
The Biblical Foundation of Christian Ecological Ethics

Kristīgās ekoloģiskās ētikas bibliskie pamati

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The pollution of nature today is a global problem, the solution of which requires global ecological ethics, which attempts to solve ethical global problems that arise as a consequence of negative change in the environment, which is endangering the health, existential conditions, and the survival of all living beings. The author argues that Christians, as God's stewards are responsible to fight against the causes and negative consequences of the recent global climate change, expressing an ecological crisis. A moral philosophical analysis of the fundamentals of biblical anthropology and ethics is made as the basis for a global environmental ethics for Christians and all people of good will. The author emphasizes that: a) a global ethics requires universally moral obligation and responsibility, b) Christians have universally moral obligations toward God's creation which has *intrinsic value*, and c) the Bible contains universally applicable norms and virtues expressing love as the universal motivation for Christians to fulfil their duties as God's stewards. The *result* of the analysis is proposed as fruitful for a global Christian ecological ethics.

Key words: anthropology, foundation, intrinsic value, ecological crisis, global responsibility

1. Introduction

In different periods of Christianity, there have been different attitudes and approaches to environmental ethics. However, there are some theologians who have evaluated nature and the physical environment as part and parcel of the study object of biblical ethics. Ecological ethics has several names such as: milieu ethics, environmental, deep ecology, etc.¹ I shall use the term "ecological ethics", which seems to be more comprehensive than the other terms. We need global ecological ethics today because we are facing a very complex and global ecological problem, which can be summarized as follows:

“ ‘Human and nature’ problems press in upon us from all sides. We are all becoming – or should be becoming – more cognizant of global warming; ecologically unsustainable cities and agricultural practices; the overuse of antibiotics in our health care systems and on our factory farms; the global crash of ocean fisheries; a human population and use of natural resources that is squeezing out other forms of life; the pollution and degradation of our air, soil and water.’ [...] Or consider the demise of wild salmon rivers in Canada’s eastern provinces thanks to the clear-cutting of the rivers’ headwater forest. Or the sterilizing effects of the acid rain wafting east from the North America West. Or crashing ocean fisheries.”²

It is relevant here to especially mention the Baltic Sea as one of the most over-polluted area in the world, which has enormous negative consequences for fish and biodiversities in the Baltic Region. This fact has a huge negative impact on human health and life in all the countries around the Baltic Sea and their neighbours.

2. Ecological ethics as an a universally applied normative ethics

The term “ecological” has the same etymology as “ecology” and “ecosystem”. By ecology is meant here “a sub-discipline of biology, the study of life”.³ For our purpose here, a relevant definition of ecology is the following:

“*Ecology* (Gr. οἶκος, ‘house’; -λογία, ‘study of’) is the scientific study of the relation of living organisms with each other and their surroundings. Ecosystems are defined by a web, community or network of individuals that arrange into a self-organized and complex hierarchy of pattern and process. Ecosystems create a biophysical feedback between living (biotic) and nonliving (abiotic) components of an environment that generates and regulates the biogeochemical cycles of the planet. Ecosystems provide goods and services that sustain human societies and general well-being. Ecosystems are sustained by biodiversity within them.⁴ Biodiversity is the full-scale of life and its processes, including genes, species and ecosystems forming lineages that integrate into a complex and regenerative spatial arrangement of types, forms, and interactions.”⁵

By global ecological ethics is meant here a global normative ethic which specifies the duties or moral obligations and responsibilities that human beings everywhere have with respect to a balance in ecosystems so that the latter can “provide goods and services that sustain human societies and general well-being” (Ibid.). *Global normative ethics* must be constituted by global or universal ethical values, norms and moral virtues. It appears to be not easy or practically possible to show that such ethics exists. As a Christian, if one takes seriously the biblical teaching about God and his relationship to the human being and nature – as essential parts of his creation – one is logically forced to believe that there are global ethics. In other words, the Bible as a whole, and the Gospel, in particular, implicitly teaches that there is global ecological ethics in the sense defined here. Such an ethic is called Christian global ecological ethics. Before we deal with it, let us refine the term “ethics”.

From the point of view of ethical studies one can talk about three different types of ethics: descriptive ethics, normative ethics and meta-ethics.⁶ Here it is relevant to concentrate our attention on normative ethics, of which there are four types of theory:

Classical teleological ethics (e.g., Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas) emphasizes the goal of an action according to the human nature. For Aristotle the highest goal of ethics is human happiness (Gr. *eudamonia*), the attainment of which requires adequate

means that must be morality good. Aristotle maintains that for a person to attain happiness he/she should live virtuously. For classical teleology, the ends or goals – given in the human species – do not justify the means. To attain ethical ends requires ethically good means (MacIntyre, 1984, 150). *Consequence ethics* (e.g., J. Bentham and J. S. Mills) emphasizes the consequence of an action. This type of ethics defines a right action as the one that leads to good consequences.⁷ Contrary to teleological ethics, for consequence ethics the ends justify the means. *Deontological ethics* (e.g., I. Kant) emphasizes the duty of the moral agent. According to Kant an action is right if and only if it expresses the ethical duty conveyed by moral norms (moral rules and principles, based in values). And all norms should be coherent with the categorical imperative, the formulation of it, which is most relevant here is: *we should always treat other persons as ends in themselves and never only as means*. (Kant, 1981, 41). This is seen as Kant's version of the Golden Rule (Erikson, 1964, 234). *Virtues ethics* (e.g., Aristotle, A. Nygren) emphasizes the good character of the moral agent, the person who acts. A relevant definition of virtues here is: “virtues are habits and dispositions that enable a person to reason well (intellectual virtues) and to act in accordance with right reason (moral virtues)” (Shelp, 1982, 15).

Some people prefer one of these four ethical theories, other people prefer a combination of some aspects of two of them, and still other prefer a combination of some aspects of all four theories (Barbosa da Silva, 2011, 164). Ecological ethics can be, at least, of four types, depending on which of above mentioned normative ethics one chooses to apply to ecology. In this essay I shall argue for the combination of, above all, deontological ethics with virtue ethics. By emphasizing “above all”, I don't exclude consequence reasoning in ethical reflections.

