

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie

**Band:** 107 (2017)

**Heft:** 3-4

**Artikel:** This is my body, a 'green' ecclesiology? : old catholic mainstream theology and the 'green theology' of the ecumenical patriarchate in dialogue

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-939183>

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# This is My Body: A ‘Green’ Ecclesiology? Old Catholic Mainstream Theology and the ‘Green Theology’ of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Dialogue

Peter-Ben Smit & Jan Jorrit Hasselaar

## 1. Introduction

Ecology and sustainable development are growing concerns for society, and the need for theological reflection on these matters is apparent. This is exemplified by Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si* (May 24, 2015), which is the heir to a long tradition of theological reflection on ecology.<sup>1</sup> While the Old Catholic theological discourse, especially in its mainstream form (see below), can certainly be developed in order to address contemporary ecological concerns, this has so far not been done in a systematic and (somewhat) extensive way. The considerations presented here are offered as an answer to the question of what an approach to ecological questions based on mainstream Old Catholic theology might look like, in terms both of its content and of its form. First, a brief survey of references to ecological matters in extant Old Catholic theological texts will be offered. It will then be argued that these existing reflections can best be developed further with reference to the ‘green’ theology that has been developed by the current incumbent of the See of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, and his immediate predecessor, Demetrius I, both of whom are heirs to the Orthodox tradition of reflection on creation and sacramentality.<sup>2</sup> Finally, a

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<sup>1</sup> On which, for the (Roman-)Catholic tradition, see, e.g. Jaime Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics. Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), but see also the authors and resources mentioned in the encyclical *Laudato si*. – In general, see the broad overview offered by Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology. Resources for Further Research* (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., the overview offered by Mathai Kadavil, ‘Some Recent Trends on the Sacramentality of Creation in Eastern-Oriental Christian Traditions’, in: Jacques Haers/Peter de Mey (eds), *Theology and Conversation. Towards a Relational Theology* (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 323–336, as well as the broad sweep of traditions overviewed and discussed by the same author in: *The World as Sacrament. Sacramentality of Creation from the Perspectives of Leonardo Boff, Alexander Schmemmann and Saint Ephrem* (Louvain: Peeters, 2005). See also the overviews of theologians past and present contained in Ernst M. Conradie (ed.), *Creation and Salvation* (Berlin:

dialogical (or ‘synodal’) approach to the ecological debate in society is proposed, in line with the Old Catholic synodal tradition, but also with the dialogical approach to culture that has characterised mainstream Old Catholicism, at least since the emergence of the *Altkatholische Bewegung* in the nineteenth century. In this way, a possible Old Catholic approach to the interrelationship between humankind/church and creation will be proposed. The case of ecology will also show that a theology with the characteristics of the Old Catholic mainstream is very well able to look beyond typical Old Catholic topics and concerns, such as ecumenism and church order,<sup>3</sup> to make a contribution to discussions concerning ecology and sustainable development. In terms of method, this essay aims to advance Old Catholic theological reflection on a particular issue by comparing and contrasting it with a related discourse, and identifying commonalities, differences, and areas for growth in reflection. This approach also means that this article will not seek to cover the entire spectrum of theological approaches to ecology, which would include, amongst others, the dis-

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LIT, 2012), 2 vols, and David G. Horrell (ed.), *Ecological Hermeneutics. Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T & T Clark, 2010). – It should be noted that Schmemmann’s contribution, which uses the term “holy materialism” to encapsulate what sacramental spirituality is about, uses the term subversively, given that his work ought (also) to be read against the background of atheist communist materialism. To be sure, such theological insights are shared with many of those identifying with the theological paradigms developed in the liturgical and faith and order movements, for an overview that includes both Orthodox and Old Catholic voices, see notably: Mattijs Ploeger, *Celebrating Church. Ecumenical Contributions to a Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Groningen: Instituut voor Liturgiewetenschap – Tilburg: Liturgisch Instituut, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> As was illustrated more recently by publications concerned with matters of social justice and a just distribution of the riches of the earth. See, e.g., Franz Segbers, ‘A Transformative Eucharistic Vision for the Entire Oikoumene’, *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9 (2009) 138–150, as well as the documentation of the trilateral consultation on catholicity and globalization in: Marsha L. Dutton with Emily K. Stuckey (eds), *Globalization and Catholicity. Ecumenical Conversations on God’s Abundance and the People’s Need* (Beiheft zu IKZ 100; Bern: Stämpfli, 2010). On the latter, see also Peter-Ben Smit, ‘Imagining a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. Catholicity and Contextuality’, *The Ecumenical Review* 66 (2014) 214–225.

