotland in order to identify patterns of environmental injustice. The forms of environmental damage selected were those for which the Scottish Environment Protection Agency has responsibility and the research was designed to have direct policy relevance. The researchers found social deprivation to be highly correlated with industrial pollution, derelict land, poor air and river water quality but not with waste landfill facilities. For some in the policy community these results meant that waste management was not an issue of environmental injustice in Scotland (see Scandrett 2007a) despite a number of community struggles against waste landfills amongst working class activists who identify with the environmental justice movement.

Environmental injustices should therefore be understood not only as correlations of poverty and environmental degradation, but also social struggles which arise from the same material conditions of economic externalities. Historically, social conflict may emerge wherever economic logic demands cost shifting onto externalities. Fairburn's correlation is a snapshot of where these externalities are occurring in areas of deprivation at a particular point in history, irrespective of whether these externalities have, are or could lead to social conflict. If the material causes of this are ignored then it provides an inadequate understanding of environmental justice.

For the purposes of policy, and from the perspective of those who benefit from economic development, environmental injustice is a result of the failure of regulatory systems which need to be tightened up where these failures occur. Creation theology, with its advocacy of

stewardship tends to concur with this perspective. From the perspective of prophecy however, the problem is systemic, lying in the economic logic of history under capitalism. So long as economic activity is based on extracting surplus value to achieve profit in the face of competition, then costs will inevitably be externalised as cheaply as possible within a given regulatory system. Tightening up the regulations will help, but the logic is unaffected. Internalising the externalities by allocating a price to turn the environment into a commodity may also help in some cases but feeds the same logic. Only by exposing the contradictions of this logic can it be transformed, and this is what environmentalism of the poor does through confronting the logic with languages of valuation incommensurable with commodity price. This contradiction between regulatory policy and transformatory conflict lay within the strategy of FoES: the class interests of the victims and those of the membership; the approach of Creation-stewardship and the Prophetic-confrontation; the praxis of lifestyle versus the praxis of struggle.

### **5.2.2 Acute and Chronic environmental injustice**

The environmental justice strategy of FoES was conducted through projects supporting communities who were fighting acute local environmental problems caused by a new development or a pollution incident. By adopting a community education approach, these projects aimed not just to provide expert advice, but also to pass that knowledge on in a way which builds the capacity of the communities to tackle similar problems in the future. Community action projects also worked in communities who were not facing an acute crisis but who tended to face environmental injustice through neglect, often in poor housing, run down neighbourhoods, with closed local businesses, fuel poverty, food poverty, undeveloped brownfield land or particular problems of waste disposal. Communities with such chronic, underlying environmental injustices were supported partially by approaches

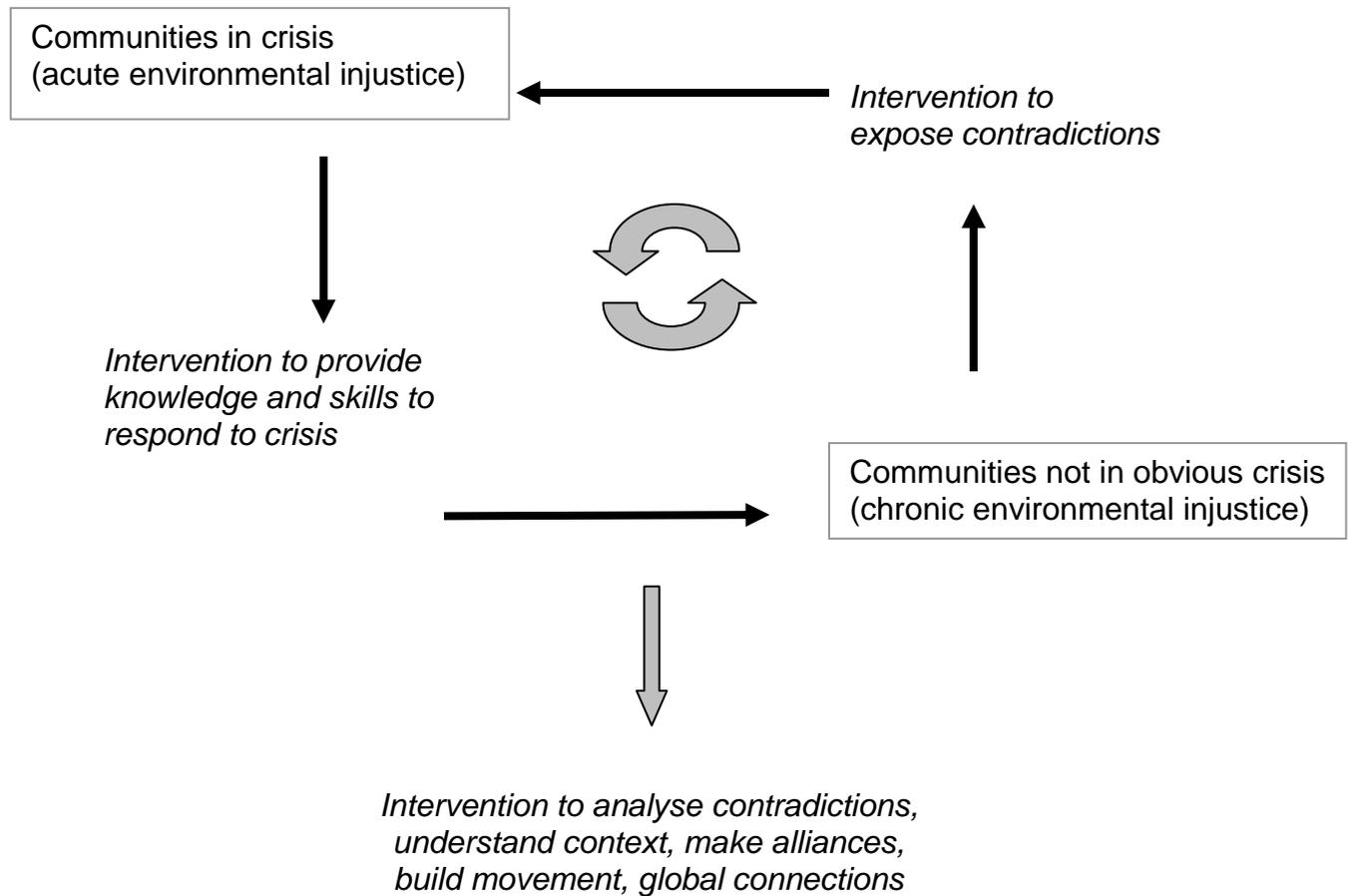
which injected an analysis of sustainable development into the more general demands of community development. FoES's publication *Resources for the Future* (FoES 1999) provided material for community workers to draw on in their work.

Community education processes can be used to expose the problems underlying a community and therefore focus action on causes rather than simply symptoms. In this respect, communities suffering from chronic environmental injustices may be seen as having hidden causes of injustice which might be made explicit. Part of the job of the community education worker is to expose the crisis in order to tackle it. At the same time, the communities facing acute environmental injustices may win or lose their battle against a new development or a polluting facility, and then revert to being a community with no acute crisis but still with an underlying chronic injustice. In that case, for the community to be empowered, members of the community need to have the capacity to expose and tackle the next injustice which, because it is hidden, will involve revealing something of the source of injustice. Thus, through a dialectical tension between chronic and acute injustices, a cycle of praxis is generated as a community is able to expose progressively deeper, underlying causes of injustice, and either tackle them or else connect with others who are attempting to tackle them (Figure 5.1).