2.1 Ecological ethics as a combination of deontological ethics and virtue ethics

A combination of these two types of ethics is based on the Aristotelian assumption that rules- and principle based ethics tells us our duties or obligations, whereas virtue ethics motivates us to do them. Beauchamp & Childress sustain that there is a correspondence “although imperfect [...] between some virtues and norms, including principles, rules and ideals.” (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009, 45f). For example, a benevolent person consistently follows the principle of beneficence and a righteous person consistently follows the principle of justice (Ibid.). This kind of person is said to be of a highly moral character or integrity, which means that he/she is prepared to obey moral norms even if his/her actions conflict with his own best interests (McFall, 1987, 9).

2.2 Two necessary conditions for a global ecological ethics

2.2.1 An ecological ethics should be comprehensive and not anthropocentric

The German-American philosopher Hans Jonas has criticized the traditional ethics as anthropocentric and contrasted it with his own proposed new ethics. Richard J. Bernstein describes Jonas' view of the traditional, anthropocentric ethics as follows:

“Traditional ethics presupposed (1) that ‘the realm of *techne* (with the exception of medicine) was ethically neutral – in respect both of the object and the subject of such an action’; (2) that ‘ethical significance belonged to the direct dealing of man with man [...] and all traditional ethics is *anthropocentric*’; (3) that ‘for action

in this domain, the entity 'man' and his basic condition was considered constant in essence and not itself an object of reshaping *techne*'; (4) that 'the good and the evil about which action had to care lay close to the act, either in praxis itself or in its immediate reach, and were not matters of remote planning'. All this has now radically changed. Because the very conditions of human action are transformed, we must also transform our ethics. This means the traditional moral imperatives are no longer sufficient for the new condition of human action" (Bernstein, 1995, 14).

Jonas' proposes a new "ethics of responsibility" (Bernstein, 1995, Ibid.) that can be called biocentric (cf. Elliot, 2002), and which comprehends humans and their environments and which imposes an imperative that requires human responsibility for both human beings and others beings as a necessary condition for human existence now and in the future. The imperative of Jonas' ethics can be formulated in four different but equivalent ways:

"A new imperative responding to the new type of human action and addressed to the new type of agency that operates it might run thus: 'Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life'; or expressed negatively: 'Act so that the effects of your action are not destructive of the future possibility of such life'; or simply: 'Do not compromise the conditions for the indefinite continuation of humanity on earth'; or again turned positive: 'In your present choice, include the future wholeness of Man among the objects of your will' " (Bernstein, 1995, Ibid.).

The relevant question here is: why should we exchange an anthropocentric ethics with a comprehensive one? There are different answers to this question, depending on the world view, concept of Man and life style that one endorses. Here we are interested in an answer implicit in the biblical worldview and anthropology. As we shall see later on, a comprehensive ecological Christian ethics takes into consideration both human basic interests and the basic interest of all living beings, grounded on the intrinsic value of all God's creation, i.e., it has value in itself (cf. Vogel, 1995, 35f). As Bernstein indicates, Jonas assumes that a necessary condition for human existence is that nature must be healthy (not polluted).⁸

2.2.2 A global ecological ethics must be universally applicable

It is relevant to specify here four different meanings of the term "global or universal ethics", and then indicate in which meaning the term is intended here:

1. Ethical norms *exist* everywhere, i.e., in all times and places;
2. There are ethical norms *applicable* to every human being everywhere;
3. There are ethical norms *acknowledged* and *accepted* by everybody everywhere;
4. There are ethical norms that are, in principle, *acceptable* people by in the whole world, despite the fact that they do not exist everywhere and are not known and not *acknowledged* and *accepted* by everybody everywhere.

The term "norms" in 1) to 4) is used to mean ethical rules and principles like "to tell the truth", "do not kill an innocent person" and "to respect a person's autonomy and dignity". I think that there is a global ethics only in the senses 2) and 4) of the term "global or universal ethics". For example the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule and the Human Rights seem to fulfil the condition 2) and 4). In due course I shall argue for the possibility of global Christian ethics according to 2) and 4) above.

2.3 The global obligation of ecological ethics and the problem of moral motivation

A moral imperative in Kant's and Jonas' sense expresses a moral obligation, i.e., what one ought to do.⁹ But it is controversial whether the knowledge of one's obligation is sufficient for doing it.¹⁰ Concerning this issue Socrates asks: *Does one automatically do what is right or good, if one knows what is right or good?*

Socrates answers his question positively. On the contrary, several moral philosophers and St. Paul answer it negatively. Aristotle, for example, maintains that knowledge of our obligation in itself is not sufficient for doing it. One must also have moral virtues such as courage, justice as fairness, temperance and practical wisdom (Aristotle, 1980, 155-158). Bernard Williams' view of the function of virtue in the performance of actions seems to express Aristotle's own view. Distinguishing between the concept of skill and that of virtue, Williams indicates that virtues motivate their possessor *to use them willingly*, whereas skills do not: "[...] virtues are always more than mere skills, since they involve characteristic patterns of desire and motivation. One can be a good pianist and have no desire to play, but if one is generous or fair-minded, those qualities themselves help to determine, in the right contexts, what one will want to do" (Williams, 1985, 147). Hence, virtues motivate actions, whereas skills do not. For David Hume it is the feeling of *sympathy*, whereas for Immanuel Kant it is *good will* that motivates us to do our obligations, for example to obey the categorical imperative (Kant, 1981, 41f). For St. Paul it is *the grace of God* through Jesus Christ that motivates (enables) us to do what we ought to do, because sometimes we do not do the good we want to do, but the evil that we don't want to do (Rom. 7: 14-25).¹¹ For Hans Jonas it is "a natural feeling of responsibility", inherent in the human being that motivates us to act morally (Bernstein, 1995, 16).

In what follows I shall combine aspect of Aristotle's view with St. Paul's view, i.e., in dealing with the biblical foundation of global Christian ethics, I shall emphasize both its imperatives (norms) given in the Bible and its virtues (motivational factors) acquired in the Christian life style. Both aspects are necessary and together they are sufficient for the realization of Christian ethics in actions as works of love. Against this background, the foundation of Christian global ecological ethics will be outlined later on.