courses of the World Council of Churches,<sup>4</sup> and of Anglicanism,<sup>5</sup> Roman Catholicism,<sup>6</sup> Lutheranism,<sup>7</sup> and the Reformed tradition, and other traditions such as the Evangelical protestant one.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, the approach developed here could be brought into a conversation with insights from any one of these traditions (and contemporary Roman Catholic and Anglican contributions might be particularly interesting interlocutors), but that would be a next step, beyond the scope of this paper.

## 2. Mainstream Old Catholic Ecclesiology and Ecology

Mainstream Old Catholic ecclesiology and theology, as it has been developed in the course of the twentieth century,<sup>9</sup> is a theology that is strongly liturgical in character and that often focuses on ecclesiology.<sup>10</sup> The predom-

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Justice, Peace and Creation Team, World Council of Churches, *Alternative Globalization. Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE). A Background Document* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., a contribution such as Michael S. Northcott, *Place, Ecology and the Sacred. The Moral Geography of Sustainable Communities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Notably the encyclical *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis (issued on May 24, 2015). Given the focus of this paper, this encyclical will not be considered on its own here.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., the contributions in: Karla Bohmbach/Shaina Hannen (eds), *Eco-Lutheranism. Lutheran Perspectives on Ecology* (Minnesota: Lutheran University Press, 2013), and the recent dissertation by Daniel Smith, *Toward a Lutheran Theology of Nature. An Ecological Ethics of the Cross* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., the appertaining resources mentioned in Conradie, *Christianity* (see note 2).

<sup>9</sup> See for a definition, e.g., Urs von Arx, 'The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht', in: Paul Avis (ed.), *The Christian Church. An Introduction to the Major Traditions* (London: SPCK, 2002), 157–185: 160, noting the affinity with Anglican and Orthodox theological paradigms. See also Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 2), 224–225. – Despite this essay's focus on Old Catholic theology as it was developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there's the possibility that earlier strands of Old Catholic theology, both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Germanophone Old Catholic movement and in the tradition of the Dutch *Cleresie* may well contain insights concerning God, humankind, and creation, e.g., in Antoine Arnauld's substantial reflections on the notion of 'creation', which could be mined and made fruitful (again) for a theological ecology in the age of the Anthropocene.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., the characteristic offered by Peter-Ben Smit, *Old Catholic and Philippine Independent Ecclesiologies in History. The Catholic Church in Every Place* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 28–29, also referring to Ernst Gaugler, 'Das wesentliche Anlie-



inant paradigm is that of liturgical theology and, within that field, liturgical ecclesiology (in the sense of *communio*-ecclesiology).<sup>11</sup> However, since this paradigm is rather an approach to the whole of theology through the lens of the liturgy, than a theological commentary on the liturgy, or a theology of the liturgy, the question of the place of a theology of creation within this framework may reasonably be asked, or, more specifically, what theological perspectives on ecology and sustainable development might be possible within it. The contemporary global and ecumenical context occasions these questions. Moreover, as will be shown in this contribution, such perspectives are indeed possible and even exist already *in nuce* in Old Catholic theology. Focusing on ecological questions in relation to liturgical ecclesiology and theology, furthermore, creates the opportunity for showing the breadth of the Old Catholic paradigm, which is often misunderstood as dealing with ecclesiological (and/or related liturgical and canonical) matters only. Liturgical theology is engrained in one of the most significant expressions of Old Catholic self-understanding, the preamble to the Statute of the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches. The preamble also refers to the interrelationship between Old Catholic liturgical theology and creation, for it holds that a local church is also "a manifestation of the renewal of creation that has its origin in Jesus Christ" and that "it is on the way to its fulfilment which all its members have to go in repentance and hope."<sup>12</sup> This statement is not a full theology of creation, but it indicates the direction in which such a theology could be developed. In his dissertation on liturgical theology, Ploeger goes a few steps further. With reference to the work of the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas' and the Lutheran theologian Gordon Lathrop's work, as well as to the work of the Old Catholic theologian Herwig Aldenhoven and to the Faith and Order documents, *Church and World* (1970) and *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness* (1994),<sup>13</sup> Ploeger observes:

Another emphasis flowing from the eucharist is the responsibility for creation – ecology, the environment, the resources of the earth. As the church confesses the redemption of the whole earth, and celebrates the highest value

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gen der altkatholischen Bewegung', *IKZ* 36 (1946) 8–16: 16, who argues that the struggle for the essence of the church is the key concern of Old Catholicism.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 2).

<sup>12</sup> Par. 3.2, see: Urs von Arx/Maja Weyermann, *Statut der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz (IBK)* (Beiheft zu IKZ 91; Bern: Stämpfli, 2001), 29.

<sup>13</sup> See Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 2), 536.

of earthly sacraments – water, bread, wine, oil – the church should also realize its responsibility towards this very earth. This is a consequence of the fact that restored *koinonia*, proleptically experienced in the church and the liturgy, is meant to embrace all creation.<sup>14</sup>

Similar insights, formulated in a more meditative style, were also offered by Joachim Vobbe, former Bishop of the Old Catholic Diocese of Germany (1995–2010), in his pastoral letters on the seven sacraments.<sup>15</sup> From a liberation theology perspective, which resonates well with Pope Francis's recent environmental encyclical, the German Old Catholic ethicist Franz Segbers has articulated his conviction that a mode of living together ought to be found that allows the entire 'household' (*oikos*) of our planet earth to flourish.<sup>16</sup> Segbers outlined this position in a treatise on human rights and economy in which he follows those who have added a declaration of the rights of 'mother earth' to the Declaration on Human Rights.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See, notably: Joachim Vobbe, 'Denk-Mahl göttlicher Zukunft', in: idem, *Brot aus dem Steintal. Bischofsbriefe* (Bonn: Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag, 2005), 111–169. See further also: Angela Berlis, 'Kleine Gebetsétude zum Wettersegen', in: Brigitte Enzner-Probst/Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (eds), *Schöpfungsspiritualität lehren, lernen und leben. Theologische Aspekte – Praktische Impulse* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2013), 176–181.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Franz Segbers, [http://kirchentag.blog.rosalux.de/2015/07/08/franz-segbers-die-klage-der-armen-ebenso-zu-hoeren-wie-die-klage-der-erde/#\\_ednref13](http://kirchentag.blog.rosalux.de/2015/07/08/franz-segbers-die-klage-der-armen-ebenso-zu-hoeren-wie-die-klage-der-erde/#_ednref13) (accessed 28.06.2016), in which he states: "Ziel kann nicht das Wachstumsmodell des Nordens sein, sondern eine Konzeption des 'Guten Lebens für alle', die auf der 'gemeinsamen Bestimmung der Güter für alle' (93) beruht und der Schöpfung als eigenem Rechtssubjekt umfassende Rechte einräumt. Eine ökologisch begründete Gleichheit, in religiöser Sprache 'das gemeinsame Haus', ist von anderer Qualität. Sie untergräbt Herrschaftsverhältnisse, indem sie den Planeten als Mutter Erde und alle, die diesen Planeten bewohnen, als Schwestern und Brüder begreift. Das relativiert die hergebrachte Eigentumsordnung. Ein 'ökologisches Menschenrecht' für 'das gemeinsame Haus' kann ein Wegweiser für eine rechtebasierte linke Praxis sein. Jeder Mensch hat das gleiche Recht auf einen gleichen Anteil an den Gütern des Planeten. Denn die Erde ist 'ein gemeinsames Erbe (...), dessen Früchte allen zugutekommen müssen (...). Folglich muss der gesamte ökologische Ansatz eine soziale Perspektive einbeziehen, welche die Grundrechte derer berücksichtigt, die am meisten übergangen werden' (93)." References are made to the encyclical as it has been published here: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) (accessed 28.06.2016).