Of course, many of the causes of local environmental injustice are not local, and increasingly the sources of injustices operate at a global level, whether through the actions of multinational corporations or international regulatory regimes. In order to provide a forum for understanding globalisation, and to tackle global injustices through building solidarity amongst communities facing problems with common causes in different parts of

the globe, the community action team developed an ecological debt strand to our work. Ecological debt describes the cost of the exploitation of the global South which is never acknowledged by the rich, exploiting countries of the North. Although impossible to measure in financial terms, it is presented as a hypothetical debt in order to expose the fallacy of the monetary debt owed by many poor countries to the North. The community action team sought to integrate an analysis of ecological debt (see chapter two) through building links with communities in the global South who are fighting problems linked to those in Scotland, and hosted activists from two communities in Ecuador fighting the environmental damage caused by oil companies.

Figure 5.1



The development of the community action strand within FoES therefore was held together by a strategic approach to environmental justice. This sought to build capacity in communities facing injustice to fight on progressively deeper and more systemic causes of environmental injustice, and build alliances across different kinds of environmental justice struggles. The hope was that the disparate struggles which were undoubtedly occurring in Scotland might build towards a more coherent movement, with either FoES in a leadership position or else able to support a more grassroots leadership. However, this also exposed contradictions in FoES' position on environmental justice.

It is in these contradictions that the dialectics of prophecy might be discerned. The most overt contradiction lies in the conflict of interests between the middle class membership and the working class affected communities. Whilst supporting in principle the move towards environmental justice taken by FoES, the staff and membership were unable to break with the core demands of traditional environmental lifestyle campaigns. The strategy of the community action team involved working with the working class communities who more typically face environmental injustices, and who tended not to join or donate money to the organisation. The priorities of an environmental NGO such as FoES are likely to be generated by the interests of the class of its supporters. Those staff involved in recruitment, understandably target the people most likely to join and to donate – young, educated middle class professionals. The campaigners aim for short term wins and simplified messages with the potential for support amongst the less committed. By contrast, working for environmental justice meant targeting those most affected, providing resources for their priorities and problematising solutions in order to generate a process of critical praxis. From 2007, following a consultation with its membership, FoES moved away from explicitly prioritising environmental justice and took a deliberate shift towards lifestyle environmentalism.

### **5.2.3 Popular education and God's action in history**

As described in chapter one, a significant achievement of the environmental justice work of the community action team was the agents for environmental justice project, incorporating a course which used popular education to generate a dialogue between the knowledge and experience of community campaigners and that of professional environmentalists and academics.

More critically, the environmental justice course has exposed some contradictions in using popular education to construct a dialogue between a fledgling environmental justice movement and higher education. This has more general relevance to the inherent conflicts of interest between educated professionals and the working class communities affected by pollution. Popular education emphasises collective learning for social benefit, and whilst the course was based on the collective learning of the whole group, and of the communities in which most of the work took place, nonetheless the process relied on the accreditation of individual students. Freire warned against manipulation by educators and “one of the methods of manipulation is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for individual success” (Freire 1972, page 149).

At its roots, popular education emerged from the popular movements in Latin America. Using these methods within the environmental movement in Scotland raises important analytical and practical questions. During the course, deliberate attempts were made to connect students, graduates and other activists for environmental justice, thereby attempting to create the conditions whereby such activists learn from one another as well as from the established curriculum, and identify with one another as part of an environmental justice movement. This was successful, but did not lead to an indigenous leadership emerging from amongst these communities, either because FoES’s effort was not sustained for long enough or that the organisation’s initial leadership itself was flawed. When FoES started to scale back its emphasis on environmental justice, the momentum for this movement was lost.

There is a contradiction between making the resources of FoES and the university relevant to the struggle of victims of environmental injustice, and the tendency to incorporate these

victims into the interests of the exploitative system. This incorporation may well benefit the activists and their communities, but it ceases to be prophetic or to build a significant movement to challenge this system. FoES continues to operate on the basis of seeking concessions from an exploitative system rather than building a movement to challenge it in significant ways.

Since moving into academic work, I participated in a research project into FoES and two of the communities represented in the environmental justice course: Scoraig in the north west of Scotland which has been fighting against expansion of the fish farm industry in their adjacent lochs, and Greenock to the south west of Glasgow, a campaign amongst women workers in semiconductor industry affected by workplace chemical hazards. The purpose of the research was to explore the processes of learning which are occurring in the campaigns within the Scottish environmental justice movement (Crowther et al. ND, 2008). Rather than seeking the most appropriate intervention into communities facing environmental injustices, whether acute or chronic, the question may be asked how these communities learn to challenge the structures of oppression, where do they access really useful knowledge and how might that process be facilitated?

That research is ongoing and firm conclusions cannot yet be drawn, but a few comments can be made, pertinent to this discussion. Our research suggests that considerable amount of learning takes place through activism, especially by those in leadership positions in the campaigns, but in a rather haphazard form. These activists report the importance of accessing particular sources of knowledge at certain times, the value of access to academics, environmental campaigners, trades unionists or professionals of various kinds, identifying

sources of information on the internet and the conjuncture of particular circumstances in which connections are made and insights emerge. Within this range of learning situations, the environmental justice course featured little.

The research raises some interesting contradictions. At the end of each presentation of the environmental justice course, an external researcher conducted independent evaluation of the agents' experiences, and each time activists reported that they had found it very useful. However, our later research suggests that when asked about their learning experience in the movement, the course was of a relatively small part of their learning experience, compared with unsystematic support given by sympathetic intellectuals at particularly crucial times. Here is perhaps an example of 'popular informal learning' rather than popular education, in which activists engaged in struggles against oppression extract knowledge from intellectuals on terms set by the movement. Some humility is necessary: the prophetic insight is in identifying God's action in history and responding to it, not confusing the disciples' response with God's action!

#### **5.2.4 Non-violence at the G8 protests**

Indicative of the contradiction between environmental justice as outlined here, and the practice and interests of FoES, has been the organisation's approach to non-violence during the Gleneagles G8 summit in 2005. One of the last major activities in my employment at FoES involved campaigns associated with this G8 summit. A wide range of activist organisations worked together to organise protests and alternative activities, and I was at various times the FoES representative on the 'G8Alternatives' coalition of socialist and green parties, trades unions and left-leaning NGOs (the other two major coalitions being the Make Poverty History alliance of development NGOs; and the anarchist alliance Dissent!).

The story of the protests at the Scottish G8 is a complex history of unstable alliances and incompatible ways of working, set against neoliberal cooption (Gordon Brown) and clumsy populism (Bob Geldof), accompanied by contradictory and at times brutal policing (see for example Gorringe and Rosie 2008). What is significant to this thesis is the involvement of FoES and the focus on climate justice.

Because of the usual media hyperbole about the likelihood of violence at the protest, various key participants in the G8Alternatives including Duncan McLaren of FoES, held a press conference some eight months before the event, which emphasised the protestors' commitment to non-violence,. However it transpired that McLaren understood non-violence merely to mean protesting without engaging in violence, rather than the more confrontational exposing of implicit violence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

There is of course a theological literature on non-violence which is beyond the scope of this thesis ranging from Myers (1988) and Wink (2003) who argue that Jesus adopted a distinctive non-violent praxis of political and religious resistance, to Horsely's (1987) view that Jesus may have been more sympathetic to violent struggle. Gandhi's *satyagraha* was briefly discussed in chapter three, where a materialist interpretation is proposed. Non-violence is not the avoidance of violence but a refusal to collude with violence. A non-violent strategy exposes conflict through the vulnerability of the activist, as Jesus' disciples in Mark expose the conflict in the Sabbath (chapter four). Peaceful protest which does not expose underlying conflict can end up colluding with implicit violence. A non-violent strategy requires a commitment to the exposure and confrontation of conflict.