2.4 The fundamental goal and motive of a global ecological ethics

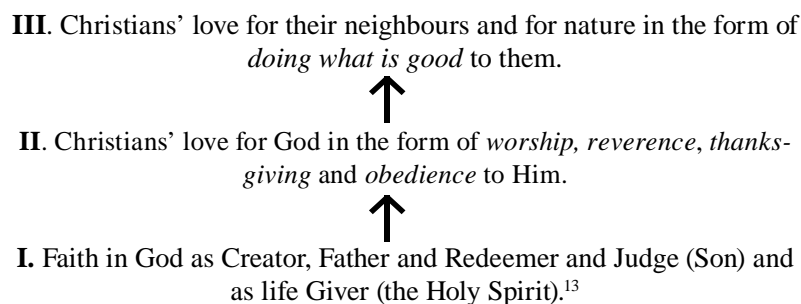
A global ecological ethics should be an application of a normative ethics theory to the relationship between humans and their environment. Ecological ethics in general deals with human responsibility for different aspects of nature, living and non-living, to the extent that human actions impact negatively on nature. Here we can think about pollution and negative climate change as dominant today, because of industrialization of raw materials and its effects in the ecological system. Ecological ethics concerns also positive aspects of development, as an expression of our contemporary endeavour to contribute to a better future for the coming generation, by preserving a healthy, i.e., unpolluted nature (*cf.* Jonas, 1984). Today, in our globalized world, and because of the vertiginous negative *climate change* which is taking place all over the world, both Christians and non-Christians are interested in formulating appropriate environmental ethics from a local, regional, national and international or global perspective. However, they may have different motives for their engagement in global ethics, even though they seem to have almost the same or at least one *common goal*, namely to save

the human kind and other living species from a great catastrophe or tragedy that may endanger the lives of all species. For non-Christians and non-religious people interested in environmental ethics, one of their *motives* to formulate global ethics may be, above all, fear for the extinction of the living organisms from our planet (Jonas, 1984). They also seem to be moved by the hope to save living beings from extinction. Christians may also be partly moved by this kind of fear and hope but they have additional motives and reasons for engaging themselves in formulating a biblical environmental or ecological ethics. Here we shall concentrate on Christians Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant ones from an ecumenical viewpoint (Falck, 1987, 18). Their norms, motives and reasons are called here *the foundation of a Christian or Biblical ecological ethics*, applicable globally in the sense already specified.

3. The main components of the biblical foundation of an ecological ethics

The model illustrated by Figure 1 below is conceived according to the view that every ethical theory is ontologically based on and epistemologically justified by a world view or a view of reality (*see* Figure 1, **III**). Thus, a materialistic and an atheistic view of reality will constitute a different foundation and justification for ethics than a religious view of reality, for example, the Jewish, Christian and Islamic view. And different religious ethics may differ from one another, depending on their view of God or Ultimate Reality, view of the human being, view of other beings and their inter-relationship.¹² These views and their inter-relationship according to Christian ethics are illustrated as follows:

Figure 1



3.1 God as Creator and Redeemer and its implication for Christian global ethics

As already indicated, global biblical ecological ethics requires global or universal ethical norms.¹⁴ It is important to note here that biblical ethics is not necessarily Christian but may also be Jewish. Here we shall concentrate especially on Christian ethics. I maintain that a biblical foundation for Christian ethics should consider the whole Bible and its teaching about the Trinity: God Father, God Son and God Holy Spirit and their relation to the whole creation and to human beings, specifically. Let us shortly describe the relationship between God and his creation as a whole and then God's special relation to the human being.

3.2 The relationship between God the Creator and his creation

The Bible tells us that everything that exists is created by and is absolutely dependent on God for its existence. Thus, there is a clear and infinite difference between God and his creation. Furthermore, God seems to have left something of himself in creation, in general, and in the human being, in particular (Gen. 1:26). For, with respect to his creation of each species, God said it was good but after he created the human being, God said that the whole creation was very good (Gen. 1:31). What God has left in creation is, first of all, his glory and goodness. Concerning God's glory, we can read in Psalm 19:1 that "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handwork" (cf. Romans 1:19f). As to his goodness, Gen. 1:31 states that God saw his work and it was "very good."¹⁵ These biblical passages allow us to state that because creation reflects God's glory and goodness, it has an *intrinsic value*, i.e., value in itself (cf. Psalm 104: 25, 30).¹⁶

For the sake of clarity we distinguish here between the concept of *intrinsic* value and *extrinsic* or instrumental value. By the former is meant "the character of being good or valuable in itself or as an end for its own sake" (Runes, 1974, 330). By the latter is meant "the character of being or of having a value as a means to something" else, i.e., an end or goal (Ibid.). The following phenomena are regarded by some ethicists as having intrinsic value: life, health, freedom, quality of life, fellowship, friendship and peace. As examples of phenomena that have only extrinsic (instrumental) value we can mention: money, house, car, airplane, computer, and medicine (cf. Holte, 1977, 48). What has or is regarded as having only extrinsic value serves as a means to attain what is seen as having intrinsic value. Thus, medicine is used as a means to attain health as an end. If creation or nature is regarded as having only extrinsic or instrumental value, from the human viewpoint, then it can be used for any human purpose, good as well as bad one. However, if from God's viewpoint (Lat. *sub specie aeternitatis*), it is regarded as having intrinsic value – as it seems to be the case –, then it can be used only for God's purposes, like human survival, attainment or preservation of human health and human flourishing. This view would exclude the exploitation of God's creation that should be respected by its own intrinsic value – for its own sake – and not only for its possible instrumental value, as a means for human and other living beings' survival. However, even if creation has an intrinsic value, it seems to include phenomena with different degrees of intrinsic value, so that they may be hierarchically related to one another in terms of means and ends. For example, a person may sacrifice him-/herself for the sake of the kingdom of God (as martyrs do), at the same time he/she may use animals as food. But to exploit and pollute nature in the way that industrialized countries are doing goes beyond God's view of and purpose for his creation. It is to violate God's command to Man to respect and preserve the intrinsic value of creation. It is to forfeit the responsibility of being the good steward of God's creation.