Within FoES there was a contradiction between a strategy of exposing and confronting conflicts inherent in climate injustice through the vulnerability of protest, and a tactic of protest which might receive media publicity in a news-saturated week without using violence. These crystallised into two protest proposals: one was a protest at Scotland's largest oil refinery at Grangemouth, designed to expose the conflict of interests between the oil industry and the welfare of those who depend on it, yet are exploited by it. This proposal required preparatory work with the local community and the workers' trades unions, with a view to forcing a rift between these groups and the interests of the industry itself, and to put the necessity of decommissioning for an oil free future onto the agenda. The other proposal from a London-based climate coalition was a low threshold 'wake up alarm for climate change' campaign involving a large number of people across the UK and beyond, sounding an 'alarm' at a coordinated time on the first day of the summit, whilst a hooter was to be sounded with police permission at the gates of Gleneagles. The purpose was to involve the maximum number of people whilst delivering a message directly to the G8 negotiators.

Little can be learned from the outcomes of these proposals since both were severely curtailed. A restricted version of the Grangemouth event took place involving a fun, no arrests, protest with the student group People and Planet and the delivery of an open letter to the company, backed up with minimal house-to-house leafleting, a poorly attended public meeting and an exchange of letters with the shop stewards convenor. Most FoES resources went into the wake up alarm, much of which did not happen because that morning saw the suicide bombings on London's public transport.

Following the G8 protests, I recognised that it was time to move on from FoES, having probably exhausted my strategic creativity, and was successfully appointed as lecturer in sociology at Queen Margaret University in August 2005. In the following two years, FoES abandoned its overt commitment to environmental justice. The justification for this was an exhaustive consultation which formed part of a strategic review of the organisation and which highlighted the desire of the membership to focus on practical, lifestyle issues. The second reason was the election in 2007 of a minority Scottish National Party government to Scotland's parliament, which abandoned any rhetorical commitment to environmental justice.

In summary therefore it may be suggested that FoES' environmental justice strategy sought to use materialist analysis in constructing an environmental movement; community education and popular education to promote a dialectical praxis of progressive resistance; and a prophetic non-violent protest against the political-industrial causes of climate injustice. The strategy however contained inherent contradictions based on conflicts of class interest between members and directly affected communities; between the institutional structures of education and the learning needs of struggle; between the disciple's needs and God's actions, and between the prophetic demands of non-violence and the survival needs of a mainstream environmental NGO.

### **5.3 Case Study 2: Bhopal**

The starting point for an ecotheology of liberation is the environmentalism of the poor. In terms of global environmental injustice, Bhopal is archetypal. Prior to the 1984 gas leak the people who lived in north Bhopal around the factory were among the poorest of the world. Bhopal was an expanding city, as landless people migrated from the countryside or smaller towns. Most of the people who lived around the factory were manual workers: the men day labourers, small stall owners, drivers, the women *bidi* (cigarette) rollers or piece workers for tailors. Those who had jobs in the pesticide factory were comparatively well off. A significant proportion of the population was Muslim which, in an Indian context means disproportionately excluded. Literacy levels were low: the 1981 census recorded literacy at 34% overall, and 19% for women. Indeed, it is because the people were poor that it made sense for the factory to be developed there. After the gas leak those who survived were still poor – considerably more so. They are also sick and weak, widowed, orphaned, bereaved, disabled, ignored, abandoned.

If anything can be learned about global environmental injustice from the ‘epistemological advantage of the poor in history’ then Bhopal is the place to learn it. That a social movement has emerged to take on, not only a major US multinational company, but also, over the 24 years of struggle, the logic of globalisation and state neoliberalism, is nothing short of a miracle.

But the Bhopalis never cease to be victims and their suffering never goes away. An early memory from my engagement in the research was after the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary march when

effigies had been ritually burned, the angry, fierce tears of one man as he told my research assistant of the deaths in the gas leak of his three children. Now childless and prematurely old, his emotions loosened by the anniversary events and drink, he railed against the pointlessness of the effigy's embers for their inability to bring back his children, his pain as raw after 23 years as if it had happened yesterday.

The struggle has also involved remarkable self sacrifice and heroism from many individuals, gas affected and not. In *Animal's People* Indra Sinha's (2008) novel set in post gas leak Bhopal (renamed as the fictional Khaufpur) the characters highlight the ordinary human saintliness which abounds in the city (Sinha 2008). Zafar, the educated outsider who has given his life to the people and their struggle for justice; Ellie, the American doctor who gives up her life in the States to set up a clinic; Somraj the stoic musician whose wife as well as his renowned singing voice were taken away by the gas leak; Ma Franci, the elderly French nun who has lived amongst the Khaufpuris all her life. None of these characters is simple and neither is sainthood. Zafar's too-good-to-be-true, Ellie is mistrusted as an American and Ma Franci's mental illness gives her hallucinations of the apocalypse. Even Animal, the book's principal character and narrator, despite his best attempts at moral depravity, is unable to deny the ordinary saintliness of his humanity.

In real life Bhopal, there is a lot of anguish about the role of outsiders whether Indians like Sathyu who have given their lives to the struggle, or westerners who arrive for a short time and then leave with their newspaper columns, films, books, photographs or research papers. There are many factions in the movement largely personified in the leadership, all of whom have given immensely to the struggle. The leaders, whether outsider or gas affected, inspire

tremendous loyalty in their supporters as well as vilification from their rivals' supporters. As for the westerners, the experience of our research does not suggest resentment. As Hazra Bee, a non-literate grassroots activist with the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal said in her interview:

Many people come to fight for the rights of gas victims, to share their pain and grief, to participate in their fight, this is their sympathy. They take the fight of Bhopal forward, amplify the voice of the victims, and want to get justice for gas and water victims. If they are well educated they can make their money in some way, when they have so many degrees then they will not find it difficult to get a job. They have sympathy and they want Bhopal to get justice. If Bhopal gets justice then the whole world will get justice. ... All the books that are written and all those who use the gas victims, all the organisations that work with us and the way we are fighting: I do not feel that we are being used. Because there is some gain somewhere through our stories. We ourselves are poor, all gas victims are poor, all those fighting are poor people. So I would not call them wrong, anyone who writes our stories or whoever captures our words either through a book or a video. I wish that my voice, maybe through the medium of a book or television or paper or a film, at least if it opens up the minds of other people, refreshes their memory and maybe that it kindles some sympathy and people from outside will join our voice and our voices will get amplified and our struggle and fight will get strengthened so that we don't accept defeat. (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009)

On the other hand, this must be tempered with the warning of Rabiya Bee, one of the founding members of the trade union *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan*:

My message to young people who are into this work is that they should do it as long as they can do it sincerely. If they lose interest they should quit. People who they claim to work for can do without them, they do not need their help or they do not insist on getting help from social activists. People can survive with what they have. People who are not assisted by social activists also survive and people who know how to fight for their rights will do so without any assistance. So my message to the new generation is if they want to do social action they have to be honest and sincere, they should not take advantage or exploit. There is a lot of power in truth. And truth will also be your hindrance because it will cause a lot of problems for you and get you into trouble. (Bhopal Survivors Movement Study 2009)

Some activists have little time for the middle class Indians and international supporters who benefit from their involvement with Bhopal and many outsiders experience anxiety about

their role. American Kim Fortun's (2001) ethnography of her involvement in the struggle as an advocate is largely a monograph of middle class anxiety. My involvement has been the fortuitous result of several opportunities to which I have responded: attendance at the Mumbai World Social Forum and meeting Bhopal activists; reconnecting with these activists when a West Bengal research project fell through; obtaining small grants and the support of colleagues to be able to conduct the research. I have been able to use the opportunities with which I have been presented - access to research funds and academic literature, experience in the NGO sector, a knowledge and commitment to Freirean methodology that encourages an equitable interaction between the experience of people engaged in struggle and the universalistic theorising of academic rigour – to conduct basic research which none the less is designed to contribute knowledge which is useful to the movement rather than to me as researcher. The methodology of the research was designed to ensure that the survivors who are active in the campaign should be participants in the analysis and assessment of the work, irrespective of literacy skills. I was strongly aware that I was an outsider in every way – not gas affected, not Indian, not a Hindi speaker, literate, educated and wealthy. However, activists valued the support of foreign intellectuals when it was approached with humility and accountability to the movement, which was embedded into the research methodology based on the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Bhopal Survivors Movement Study 2009, see chapter two).

Because the intention was to involve survivor activists in the research as much as possible, it was important to devise a system of authorship of any publications which acknowledge this. Authorship of academic publications is a controversial issue. On the one hand, ethnographers have often published multiple versions of their research in order to

differentiate between their attempts to be ‘objective’ and their recognition that as participants who affect and are affected by the communities which they study they have personal autobiographical reflections on the experience (Tedlock 2003). On the other hand, research which makes the greatest claims to impartiality in the ‘pure’ sciences through replication of experiments, ironically places great importance on authorship and seniority. Authorship has at least two functions in academic literature: that of acknowledging those who have devised and carried out the research for their credit and the benefit of their own careers; and secondly for the justification of argument, so that it is clear who is making what claims in order to defend them. In our case, we thought it important to acknowledge all those who contributed to the research, including where those people preferred to remain anonymous, whilst at the same time make clear who it was that was making claims in order to justify them. For the former we came up with the collective authorship of Bhopal Survivors’ Movement Study, which comprised the four members of the research team plus other named and unnamed contributors.

In the first paper presented at a conference, authorship was given as Mukherjee, Scandrett and Bhopal Survivors’ Movement Study. Suroopa Mukherjee and I presented the paper at the conference, and the Bhopal Survivors’ Movement Study was annotated as Sathyu Sarangi, Dharmesh Shah, Tarunima Sen and anonymous survivor-activists. A book length publication, *Bhopal Survivors Speak: emergent voices from a people’s movement*, to be launched on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the gas leak in December 2009, is authored by Bhopal Survivors’ Movement Study. This collection of extracts from interviews and essays by leaders will tell the story of the survivors’ movement in the words (translated into English)

of the activists who have been part of the movement (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009).

To date, some 80 hours of interviews have been conducted with activists from the three main survivors' organisations and several other groups or former groups. Meanwhile, the contact which I have had with the movement has enabled me to take solidarity actions: I have given public lectures in a number of settings, including the national library of Scotland and the Scottish Hazards campaign; I have produced newsletters for a variety of networks in Scotland, including Hazards, Iona, Ashram and FoES. In March 2008 at the time that a group of survivors and activists associated with the ICJB were walking 800 km from Bhopal to Delhi to lobby the Indian government, I organised a group of Members of the Scottish Parliament, the STUC, FoES and Amnesty International, to lobby the Indian Consulate in Edinburgh. I have also been able to propose Sathyu Sarangi of Bhopal Group for Information and Action for an honorary doctorate from Queen Margaret University, which he was awarded in July 2009, following which he participated in a lecture tour which I had organised, building support and solidarity across the UK, and especially in areas where Dow has facilities.

The very existence of this movement is a prophetic challenge to the logic of capitalist expansion. The Indian government since the 1990s has followed a neoliberal policy of attracting inward investment through the establishment of Special Economic Zones and other sweeteners in which companies are exempt from many state regulations on health and safety, environmental protection, labour standards and accountability. Many of the activists' attitudes are uncompromising: tougher regulation and implementation, no inward

investment, no chemical production anywhere. Dow, which is seeking to take advantage of the favourable conditions to invest in India, yet denies any liability for Bhopal, has been prevented from expanding through the campaigns and direct action of the Bhopal movement and its supporters. Activists have prevented the development of R & D facilities and chemical production hubs in West Bengal and Maharashtra, and disrupted recruitment fairs, university sponsorships and corporate responsibility events. The views of the survivor activists sometimes differ from my own. For example, survivors almost universally advocate the death penalty for Warren Anderson, the former CEO of Union Carbide. However, in my role of solidarity with the movement I support the extradition of Anderson to face trial in India. In fact he is charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder, which would not lead to the death penalty. His greatest risk is from a lynching.

Amongst the movement there is a diversity of views as to what a historic project would be like. The leader of the first mass mobilising organisation Alok Pratap Singh is of the view that no further battles can be won by militancy, the task is to achieve incremental reforms to improve the lives of the survivors, including accepting compromises where necessary. He now heads a group of NGOs providing employment to survivors and is a member of several government committees on economic rehabilitation of gas victims. He has been instrumental in a legal petition for the state government to clean up the contaminated factory site, a move opposed by other groups because it lets the corporations off the hook. In an essay written for *Bhopal Survivors Speak* Singh pointedly asserts:

The movement was constantly in conflict with the government. We would fight against the government but we would also use it and support it when necessary. I think it is important to recognise that we do not have any ancestral dispute against the government, which consists of elected representatives. It does not make sense to oppose it all the time as some groups, especially foreign funded NGOs have

always tended to do for ideological reasons. (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009)

One of the targets of this criticism is Sathyu Sarangi of Bhopal Group for Information and Action, who takes an uncompromising anti-capitalist position on development. He is also managing trustee of Sambhavna Trust which provides health care for survivors using allopathic and ayurvedic medicine in which herbal, panchakarma (massage) and yoga therapy minimises the use of pharmaceutical medicines. Fourteen year old Sarita Malviya echoes Sathyu's view with her characteristic combination of youthful directness and analytic sophistication:

I'm not against government but against their lack of justice. I will support any government which gives justice... Governments deny justice because they are in the pocket of the multinational corporations. MNCs and other foreign companies shouldn't be allowed to come to India. If they do they should be obliged to care for people and the law should be implemented. All companies and their scientists should be responsible for their inventions. Poisons should not be made, or if they must then they should make less and make an antidote. It is possible to live without chemicals. We should stop buying chemicals.

It's not just that the companies are owned by foreigners... Many foreigners come here to make books and films to tell our story all over world and that is very important... I know that the campaign and Sambhavana trust run on money donated mostly by people from outside India and this is completely okay. They can earn a sufficient amount and still take out some money and give to us, who cannot even get one decent meal a day. The money that is given to us is given by choice and we don't demand it. In this world every one relies on something or some one so it should not be seen as a problem if we do the same. But we should not rely on this money all the time and look for other means, one of which is the government. It is their responsibility. The government should take notice and help us and give us our rights. (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009)

A third approach is that of Sadhna Karnik whose organisation *Bhopal Gas Peedit Sangharsh Sahayog Samiti* is affiliated to the Communist Party of India. This leads her to a more intermediate position endorsed by the constraints of an electoral party such as CPI, linking local militancy with a national programme of accountable economic development, including industrialisation and chemical production.

For an outsider acting in solidarity with the movement it has not been my place to take a position between these views, although the possibilities of solidarity action in the UK are to be found in the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal. To some extent this correlates with prophetic action, even though this runs the risk of appearing to take sides within the movement. In particular, during the visit of Sathyu to the UK to receive his honorary doctorate, an increased network of supporters was identified and there are possibilities of symbolic solidarity actions leading up to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, including direct action against Dow.

### **5.4 Case Study 3: Iona Community**

My work on environmental justice in the Iona Community has occurred during the period of the research for this thesis and therefore has been a live example of action-reflection in a worshipping Christian community. In chapter one, the background to the Iona Community was described and the current membership portrayed as largely consisting of educated, professional class Christians, theologically radical or liberal, from across many denominations and none. I was interested in the extent to which the community would respond to environmental justice in ways that are prophetic and have been struck by how much we (including myself) have translated the challenge of environmental injustice into issues of lifestyle which are neither an adequate response nor a challenge to the interests of the privileged class to which we belong. There is a considerable amount of radical activity amongst Iona Community members, although much of the response to environmental justice seems to be identical to middle class liberals unconnected to Christianity. The common factor in determining the type of response to the ecological crisis is the class background. Christian adherence appears to have nothing further to add. This reflection is illustrated in the following two vignettes.