3.3 The whole Reality as constituted by a hierarchy of intrinsic values

There is a tradition in Christian theology, according to which the whole reality – God and creation – encompasses hierarchical levels of reality, each level having a given intrinsic value related to one another as follows: God, angels, humans, animals, plants and inorganic entities. God, who has the highest form of reality, also has the greatest intrinsic value (Dignity) in the hierarchy, whereas inorganic entities have the lowest form of reality and also of intrinsic value (Hof, 1985, 46, 79; Ramsey, 1978, 280). There are, at least, three strong biblical reasons to regard all living beings as

having intrinsic value. First, after having created them, God said that it was good (Gen. 1:25). Second, God made a covenant with them with a promise to preserve them. In Gen. 9: 8-9 we can read: “Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: *I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you [...] every living creature on the earth*” (Italics added.) And Gen. 9: 12-13 underscores that the “covenant is for all generations to come”.¹⁷ Third, God appointed Man to care for creation. Since God created, blessed and made a covenant with the different species, and since God appointed the human being as the steward of his creation, then the human being has a religious and moral obligation to respect and protect all God’s creatures, i.e., the living beings and their environment for their own sake and not only as means to attain human ends. It is also relevant to emphasize here that God want to regenerate the whole creation (see Isaiah 11, Isaiah 65: 17-25 and Rom. 8:19f; 2 Pet. 3:11; Rev. 21). The above mentioned covenants put a definite limit for what humans can do in relation to God, fellow humans and all the other beings. For, as Thomas Aquinas affirms, “only by adhering to an extrinsic divine will embodied in a covenant freely bestowed could one escape the snares of passion or *eros*” (Burrell, 2001, 218). I regard the norms implied in the various covenants as basic constituents of the foundation of a biblical ecological ethics.

3.3.1 The special relationship between God and humans

Although, from God’s perspective, the whole creation has intrinsic value, the human being has a unique intrinsic value distinct from the intrinsic value of the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26; Psalm 8). In Kant’s term everything has a price but the human being has none, it is inestimable, because it has dignity. The ontological foundation of human dignity is partly the image of God (Lat. *Imago Dei*) in the human being and partly God’s covenant with Man (Gen. 9: 12-13). It is, however, controversial what God’s image became after the fall.¹⁸ There are many biblical passages which entitle us to affirm that Man still has some kind of divine nature and a special relationship with God. And through faith in Christ, God’s image in Man will be completely recovered or rebuilt (Rom. 8:29, 2 Cor. 3:18). God’s special covenant with the human being imposes responsibility on the latter. First, God made a covenant with Noah, then subsequently with Abraham, Israel people and at last with all people through Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 26: 26-30; Lk. 22: 20f; Eph. 2: 13-15f; Hebr. 10:16, Rev. 5:9). Although all human beings are responsible before God, a Christian person’s responsibility is enormous (Mt. 5:44; 22:48; Rom. 2:12; Col. 1:28; James 2:12). It is the latter that I want to analyse in what follows. “Being made in God’s image” (Falcke, 1987, 18), can be interpreted as meaning “being made jointly responsible as humanity for one’s fellow creatures.” (Ibid.). By responsibility is meant here the power for performing a given action or for refraining from doing it. In both cases one is morally accountable.

3.3.2 Man’s fourfold responsibility as necessary for a biblical ecological ethics

Both man’s stewardship for God’s creation and God’s special covenants with him impose on the latter a fourfold responsibility expressed in his love: for God, for himself, for his fellow human beings and for the rest of creation. To love God’s creation means to respect and protect it. It is an integral part of Man’s stewardship for God’s creation. These four forms of love express Man’s fourfold responsibility before God and are necessary for biblical ecological ethics. An underlying thesis in what

follows is that the neglect, boundless consumerism, and exploitation of nature leading to ecological imbalance and risk of global catastrophe, e.g., negative climate change, can be seen as a bad consequence of partly the lack of Man's love for God and partly the lack of reciprocal love among human individuals, groups and nations, expressed in oppression and injustice at various levels of human relationship: regional, national and international. Hence man's love for God and for fellow-humans is the most basic precondition for ecological balance. Therefore, the analysis in what follows will concentrate on these two forms of love and their interrelationship.

3.3.2.1 *Man's love for God, love for neighbour and their interrelationship*

Man's fourfold responsibility before God can be ultimately explicated in terms of Man's love for God. The great love commandments, contains a religious duty to love God and an ethical one, to love one's neighbour as one self. To love God means to have faith in him, obey him, worship, glorify, respect/show reverence and gratitude to Him.¹⁹ This way of loving God is well expressed both in the OT and NT (Ex. 20: 1-18; Deut. 5: 1-2; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). As Christians our neighbour is anybody that may be in need of help, even our enemies, as illustrated by the parable on the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37; *cf.* Mt. 5:44; Lk. 6:2f).²⁰ As this parable shows, love for neighbour is expressed not only in respect for the neighbour's dignity, integrity and basic rights, but also in service to him/her such as to help him/her to satisfy his/her fundamental needs and to relieve his/her suffering.²¹ The parable also shows that to love the neighbour is to obey a universal God's commandment (*cf.* John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). The difference between the two kinds of love can be explained as follows. They are directed to two ontological entities which are infinitely and qualitatively different: (i) God the Creator who is divine, holy, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, love, provident and self-sufficient, i.e., without any need, and (ii) the human being that is created, finite, absolutely dependent on God for his entire existence and is full of needs to be satisfied by God. The close relationship between the two forms of love and Man's love for God's creation can be described as follows. All the four forms of love are closely related to one another. God's love for Man is prior to and a precondition for Man's love for God (1 John 4:10f, 19). This means that God (a) takes initiative and shows his love first (*cf.* Ramsey, 1978, 129). Man's love for God is (b) a reaction to God's love for him, expressed, *inter alia*, in faith, gratitude, humility obedience, reverence to and worship of God. Man's love for his neighbour is an articulated consequence of Man's love for God (Ramsey, 1978, 129). In other words, God's love for Man is a necessary condition for Man's love for God. The latter is a necessary condition for Man's authentic love for himself and his fellowmen (Barbosa da Silva, 1989/1999, 120). A consequence of Man's love for God is his love for his neighbours and creation. The two latter forms of love are a responsive and obedient love.