At the end of the 2005 covenanting week with Kathy Galloway described in chapter one, during the feedback session, one young man, a US citizen and liberal Christian, working as a youth worker in Belfast, noted his disappointment with our session because he was ‘hoping for something more practical that I could do with my youth club’. This response seemed to illustrate the tendency of the professional middle class constantly to look for practical activities to resolve problems which seem to have no practical solutions. Indeed the kind of

responses to a problem which we look for are those which do not cost us and those like us too much.

It made me think of the rich young man who came to Jesus to find out what he should do to inherit eternal life (Mark 10: 17-22). The man claimed to be devout in his adherence to the law. He was disappointed however when Jesus told him to sell everything he had, give it to the poor and follow him. One is tempted to think that the rich young man's response might have been something like 'I was hoping for something more practical that I could do with my youth club'!

*A member of the Iona community put this question to him: 'Good Master, what have I to do for the world to inherit sustainable life?'*

*Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Thou shalt not waste energy, thou shalt not drive unnecessarily, thou shalt not take internal flights, thou shalt not shop in supermarkets, honour your fair-trade and organic producer, recycle your waste'.*

*'Yes, yes' he replied, 'I have kept all these from my earliest days until now'.*

*And when Jesus heard this he said 'there is still one thing you lack. Stop using non-renewable materials and come and live with me and the poor of the earth on a polluted waste heap.'*

*When he heard this he was filled with sadness because he loved the environment which he could afford to live in.*

*Jesus looked at him and said 'How hard it is for those who have riches in this world to find their way into a sustainable future - it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle!'*

*'In that case,' said the listeners, 'who can be saved?'*

*'Things that are impossible for men' he replied 'are possible for God.'*

The other reflection was based on the parable of the talents (Luke 19:11-27) and included in my report in Iona Community members' magazine *Coracle* (Issue 4/14, December 2004 p. 23). Just as the retainers in Jesus' parable, we are faced with participating in the exploitation of our neighbours (through the tax concessions of an absentee landlord) and being rewarded for our treachery, or else refusing to participate (burying our talents) and suffering the consequences. The refusenik stance seems noble if costly but ultimately benefits nobody and since there are plenty of others to do the job, the exploitative system remains intact.

With these thoughts as my point of departure, I was convinced that a prophetic rather than a practical response was necessary. I focused the following year's themed week on ecology and prophecy.

#### **5.4.1 Reflections on Iona week *Ecology and Prophecy*.**

The main groups attending were a Dutch group from two churches near Rotterdam, near to a major petrochemical complex, and a group of Canadian ministers, with a few additional individuals and couples. The week followed the model of prophecy outlined in Walter Brueggemann in *The Prophetic Imagination* (Brueggemann 2001). This comprises three elements of prophecy. First, the radical critique of existing social reality; second a Lament

for the inevitable loss of this social reality with the revolutionary change needed; and third imagining the vision of a new society. In this case, we spent several sessions looking at ecological destruction and how it particularly affects the poorest, using videos, newspaper clippings and input. This was analysed in terms of the social and economic factors which cause this destruction: for example the practices of multinational corporations, corrupt local businesses, the international economic regime, and the consumption patterns of the rich.

The Biblical material used was primarily Amos, for whom unjust practices, lavish lifestyle and the desperation of the poor are integrally linked to socio-political disaster through the action of God (see chapter four). Ecological destruction is intrinsic to the same social and economic systems which we depend on for a comfortable life and cannot be altered by reforms, technological innovations and lifestyle change. The prophetic response involves not only critiquing ecologically destructive practice, but also lamenting the loss of the privilege which we obtain from it.

Later in the week, participants were encouraged to imagine a vision of the new society, and express it through creativity, which they did primarily employing much symbolism of death and destruction, new life, hope etc – painting, drawing, poetry, painted stones, and an impressive six by four foot installation using found objects, displayed in the Abbey church. I particularly remember a stone painted with the words taken from a Shriprakan film about the loss of tribal lands to coal mines: ‘now where can we celebrate karma?’

Finally, the group had a session using the parable of the bigger barns in Luke 12 16-21. The participants listened to a description of the socio-ecological change which was occurring in

first century Palestine as a result of agricultural innovations – primarily leading to development of big estates and dispossession of traditional peasant farmers. Then in small groups, they were encouraged to hear the parable from the perspective of different people who might have been in the crowd listening to Jesus, and who would have had differing relationships to this socio-ecological change: a landowner; an agricultural tenant; a dispossessed peasant; a craftsman dependent on casual employment by the estates; a day-labourer.

An interesting outcome was that four of the groups came out with four very different interpretations of the same story from the same process, with differing implications for modern responses to the ecological crisis today. These interpretations might be classified as individual piety; communitarian; revolutionary bourgeois and utopian socialism. To this range of interpretations may be added my own response which may be classified insurrectionary (figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 Interpretations of Luke 12:16-21 arising from Iona workshop

<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Summary of message</b>	<b>Implications for ecological crisis</b>
Individual piety	Don't be greedy, don't store up more than you need.	Response to ecological crisis dependent on people in the rich world being morally convinced to make lifestyle choices: simple living; content with less; downsizing.
Communitarian	landowner realising that he should share a bit more of his bumper harvest with the rest of the community, even to the extent of releasing debt and paying decent wages.	Response to ecological crisis requires the rich world voluntarily to share the world's wealth, for example through fair trade, corporate social responsibility and debt cancellation.
Liberal bourgeois	barn builder realising the liberating potential of being self employed and making individual choices, exploiting opportunities and benefiting from whosever big harvest.	Entrepreneurs respond to opportunities afforded by the ecological crisis, whether non-profit organisations providing waste recycling or big companies investing in green technology.
Utopian socialist	all realise the common interest in holding all things in common (is this the interpretation encouraged in the early church by Luke-Acts?).	Borders and property rights abolished globally, resources directed to where there is need, perhaps through the United Nations or some form of global government, leading to enforced simpler lifestyles in the rich world.
Insurrectionary	displaced peasants respond to Jesus' question 'who does this belong to?', tear down the barns and share the produce.	Conflict, as the poor of the world try to claim what has been stolen from them. Oil wells are seized in Nigeria and Ecuador; disgruntled refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants riot in rich countries; oil and gas rich countries in the global south become sites of international wars; dispossessed poor in failed states become recruiting ground for terrorism. Ultimately, the economic order collapses.

These are not the only interpretations of this parable, nor are the extrapolations to modern ecological disaster the inevitable implications of these interpretations. However this does

illustrate the importance of how people from different contexts will see the way forward in terms of their own interests, especially in terms of power. Individual piety and voluntary sharing reproduce the power relationships in which those who are currently powerful retain the choice of acting: existing structures are reformed rather than transformed. The liberal bourgeois interpretation requires a transformation of the Palestinian feudal society but a buttressing of powerful interests in capitalism. The utopian socialist version appears to be in the interests of the poor and oppressed, but contains no route map for achieving it – and therefore is actually disempowering. The insurrectionary interpretation requires a transformation of existing power relations led by the poor, but has a very uncertain if not dangerous outcome. What is indicative is the diversity of class positions in this reading and emphasises the risks involved in reading the bible from any other perspective than that of the poor.

### 5.4.2 The early 'Place' discussions and conflicts

As described in chapter 1, the Iona Community, under the leadership of Kathy Galloway, undertook to focus on a theme every two years, the first being Poverty, the second Place and the third Peace. I convened the Place working group which focused primarily on environmental justice. Early on within the working group there were debates which centred around, on the one hand, creation, celebration of nature, lifestyle changes, and on the other, prophecy, critique of environmental injustice, engagement with political action. A compromise paper was circulated around the membership, written by me and presenting the prophetic argument, but also including the arguments presented by the creation advocates. Despite my attempt to incorporate both perspectives in the paper, it was perhaps inevitable that the prophetic argument was more strongly presented.

The paper provoked reactions from a range of sources. Several individuals expressed support and relief that the group had taken a strong position, linking Place with Poverty and challenging environmental complacency. Others were more critical, largely coming from a defensive position on creation, arguing that creation should be central to an environmental theology or defending its motivational capacity, and proposing that lifestyle change is essential for environmental responsibility. The Place working group decided that it would be useful for *Coracle* to carry a series of articles exploring the implications of Place and environmental justice from various perspectives.

By the time of the 2007 AGM, in May, it was clear that the membership reflected a wide range of positions on environmental justice. For some, it was an entirely new issue and they were hardly aware of the environmental impact of their own lives. For others, lifestyle

change was the beginning and end of environmental responsibility. Still others saw environmental concerns as connected to their social justice commitments. At the AGM it seemed necessary to address the difficult issue of individual choices and lifestyle, in order to help people along from whichever starting point they were at. I devised workshops which were designed to meet the creation-lifestyle advocates half way and provoke their position into a more radical stance, whilst also encouraging people for whom this is new, to take a position on a continuum of action points.

Although the workshops seemed to work reasonably well with most participants, there was a small and vocal group who rejected the focus on lifestyle and, by associating environmentalism with lifestyle choice, rejected the Community's focus on the environment altogether as a middle class distraction from its primary vocation of serving the poor. Unfortunately there were also people present whose embrace of lifestyle environmentalism reinforced this prejudice. The most vocal advocates of both sides seemed not to have read or understood the discussion paper which the Place group had circulated. This presented a problem. The whole project of environmental justice within the Community was being challenged by a group who rejected middle class lifestyleism, whilst the working group was attempting to keep the lifestylists on board in order to challenge its middle class assumptions.

At this point it became clear that aiming for consensus within the working group, let alone in the Community, was not constructive and that a useful mechanism way to present perspectives and polemical arguments and to stimulate debate was through articles in the *Coracle*. My article *Poverty, Place and the Environment* followed in the next available slot

(*Coracle* issue 4/30 August/September 2007 p. 17) in which I confronted creation theology for its class bias. In particular, I argued that standing alongside environmental victims must come first in a prophetic response to the environmental crisis, whilst creation theology led to reformist lifestyle politics. Lifestyle change I suggested was a matter of integrity whilst struggling alongside the environmentally poor, and not a means to environmental protection.

Our theology is shaped by our unstated assumptions. If we benefit from the current, exploitative economic system then we will be constantly tempted to focus on how we can modify it in ways that are reasonable, implementable. A creation-centred theology risks starting from where we are, which in the west means living at others' expense simply by the logic of the economy. The closer we are to those who suffer from the current economic system, the more we will focus our sights on a radical alternative which will be accountable for its treatment of the poorest and the environment we share.”

*Coracle* carried several articles generated and written by members of the Place working group, on the subjects of *Rural Concerns and Place* by Peter McColl, *When Choice is a Luxury* about disability and voluntary carbon reductions, by Alison May (both in *Coracle* 4/32 December/January 2007/8) . Nobody from the working group wrote an article specifically to defend a creation centred theology.

### **3.5.3 The Christian Aid commitment**

The next significant milestone occurred during the 2007 community weeks (two community weeks occurred in 2007, in August and October). Directed by the Leader with input from the Place working group, a series of workshops focused on resources for change, moving from a celebration of the resources which community members, staff and volunteers draw on in supporting change, through to an input from a range of people engaged in action to reduce fossil fuels and other resource use in their communities, families and work places. This proved to be a tactical success. Kathy Galloway proposed that the Iona Community sign up

to Christian Aid's climate challenge of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 5% year on year and this received significant support. This challenge was aimed at finding solutions to difficult problems of implementation and accounting, rather than reasons to abandon the commitment. The Community had turned a corner in its desire to take action, at least on climate change. This had primarily been made possible by the leadership of Kathy Galloway who recognised that the majority of members were keen to take what action they could if they could only see the resources they had to act.

### **3.5.3 Incorporation into the rule**

The final event in the two year Place theme was the 2008 AGM. Following discussions with Kathy, I had circulated a list of options for changing the rule and other proposals coming from the group. The final proposal presented to the group sought to integrate the diverse positions within the group and the community, without compromising on the principles. In significant proportion, the proposal was accepted by the AGM. (There was a minor modification that the rule 2 should retain a reference to money so should commit to 'sharing and accounting for our use of money and the earth's resources')

In practical terms, the outcome of two years of working on environmental justice in the community led to a greater awareness and commitment to voluntary individual and collective carbon reduction involving heightened awareness of existing activity plus stimulation of new activity, with challenging but still inadequate targets, set within the context of accounting for all our use and with ample awareness of the implications of ongoing over use. It has raised awareness of Camas, the youth centre which depends only on its own wind and solar generated electricity, with dry-compost toilets and organic food garden, as a model of low impact living close to creation in solidarity with the poor.

Members were encouraged to support mainstream NGO campaigns such as the climate bill which was passed in Scotland in June 2009. Specifically it led to collective and individual membership commitment to achieving the Christian Aid challenge of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 5% annually, and the change to the rule which included ecological concerns in the accounting process.

How these reductions are to be achieved remains to be seen but the accountability is potentially a genuinely prophetic mechanism, reminding members that our use of some resources, especially fossil fuel, is not an entitlement but needs to be justified against strong criteria because of the actual harm it causes; that the earth belongs to God and our use of it is both gift and responsibility; that a socially just use of resources would require in most cases a reduction of over 80%.

One year on it is becoming clear that most family groups will not succeed in achieving 5% reduction, and it is to be expected that the following year's target of another 5% is going to be impossible without major structural changes to the economy. Even with one of Europe's most ambitious piece of climate reduction legislation implemented in Scotland, it is unlikely that these targets will be reached. Hopefully this will stimulate more prophetic understanding and action over the next few years. Members have, however, been introduced to some ideas for social change on environmental justice, such as transition towns (not specifically radical but including commitment to 'energy descent plans'), carbon rationing (more radical version of voluntarism), carbon 'mutual aiding' (sharing the burden of carbon reduction more justly than through carbon trading), just transition (trade union led planned decarboning of the economy so that workers are redeployed into sustainable employment), climate camps (direct action camps in places of high carbon emissions).

The next step will be significant, in which the failure to achieve the Christian Aid targets should be seen as a stimulus to prophetic action. It is the moral tension between an increasing awareness of the necessity for radical change, and the impossibility of achieving it within current structures, which can lead to prophetic actions in the direction of some of the radical proposals available.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

### ***6.1 Implications for orthopraxis***

Critical reflections on the potential for prophetic action in the three case studies has drawn attention to the material interests embedded in any kind of action and reflection on environmental justice. Yearley (1994) insightfully noted that the class membership of environmental organisations had material interests incompatible with a deep greening of society. In that case it would appear that the ideology of the supporters of the environmental movement contradicts their class position. In fact, as the environmental justice movement has identified, this is not necessarily the case and the narrative of environmentalism associated with the mainstream environmental movement is more compatible with their privileged class interests than a deep greening of society would suggest. Moreover there is enough in this narrative to be compatible with the interests of national and international capitalist class. Class has its own ontology on which epistemology is based. Gilfillan (2009) has argued for a self-conscious working class ontology to liberate working class knowledge

from cultural norms of inferiority. The preferential option for the poor is not an easy one and for privileged Christians an immense discipline.