3.3.2.2 *Love as the highest principle of Christian ecological ethics*

As a universal ethical principle (expressing obligation) and as the highest Christian virtue, love is the basic element of Christian global *ecological* ethics (*cf.* Gustafson, 1996, 2). The essence of Christian love (Gr. *Agape*, Lat. *Caritas*) is described in 1 Cor. 13: 1-13). As an ethical norm love expresses an ethical duty which entitles our fellow humans to have moral claims on us as Christians. As an ethical duty Jesus summarizes it in the *Golden Rule* (hereafter – GR) in Mt. 7:12. Some ethicists interpret the GR in a way that tends to reduce it to a universal rule or principle for secular, humanist social

ethics, loosing thereby its Christian distinctiveness (cf. Holte *et al.*, 1977, 148f). They argue that the GR occurs in almost all cultures (Ibid., 142, 154) and that its normative validity is in principle recognizable and acceptable by all people.

Without going into details here, I want to argue that in the context in which Jesus recommends the GR – the Sermon on the Mount – it is intended to be the most fundamental principle of exclusively Christian ethics for the following reasons.

First GR can be interpreted in two different forms: a positive and negative one:

- The *positive* form: “Always treat others as you would like them to treat you”. Mt. 7:12.
- The *negative* form: “Never treat others as you would not like them to treat you”.

It should be noted that it is in its negative form that the GR occurs in the great world religions. In Judaism, although it has a positive form in Lev. 19:18, it was definitively formulated by Rabbi Hillel as: “*What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole of the Torah and the rest is but commentary. Go and learn it*” (Bloch, 1984, 200).²² In its positive form the GR is said to occur only in Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity (Spooner, 1913, 311). It is also relevant to emphasize here that it is easier to fulfil the negative form of the GR than to fulfil the positive one.²³ According to Abraham P. Bloch (1984) the principal reason why Hillel formulated the GR negatively is to enable the “heathen” to be “in compliance with the spirit of the Golden Rule” (Ibid., 200). That the negative form of the GR is easier to fulfil than the positive one is illustrated by the fact that, in certain situations one can fulfil the following negative norms without doing anything: “You shall not kill”, “you shall not lie”, and “you shall not steal”.²⁴ By contrast, to obey or fulfil the *positive* form of the GR requires of *us* moral character or virtue, efforts, engagement, compassion, motivation and active action. Despite the difficulty of fulfilling the positive form of the GR, Jesus commands his disciples to follow it (Mt. 7:12; 22: 37-48; Lk. 6:31).

Second, Reinhold Niebuhr (1963, 65) recognizes that negative moral rules only express a minimum of justice that is necessary to create and maintain order in society. He also affirms that only a minimum of requirement can be legally enforced (Ibid.). *Mutatis mutandis*, we can say that only a minimum of requirement can be *morally* enforced through moral imperatives. Perhaps this is the explanation why it is the negative form of the GR that seem to occur in most culture and world religions.

Third, for any person, anywhere, to obey the GR as a moral obligation it is not sufficient that the GR’s normative legitimacy is, in principle, intuitively grasped by all people (Holte *et al.*, 1997, 142). One must also be motivated to obey it (cf. Socrates’ question above). In the context in which Jesus recommends it – the Sermon on the Mount – the ultimate justification for its universal normative validity is God’s benevolence toward all people (Mt.5: 43-48; Lk. 6: 32-35; Acts 10). The context also makes it clear that it is as a follower of Jesus that one can be willing (motivated) to love all people even one’s enemy (cf. Lk. 10: 25-37; Acts 10:34f). As Christians “we find the basic motive for ethical conduct in Man’s response to God as he makes Himself known in his wisdom and goodness” (Braybrooke, 1992, 38). Without the willingness to obey God as Creator and *Father* of all human beings – who loves them equally –, and without following Jesus as the Saviour of the world, one may ask him-/herself: Why should I love all people including my enemies, even if it is right and is my obligation to do so? Hans Küng states the problem of motivation concerning the GR as follows:

“For instance is the “*golden rule*”, accepted by many religions and philosophers and at least by Kant, so obvious that we all know what to do when the person I must treat as I want to be treated myself stands clearly in my way, in the way of my plans, my policy? How do we know which policy is moral as a whole, which science is truly human, which civilization or form of economy is humane? Even in such fundamental questions as love and hate it is difficult to explain why I should love and not hate. *Scientifically considered*, is hatred simply worse than love? ‘There is no logically stringent reason why I should love and not hate, as long as this hatred does not put me at a disadvantage in my social life.’ Why should not war be as good or as bad as peace, freedom as good or as bad as oppression? ‘For how can it be proved exactly that I should not hate if I feel like it? *Positivism knows of no authority transcending man* which might distinguish between helpfulness and greed for gain, kindness and cruelty, cupidity and self-denial. *Logic too is dumb*, it gives no preference to moral dispositions’ [...] For all the foregoing it is completely clear that the *Christian lets Christ tell him* what is essential even for practical action. But does this solve all problems in practice?’ (Küng, 1978, 540; cf. Küng, 1980, 692f) (Italics added).

My answer to Küng’s last question is: it does not because, as Aristotle, Hume, and others answer Socrates’ question on the problem of motivation for action, it is not sufficient to know what one ought to do in order to do it. One needs also motivation. Thus we can say that the ultimate motivation for fulfilling the GR’s positive form addressed to all people is the Christian life style (Lat. *imitatio Christi*).

A quite different interpretation of the GR is made by Swedish moral philosopher Ingemar Hedenius (1977, 305) who uses the GR to justify active euthanasia, when he points out that a physician confronting a patient’s enormous suffering should ask himself: “what would I like to be done to me that is in my best interests, if I were in the same situation as the patient”? His answer: “I should give him/her active euthanasia, since I would wish to have it myself” (Ibid.). This example shows that the GR as Jesus interprets and uses it presupposes a given context of interpretation, one in which human life is holy and inviolable and taken as a God’s gift and property that endows it with dignity. Inserted in different views of life the GR may acquire different and even contradictory meanings. Then it may lose its cross-cultural character of ethically binding norm.

3.2.2.3 *Love as the most basic virtue of Christian ethics*

The great, love commandment, as an ethical norm, tells the Christians what to do, but it does not motivate them to do what they ought to do. To be motivated to do their obligations Christians need Christian virtues – acquired in the Christian life style through the imitation of Christ. In biblical terms, the essence of virtue ethics can be expressed as: a good tree produces good fruit (Mt. 7:17). According to 1 Cor. 13: 1-13, and Gal. 5:22, love includes all Christian virtues. As the basic virtue of the Christian ethics, love is described in the parable of the Good Samaritan as *compassion* (Lk. 10: 25-37). Compassion includes in itself other virtues as sympathy, altruism, justice as fairness, respectfulness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, benevolence, and engagement for the welfare of others.²⁵ While love as a duty tells us it is our duty to act for the benefit of others (the principle of beneficence), love as virtue (the virtue of benevolence) motivates us to do our duty. Thus, it is the Christian virtue of love that enables Christians to practice the duty of Christian love directed even to the enemies. To fulfil this duty comprises the fulfilment of two necessary conditions of global ethics, namely: to identify oneself with all people and to respect all people as

having the same value, dignity and basic rights. Christian virtues are acquired in the Christian life style (Lat. *imitatio Christi*). Therefore, while for example humanists are motivated by their view of human being as equal in value and rights, Christians – though endorsing human equality – get their motivation from their belief in God as love and their commitment to Christ the Saviour of the world. Despite this commitment and owing to his/her dependence on God's grace "It is [...] natural and inevitable that the faithful should regard genuine acts of love as proceeding from propulsions which are not their own, and should confess with St. Paul, 'I, yet not I, But Christ that liveth in me'" (Niebuhr, 1963, 133). Talking about a Christian individual's knowledge of his/her moral obligation and what motivates him/her to fulfil them in concrete actions, Karen L. Bloomquist (1987, 271) emphasizes "the moral power of the indwelling Christ" (as moral empowerment) in what follows:

"The ethical question is not only what ought to be and could be, but also what hinders us from acting. Knowing there are injustices and exclusions that go against what we believe, or that changes are needed, is not by itself sufficient for ethical action. Thus, attention needs to be given to how moral agency is *empowered*, especially through the relationality grounded in what it means to be a *communion*. [...] The point is that the self is related or interconnected with God and with others, including the rest of creation. Luther focused especially on the tension between standing as human beings before God (*coram Deo*) and before human beings (*coram hominibus*). [...] For Luther, moral agency becomes a function of communion – the moral power of the indwelling Christ in the face of human inability to act" (Bloomquist, 1987, *Ibid.*; cf. Küng, 1987) (Italics added).

Empowerment in this sense is transformation or sanctification (Rom. 12, Fil. 2:5f). The essence of this quote expresses an ecumenical consensus regarding the relationship between Christian dogmatics and Christian ethics, i.e., between teaching and acting, believing the Gospel and living it out among all kinds of people, all of which God wants to save (1 Tim. 2:4). God also intends to "save" all his other creatures as the consequence of human redemption (Isaiah 11; 65: 17-25; Rom. 8:19ff; 2 Pet. 3:11; Rev. 21).

4. Ecumenical consensus on God's salvation plan and – Christian ecological ethics

A Christian global ecological ethics should comprise the ethical norms implied in what can be regarded a "beginning ecumenical consensus" among the Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches on God's comprehensive will to save both humans and the rest of creation. The consensus can be summarized as follows:

"The biblical message of salvation does not only apply to the individual human being in his or her inner and social-political life. It also embraces physical life and the world of nature.

What God's people have said about creation is strongly influenced by their experience of salvation. But statements about creation are not to be interpreted exclusively as statements about God. [...]

The doctrine of Christ must take seriously the incarnation, the cross of Christ and the bodily resurrection. Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God for humanity in its historical and physical existence. He used the world as a parable for God's sovereignty.

The raising of the Crucified from the dead does not mean that God leaves the world behind, but that he gives it the new dimension of hope. Reality is a process open to

the promised-but-not-yet-realized future, which is anticipated in the resurrection of the Crucified. The kingdom of God is related to the creation in both nature and history. When Christian eschatology speaks of the end of the world and the Last Judgement, it is not expressing a denial of the world but a critique of the world in the interest of its renewal” (Falcke, 1987, 17).

5. Bearing witness as a way for Christian ecological ethics to impact in the world

As already emphasized, Christian ethics is not only a set of norms to be followed.²⁶ It is a virtuous life style acquired through the imitation of Christ. To impact in society it must be lived out in acts expressing Christian love. It is through Christian individuals’ way of living according to Christian norms and virtues – i.e., through a true *imitatio Christi*, that Christian ethics can impact on the local community and the world at large. Therefore, Christians should preach and teach ecological ethics based on all the three articles of faith.²⁷ Specifically, Christian ethics must emphasize Jesus’ teaching and call to discipleship. And to base Christian ethics on the belief in Trinity is not incompatible with human “natural reason” (Gustafson, 1981, 74).²⁸ Instead, such a teaching corrects, illuminates and embraces human reason. Alasdair MacIntyre makes this plain by stating the relationship between faith and reason (ethics) as follows:

“From the fact that we can at one stage in our progress towards God evaluate the divine claims, using *a standard of justice* acquired and elaborated independently of the knowledge of God, it does not follow that in so doing we are judging the Word of God by something external to it. This may indeed seem to be the case if we restrict our attention to that preliminary stage. But if we progress beyond it, something we are able *to do rationally* only because and in so far as we first assented to the divine claims because *we judged them to be just* (and also, of course, true), then we discover, as our analogically and historically ordered concept of justice develops, that the standard by which we judged God is itself a work of God, and that the judgments which we made earlier were made *in obedience to the divine commands*, even although we did not have recognized this at the earlier stage. God, it turns out, cannot be truly judged of by something external to his Word, but that is because *natural justice* recognized by *natural reason* is itself divinely uttered and authorized [...]” (MacIntyre, 2001, 583) (Italics added).