In a telling passage, Nalunnakkal (2004) inadvertently raises the same question from a different perspective. In chapter 3, it was acknowledged that aspects of Nalunnakkal's use of process theology as a corrective to liberation theology's anthropocentrism were useful, and in particular the material interpretation of kenosis illustrated in the following quotation (also quoted in chapter three):

Jesus self-emptied his power and dominion and became a servant for the sake of both human as well as non-human creation. It was on the cross that Jesus' 'kenosis' reached its culmination. This follows that our self-divestiture of dominion should lead us to 'cross bearing' ('necrosis'), to an identification both with the suffering humanity and the groaning creation (Nalunnakkal 2004 page 265)

What is interesting about this quotation is the unproblematic use of 'our' and 'us', given Nalunnakkal's insistence on the social basis of ideology elsewhere. For example, in his own critique of creation spirituality, Nalunnakkal emphasises that "in the Third World countries, the ecological concerns can only be discussed and approached from the perspective of the oppressed and victims. This is the distinctiveness of a Third World ecotheology." (Nalunnakkal 2004 p. 273). This approach can only be endorsed from a theology of liberation – in fact in the 'First World' the same 'epistemological advantage' of the oppressed victims must apply. However, it isn't clear whether Nalunnakkal's "our self-divestiture of dominion should lead us to 'cross-bearing'" applies to the 'us' of Third World theologians, of the oppressed and victims, or of humanity as a whole. Arguably, it applies to human beings in their relationship to the social relations of production, conditions of production and relations of actual harm (ie ruling classes and those privileged through

alliance with them), because it is only in relation to material conditions that 'self-divestiture of dominion' has any meaning.

The ecological lifestyle and creation spirituality movement which Mary Grey affirms, focuses on voluntary simplicity but does so as individuals operating collectively in groups. They do not do so as a class in the sense of having a common relationship to the means of production. To advocate voluntary disempowerment *as a class* is perhaps the clue to the relationship between environmentalism of the poor and the middle class lifestyle movement. Here lies the dialectic between prophecy and creation. To adopt voluntary simplicity as an individual lifestyle choice is a badge of privilege, of greater benefit to the conscience of the practitioner than to society. To engage in a politics which is materially disadvantageous to the class to which you belong may or may not lead to individual lifestyle simplicity, but is a more genuinely prophetic discipleship practice. Orthopraxis, for privileged Christians, is class betrayal, not just in terms of personal practice but in terms of ontology and epistemology. It is a severe discipline to face the contradiction at the heart of being a privileged Christian in a disintegrating ecology.

Opportunities for prophetic action have been identified through analysing these case studies. These arise from adopting a materialist analysis to recognise the common interests of those who are victims of the economic logic of cost shifting and therefore a shared relationship to both the relations and the conditions of production. Conflicts which are therefore embedded can be exposed and confronted, and tools which may be adopted include a material version of non-violence, popular education and popular informal learning. They may also be

stimulated by failure to achieve lifestyle commitments made in good faith, in combination with a discipline of accountability.

There is a necessity for constant contact with and accountability to environmental victims and the environmentalism of the poor, not in simplistic 'workerist' terms but in a systematic critique of the material interests embedded in the ideology of environmentalism of the professional middle classes. A Christian worshipping community largely made up of this class is no more immune from such class blinkers than any other group, and false consciousness can be reinforced by a dependence on creation theology. On the other hand, the resources exist in Christian theology for radically challenging this distortion, including theologies of liberation, hermeneutics of suspicion, kenotic anthropocentrism and most fundamentally, a dialectical reading of prophecy.

A materialist analysis allows us to discern historical processes and relate them to economic and ecological conditions. Environmental injustice is the disproportionate effect of environmental damage on the poor or socially disadvantaged through cost shifting. The poor are usually understood, after Weber, as sharing common and diminished life chances but a materialist analysis also requires a Marxist understanding of class, sense of sharing a common, exploited relationship to the means of production. Environmental injustice is an historical process grounded in material conditions. As explored in chapter two, capitalist expansion looks for opportunities to shift costs out from the economic balance sheet and onto the 'conditions of production' with as little cost as possible. This leads to phenomena which on the surface might appear discrete but which are in fact part of the same social force. Environmental damage, resource consumption, industrial health and safety, urban

decay, women's double shift and even wildlife extinction are part of this same tendency within capitalism. James O'Connor (1998) argues that this is every bit as much an intrinsic property of capitalism as the conflict of interests between workers and capital, and indeed at certain times conflicts in the conditions of production are more acute than those in the relations of production. Environmental justice struggles can temporarily replace class struggle in particular places at particular times.

Martinez-Alier (2002) argues that a core factor in environmentalism of the poor is the value incommensurability between environmental and financial costs and benefits which results in social conflicts. The rich are in a better position to protect their environments through their leverage on the market. The poor are least able to do so and therefore protest, using alternative languages of health, livelihood, tradition, sacredness, human dignity, racial equality etc.

It is not possible to do theology from the perspective of the exploited environment, whether understood as Earth, Deep Ecology or ecocentrism. This cannot be achieved through speculation, nor from a shared cultural form of exploitation as ecofeminism attempts, nor from a discipline of kenotic anthropocentrism, at least not without concealing class interests. This can only be attempted from the perspective of the environmentally poor, sharing their common struggle against an economic logic which devalues their environment. An orthopraxis for privileged Christians therefore requires a sustained process of building a historic bloc with the environmentally poor (Gramsci 1972).

These processes are more fully understood dialectically. The social conflicts which are caused by a common phenomenon and which disproportionately affect the environments of the poor have an impact on the capacity of capitalism to expand, and undermine its tendency to incorporate oppositional movements. This happens at both an ideological and a material level, and of course in relationship between the two. Raymond Williams (1972) points out that the capitalist corporate culture deals with challenging innovations by either marginalising or attacking and eliminating them, or more often in the long term by incorporating them. Thus those elements of an environmental movement which are compatible with capitalism have been incorporated by capitalist ideology.

On the other hand they remain oppositional to the extent to which they sustain alliances with others which share their common source of oppression. This is how historic blocs are constructed amongst exploited and subaltern groups with a common source of oppression in the expansion of capital. The extent to which mainstream environmentalism 'of the privileged' is identified as an environmental justice struggle shapes the way in which the interests embedded in the campaign include those interests of the poor and oppressed.

So there is a dialectical relationship between class interests and the ideology of a campaign. There is also a dialectic between the historical economic forces of capitalism on the environment, and the social conflicts in the conditions of production. If capital seeks to shift costs onto the cheapest sink, then protest either prevents this or makes it more expensive. The ultimate logic of capital expansion is cost-benefit analysis. Environmentalism of the poor simultaneously raises the costs in the equation, and also denies the equation by

demanding alternative valuations. This is the prophetic refusal to compromise with the interests of capital.

## ***6.2 Implications for historical projects***

According to Petrella (2006), current liberation theology fails because it is prophetic and therefore remains at the level of condemnation and lamentation, with vague utopian hope. For Petrella, such a theology tends towards idolatry by condemning an omnipotent enemy whilst presenting an unattainable kingdom. However, opposing prophecy to the historical project is a false dichotomy. Just as creation must be understood through the perspective of liberation so historical projects are not unprophetic or anti-prophetic but rather emergent from the contradiction of prophecy. The historical project emerges from the dialectical relationship between conflict exacerbation and achievement in implementation, as the book of Covenant with its sabbatical laws can be seen as a synthesis of the prophetic movement of the eighth century and post-exilic reform. Prophecy does not go away with the Covenant however but re-emerges in new forms, not least in the Jesus movement of the first century CE, the prophetic dialectic of which led to the radically redistributive elements in the early Jesus movement. The achievement of the Covenant required new alliances to be built with the poor. The failure of the Covenant, later required further alliances to be built with the new poor in a constant process of prophecy. Historical projects are not static or concrete but dynamic and dialectical: they are never fully achieved. Historical projects exist in tension with building historic blocs.

Any attempt to devise a historical project which is not merely reformist, must have this dialectic. Here I attempt to outline some themes towards a historical project which is a synthesis of the confrontational utopianism of prophecy and the radical reformism of the

Covenant. In another, complementary dialectic, it aims at a synthesis of the social science of political ecology and the theology of liberation.