MacIntyre touches upon an aspect of Aquinas’ ethics, according to which “God alone can [...] move it [human will] freely in such a way that it moves itself” (Burrell, 2001, 215). A similar view is held by James Gustafson who compares an anthropocentric view of life with a theocentric one and holds that the latter *corrects* human “visions,” “rational activities,” “order of the heart,” (Gustafson, 1981, 308) perception and interpretation of reality. Or, that “Christian experience and beliefs” contribute to ethics by qualifying: “(1) the reasons for being moral, (2) the character of the moral agent, and (3) the point of reference used to determine conduct” (Gustafson, 1975, 173).²⁹

Concerning (1), Gustafson states: “One is not a religious person in order to have reasons of mind and heart to be moral; rather, one is religious as a consequence of experience of the reality of God, and this experience requires that one be moral” (Ibid.). Gustafson also says that “Christianity offers reasons for morality itself, and reasons for persons to be moral” (Ibid.). One reason for being moral is the experience of gratitude to God and dependence on him. This shows the close relation between Christian ethics and dogmatics, i.e., Christian ethics is an integral part of the Christian faith.³⁰ Therefore, it may be difficult or practically impossible for non-Christians to obey Christian

ethics as exposed in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5ff).³¹ Although specific Christian norms are endorsed only by Christians, they are however applicable to all humans, at least, in the sense that they can promote the welfare of all people. St. Paul declares that “Love works do no harm to one’s neighbour” (Rom. 13:10).

Gustafson’s point (2) above is about Christian virtues. As Gustafson emphasizes, “to experience the reality of God with special clarity through the Christian story [...] has, and ought to have, the consequences of nourishing (if not creating) loving, hopeful, and faithful disposition [moral virtue] in Christians” (Ibid.). So defined, moral virtues, because they strengthen our will and desire to do what is morally right and good – are necessary for motivating our acts because, as already indicated, sometimes we know what we should do, but have no desire or power/motivation to do it (cf. Rom. 7: 14-25). Christians acquire moral virtues by imitating Christ (through sanctification, Gr. *theosis*³²) and through the indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this way, they may become ethical models with highly moral integrity to be imitated by others. This can be possible if Christians live as they teach/preach. A person of highly moral integrity is consistent in his/her action and “ [...] is willing to bear the consequences of her convictions, even when this is difficult, that is, when the consequences are unpleasant” for him/herself (McFall 1987, 9).³³ Concerning his point (3) above, what Gustafson (1975, 173) calls “the point of reference used to determine conduct”, he declares that “certain action-guiding values and principles can be inferred from religious beliefs as normative for those who share some common Christian experience of the reality of God” (Ibid.). Thus, Christian faith and life constitute *the conceptual framework* from which Christians infer and in terms of which they interpret and apply ethical rules and principles to concrete situations. For example, the commandment “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” is “an action guiding principle that is inferred from the theological assertion that God is love” (Gustafson 1975, 169). In other words, the Christian *belief* that God created the human being in his image, loves all humans, wants to save them all through Jesus Christ, and that Christians ought to obey Jesus’ commandments, is the conceptual framework or world view that tells the Christians who are their neighbours. This framework – which implies a fourfold responsibility as previously emphasized – and the new life in Christ (Gal. 2:20) give them the reason and motivation for loving all people (neighbours). I think that this is so, because I believe that “the human values and moral principles to which agents are committed affect their [moral] discernment” (Gustafson, 1981, 337) and action in a positive sense. Therefore, I claim that “Christian theology and faith bring distinctively valuable emphasis and practices [...]” (Gustafson, 1981, 24; 2007, 42-51) to the applications of Christian ethics, e.g., to health and ecology. Christian anthropology – an integral part of the Christian conceptual framework – by affirming the sanctity and dignity of human life is the basis of the inviolable dignity and basic rights of all humans (Gustafson, 2007, 36f; 1996, 70f). This is the most basic ethical basis of a global Christian ecological ethics.

6. Summary and concluding remarks

The biblical foundation of global Christian ecological ethics is inferred from the beliefs that: (1) God has created everything with intrinsic value, but put his image only in the human being, which gives it its specific value, i.e., dignity, (2) God made covenants with both the human and the other living beings, and (3) God commanded the human being to protect, preserve and care for the rest of creation. From (1) to (3) a hierarchy of intrinsic values inherent in creation can be inferred. The various degrees

of intrinsic values require of Christians due respect and impose on them a fourfold responsibility for the various levels of reality, being God the Ultimate Reality with the highest intrinsic value for which all other intrinsic values can be seen as means to, i.e., the *Telos* to which everything strives and for which everything is created (Rom. 11:36). Human fourfold responsibility is expressed in the various covenants between God and the different living species and it is summarized in the love commandments. These covenants impose a definite limit for humans' actions toward creation. This shows God's providential care for the whole creation, which is very relevant for the foundation of a biblical ecological ethics. This ethics also presupposes the biblical truth that all human beings are brothers, since they have the same Father (God) (cf. Art. 1 in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights). From this perspective, the moral obligation of Christian ecological ethics is imposed to Christians, but its goal and the means to attain it are open to Christians as well as all persons of good will.

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- 1 See online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecology>
- 2 Donnelley (2000, 36) and Gustafson (2007, 41).
- 3 For more about "ecology" see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecology>
- 4 A reference is made here to Begon M. *et al.* (2005).
- 5 See online: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecology>
- 6 *Descriptive ethics* studies the actual norms and values in a given culture. It is a description of what moral perception and praxis exist in different cultures. *Analytical ethics* or *meta-ethics* makes a philosophical analysis of the relationship between ethical terms (such as, good, right, responsibility and duty) and reality. Thus it studies the ontological, epistemological and semantic aspects of ethics or ethical discourses. *Meta-ethics*, like descriptive ethics, does not recommend any norm for human conduct (cf. Frankena, 1973, 35-59 and 95-116).
- 7 There are two types of consequence ethics: ethical egoism and utilitarianism. For the former an action is right if and only if it has good consequences for the moral agent. For the latter an action is right if and only if its good consequences can promote the happiness of as many people as possible.
- 8 Bernstein (1995, *Ibid.*). Jonas' assumption does not necessarily take into consideration the intrinsic value of nature, if humans care for nature only because a healthy nature guarantees human existence. This is also an anthropocentric ethics which attributes nature only an extrinsic, instrumental value.
- 9 Natural law theories affirm that moral obligation or imperative is imposed by human reason. Kant calls this obligation "a command of reason", i.e., "an imperative". Cf. Kant 1956/1975, 126.
- 10 George (2001, 17) presents a constructive critique of the view that "what moves people to act are feelings and desires, and not reasons". This view seems to be well established among moral philosophers since David Hume, who considers reason as "the slave of passions", [...] "people's ends are necessarily given by their feelings and desires, and reason's role is limited to identifying efficient means to these ends" (*Ibid.*, 18).
- 11 God's love "forces" us to do what is right and good (2 Cor. 5:14). Niebuhr (1963, 62) states: "Prophetic Christianity [...] demands the impossible; and by that very demand

- emphasizes the impotence and corruption of human nature [...]”. And Kant declares: Christian ethics, because it formulated its precept as pure and uncompromising [...] destroyed man’s confidence of being wholly adequate to it, [...] but it reestablished it by enabling us to hope that, if we act as well as lies within our power, what is not in our power will come to our aid from another source, whether we know in what way or not. Aristotle and Plato differed only as to the origin of our moral concepts” (Kant, 1960, 132, 127).
- 12 For the relation between ethics and world view *see* Donnelley (2000, 40); Barbosa da Silva (2007, 97).
 - 13 For Christians’ and Jews’ view on these God’s properties *see* Braybrooke (1992, 38).
 - 14 A norm is a formulation or a rule containing at least one value, e.g., “you shall love your neighbour.” The value here is “love”.
 - 15 According to Dyrness (2001, 151), the goodness of creation includes its beautiful-ness. Thus, the biblical concept of ethic implies beautifulness. This is an idea de-fended by for example Saint Augustine.
 - 16 Given that “aesthetics is the mother of ethics”, as Joseph Brodsky (1987, 4) defends, then we can say that God’s creation reflects not only his glory but also his good-ness.
 - 17 Other relevant biblical passages for ecological ethics are: Gen. 1:26; Lev. 25: 23-24; Psalm 96: 10-13 Jer. 2:7; Isaiah 24: 4-6; Isaiah 43:20f and 65: 17-25; Rom. 8:19f.
 - 18 For the substantial, relational and functional interpretations of God’s image in Man *see* Chia *et al.* (2004, 3).
 - 19 For the difference between the four types of love *see* Lewis (1998).
 - 20 For the love commandments *see* Green (1992).
 - 21 For the concept of fundamental needs *see* Beauchamp & Childress (2009, 242).
 - 22 At least from Jesus’ time onwards the negative form of the GR seems to be central to Judaism. The term “neighbor” or “fellowman” is translated from the Hebrew *le-reacha* (Bloch, 1984, 198-200).
 - 23 It should be noted that 9 of the 10 commandments in the Bible are negatively formu-lated (Ex. 20). *Cf.* Barbosa da Silva, 2004, 84f.
 - 24 According to the essay *Towards a Global Ethic* (1993, 4-10), these three norms exist in almost all religions.
 - 25 *Cf.* Beauchamp & Childress, 2009, 38f. *See* Nussbaum (1996, 37f) on the relationship between Justice and compassion.
 - 26 This section, i.e., last part of this essay is more or less the same of the article by Bar-bosa da Silva (2009b).
 - 27 The doctrine of the natural law (associated with natural revelation and compat-ible with the first article of faith) was central to Roman Catholic social ethics for Christians and all people of good will until Vatican Council II. It is also the basis of Luther’s worldly kingdom that still dominates ethical thinking among Protestants in Scandinavia. However, to emphasize the natural law or Luther’s worldly kingdom as the common ground (grasped by human reason without faith), for an ethics for Christians and non-Christians – despite the fact that it constitutes a basis for dialogue between them – tends to eliminate what is genuinely Christian from social ethics. *Cf.* Barbosa da Silva, 1998/1999.
 - 28 Here, on p. 74, Gustafson refers to John Howard Yoder’s view of Christian ethics.

- 29 Cf. MacIntyre, Ibid.; Kant, 1956, 132, footnote no. 2; Gustafson, 1975; Niebuhr, 1963, 19f.
- 30 For the relationship between the concept of morality and ethics, the concept of the human being, and philosophy of life *see* Barbosa da Silva (2009a, 96-8).
- 31 Cf. Kant, 1956, 132, note no. 2; Gustafson, 1975; Niebuhr, 1963, 19f.
- 32 Chia (2011) points out the centrality of sanctification in the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches, even though it is described in different terms.
- 33 Persons of highly moral integrity are, e.g., Socrates, Jesus, M. Luther King, Jr., M. Teresa of Calcutta and N. Mandela.

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Kristīgās ekoloģiskās ētikas bibliskie pamati

Kopsavilkums

Dabas piesārņošana mūsdienās ir kļuvusi par globālu problēmu, kuras risināšanai nepieciešama globāla ekoloģiskā ētika, kuras mērķis ir atrisināt ētiskās globālās problēmas, kas rodas kā sekas negatīvajām izmaiņām vidē un kas apdraud veselību, pastāvēšanas nosacījumus un visu cilvēku izdzīvošanu. Autors uzsver, ka kristieši kā Dieva kalpi ir atbildīgi cīnīties pret neseno globālo klimata izmaiņu cēloņiem un negatīvajām sekām, kas izsaka ekoloģiskās krīzes būtību. Rakstā ir veikta bibliskās antropoloģijas un ētikas pamatu morāli filozofiskā analīze kā pamats globālai vides ētikai, kas domāta kristiešiem un visiem labas gribas cilvēkiem. Autors uzsver, ka: a) globālā ētika pieprasa vispārējus morālos pienākumus un atbildību; b) kristiešiem ir vispārēji morāli pienākumi Dieva radības priekšā, kurai piemīt *iekšēja vērtība*; un c) Bībele satur vispārēji aplicējamās normas un tikumus, kas pauž mīlestību kā vispārēju motivāciju kristiešiem piepildīt savu pienākumu, darbojoties kā Dieva kalpiem. Rakstā veiktās analīzes *rezultāts* tiek piedāvāts kā auglīgs risinājums globālai kristīgajai ekoloģiskajai ētikai.

Atslēgas vārdi: antropoloģija, pamati, iekšējā vērtība, ekoloģiskā krīze, globālā atbildība



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