### ***6.2.1 The transformation of consumption and the contradiction of the agony.***

Any historical project needs to find a way for human society to consume within environmental constraints, to shift radically away from our current dependence on non-renewable resources, and to distribute these resources equitably. The exhaustion of the earth's resources is intimately connected with the distribution of access. We cannot opt out of the role we play in this – through our consumption we are implicated in global relations of actual harm (Dobson 2003). It is necessary to consume less, but even the most ascetic refusenik of western consumption, by virtue of living in the West consumes a great deal to the detriment of others' wellbeing. Furthermore consumerism, even in its green, fair trade or ethical varieties, maintains the culture-ideology of capitalism (Sklair 2003). Our reduction in resource use is not lifestyle choice as consumers but a foretaste of the kingdom. It is a choice of integrity which emerges from our engagement in the struggle on behalf of the environmentally poor. It is the dialectical opposite of hypocrisy, the challenge which Jesus often directed at his former allies and teachers, the Pharisees.

Support for environmentalism is largely from the professional middle class or the elite; those who are in the privileged position to advocate choosing a simple lifestyle, often selectively. For many liberal environmentalists, the contradictions of belief that lifestyle change will drive social change are experienced as an agonising over which lifestyle choice to make with the constant fear of guilt should these decisions prove wrong. On the contrary, for prophetic environmentalism, lifestyle emerges from engaging with the struggles of the

environmentally poor. However, as Thomas Cullinan (1987) has pointed out, the middle class Christian can never be poor or even fully alongside the poor and is thus faced with the ‘agony’ of separation from God’s option for the poor. Even embracing material poverty doesn’t leave behind the health and education of privilege, and standing alongside the environmentalism of the poor always presents contradictions. So a historical project requires alternatives to consumption, which means finding ways to reduce that which is needed.

### ***6.2.2 The transformation of production and the contradiction of surplus value.***

Global neoliberalism locates production in its most economically efficient place, which means shifting costs onto the poor and marginalised, whether the isolated community of Scoraig, unemployed shipbuilders’ wives and daughters in Greenock or by cutting corners in the production of pesticides in India. The disaster in Bhopal and the subsequent social movement is all about what kind of historical project delivers liberation to the poor. The green revolution was justified in terms of feeding the poor through high yield varieties of crop made possible through artificial inputs which stimulated the domestic manufacturing industry. Yet it was the poor who suffered most, and still do, as a result of this kind of historical project. Bhopal is the logical outcome of global capitalism, the shifting of costs onto the poorest.

The transformation of production requires a different kind of work process and we do not yet know what that is. It certainly requires a renegotiation of the global and gendered divisions of labour and between paid and unpaid work (Gorz 1989). For Soelle (1975), this is a creation theology which is dialectically responsive to the historical process of liberation – to love and to work. Under capitalism work equals exploitation because the surplus value

is extracted from labour as from the conditions of production. As Miranda (1977a) points out, even well paid workers with high degrees of control over their activities are exploited under capitalism because at the end of the day the value of their work in the market must always exceed the value they receive in reward. The extraction of surplus value is the contradiction which I face in the university in my struggles to make education relevant to the poor, to community struggles and to social movements. The argument that private investment or marketisation or productivity increase or competitiveness is the only alternative to generate employment and tackle poverty must be rejected outright in principle, even as we are all implicated in it.

### ***6.2.3 The transformation of the economy and contradictions in productive conditions***

The social struggles which emerge in the conditions of production, or over dispossession of resources through primary accumulation, are central to the pressure for transformation. Environmental justice movements represent social limits to the expansion of capital. The economic logic which shifts costs onto the poorest and their environment is contradicted where political protest responds. In order to move towards a sustainable economy based on environmental justice, it is important that the social cost of this transformation is not borne disproportionately by those who have no choice but to sell their labour in the unsustainable economy. Just transition is a process of transformation of the economy in which workers, through their trades unions, are involved in planned redeployment into sustainable jobs.

There is a need to renegotiate the relationship between the local and the non-local. This renegotiation must happen between the local and global, in which the movements of environmentalism of the poor and environmental justice need to move to being just

sustainability movements (Agyeman 2005) which combine protest against the expansion of capital, the shifting of costs and the conflicts in the conditions of production, with proactive grassroots initiatives to live within a globally just distribution of resource consumption. The relationship also needs to change between local and national, in which development planning processes become genuinely democratic and producers and service providers are accountable to all stakeholders – the workforce, local communities, suppliers as well as consumers and the wider social good through forums of democratic accountability. Multicriteria analysis is a valuable mechanism to replace cost-benefit analysis, in which stakeholders identify the criteria for development and then assess potential projects which might meet these criteria, rather than leaving decisions to developers whose main if not sole criterion is profit.

#### ***6.2.4 The transformation of ecumenism and the contradiction of the church***

The environmentally poor are not, generally, Christian. At the same time, the church continues to be disproportionately associated with privilege. Amongst the Iona Community, attempts at prophetic responses to environmental injustice were tempered by the professional middle class position of most of its members. Liberation theology has been more or less successfully destroyed by the reactionary powers in the church. The church is so tarnished with the ideology of oppression or else liberalism that it is difficult to see how it can act as a liberating force for the poor. Just as Amos and the Jesus movement can be interpreted as prophetic responses to environmental injustices, and made claims for liberation through polemics of the day –for Jahwism and humanistic sabbatarianism – so we can interpret prophetic movements against environmental injustices as finding new languages. Prophetic action on environmental justice is largely occurring amongst

environmental activists outwith the Christian church. Climate camps continue to provide prophetic witness, where civil disobedience is used as a mechanism to challenge a reluctant government and energy industry into significant action. Increasingly these climate camp actions are also couched in discourses around social justice. In 2009, the Scottish climate camp took place on the site of a proposed open cast mine extension in an area of Lanarkshire with high incidence of respiratory problems connected with particulate matter.

We can recognise God's actions today by using political ecological analysis and standing alongside God in the environmentally poor of any faith. Class, the objective ecosocial location, is more significant than religious affiliation. Professional class Christians adopt practices little different from professional class atheists, and victims of environmental injustice will respond collectively whether Christian, Muslim or Hindu. Orthopraxis appears to have little bearing on worshipping communities. For the Iona community to practice liberation ecotheology would require locating itself corporately alongside the environmentally poor in their struggles, rather than its position amongst Christians. It is possible that the forthcoming failure of the Community to achieve its pledge of reducing carbon dioxide emissions will lead to more prophetic action alongside the victims of climate change.

The classic texts of Latin American liberation theology from the 1970s do not advocate an orthopraxis for Latin American Christians as if this can generate God's work in the world. On the contrary, God's work was thriving in the liberation struggles of the poor of Latin America. The problem of orthopraxis for these writers was that the church was at risk of

being on the wrong side of God's work. As Gustavo Gutierrez puts it in his introduction to Hugo Assman's *Practical Theology of Liberation*:

The irruption of the other, the poor man (*sic*), into our lives leads to active solidarity with his interests and his struggles. This commitment is expressed in an attempt to transform a social order which breeds marginalisation and oppression. Participation in the historical practice of liberation is ultimately the practice of love, the love of Christ in one's neighbour; and of encounter with the Lord in the midst of a history ridden with conflicts. (Assman 1975 page 6)

In 1960s and 1970s Latin America, a movement of the poor was on the ascendancy and, it seemed, could achieve the ultimate goal of history, to overthrow the contradictory and oppressive order of capitalism to the collective benefit of all. Here was the possibility of a historical project. Reading these texts today is a reminder of the failure, both of these struggles and of the church.

Today there is a liberation struggle against environmental injustice in which God's historical work can be seen. It is less obvious, very diverse, not Christian and largely in the global South. The church may fail again through creation theology, lifestyle politics and a practice compatible with the interests of the ruling class. The responsibility of Christian orthopraxis is to identify and embrace struggles for environmental justice and be located, ontologically and epistemologically, alongside the environmentalism of the poor.

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