<sup>17</sup> See Franz Segbers, *Ökonomie, die dem Leben dient. Die Menschenrechte als Grundlage einer christlichen Wirtschaftsethik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2015), 164–168.

These reflections on ecology and theology in recent expressions of Old Catholic theology both allow a conclusion to be drawn and provide a starting point for a dialogue between Old Catholic theology and the theological considerations about ecology and sustainable development offered by the ecumenical patriarchate. The conclusion is that there is no fully developed discussion of ecology in contemporary expressions of Old Catholic mainstream theology, although publications considering other matters offer indications that such a theology could be developed, and both Ploeger's work in liturgical theology and Segbers' work in liberation theology raise the possibility that this could be done from the vantage point of a Eucharistic *communio* theology, as would be typical for Old Catholic theology. This situation makes it desirable that this approach or vision be developed in discussion with representatives from a compatible theological paradigm who have pursued the matter at somewhat greater length. The primary interlocutor will be the current Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, who, as the 'green patriarch', has not only placed a strong emphasis on the topic of ecology but has also done so from within a theological paradigm akin to that which has become dominant in Old Catholic theology, which is just as significant. Old Catholic and Orthodox theology tends to be liturgical and sacramental in nature and to take its cue from the faith and order of the early church, a compatibility that has long been recognized and which forms the foundation for the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. The Constantinopolitan Tradition of 'Green Theology' and the 'Green Patriarch'

Although the focus of this section will be on the eco-theological reflections of the current incumbent of the ecumenical see, Bartholomew I, it should be noted from the start that Orthodox theological reflection on ecology dates back at least to an encyclical issued by Bartholomew's immediate predecessor, Demetrios I (1914–1991; Patriarch 1972–1991), in 1989. This encyclical called for prayer for the preservation of the environ-

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<sup>18</sup> Together with introductory materials, the statements produced by this dialogue have been published in their entirety as: Urs von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis. Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der gemeinsamen Texte des orthodox-altkatholischen Dialogs 1975–1987 mit französischer und englischer Übersetzung* (Beiheft zu IKZ 79; Bern: Stämpfli, 1989). The English version of the texts can be found on 173–229.

ment and set apart 1 September, the first day of the (Orthodox) liturgical year, for this purpose, defining it as the 'Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation', and urging all the faithful not only to pray and give thanks for creation but also to respect and protect it.<sup>19</sup> Since then, an annual 'ecological' encyclical has been published on 1 September. This appeal, both provoked by and resonating with the growing ecological concern across churches, the ecumenical movement, and society at large, received a very favourable response, both when it was first issued by Demetrios I and as it has been continued by his successor, Bartholomew. Bartholomew has also endeavoured to host a series of high profile symposia on the topic, organized through the Patriarchate's Religious and Scientific Committee and involving not only religious leaders but also key political figures, such as the president of the European Commission, José Barroso, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. As a result of these efforts, Bartholomew was not only listed by *Time Magazine* (2008) as one of the 100 most influential people in the world for drawing attention to the "spiritual dimension of environmentalism",<sup>20</sup> but he also received the nickname 'green Patriarch',<sup>21</sup> reflecting a perception that 'green' concerns have become his trademark. Bartholomew's theological vision has found a number of expressions, not only in his own writings but also in those of theologians closely associated with the ecumenical see, such as Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon and Archdeacon John Chryssavgis.<sup>22</sup> A

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<sup>19</sup> See the encyclical letters of September 1, 1989 as it was issued by Patriarch Demetrios I in: John Chryssavgis (ed.), *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer. The Ecological Vision of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2009 [2003]), 35–37: 36. Soon this day received its own liturgical materials as well, on which see, e.g., John D. Alexander, "'From Lightning and Tempest; From Earthquake, Fire, and Flood': Environmental Sin and Reconciliation in the Book of Common Prayer (1979)," in: Jennifer Phillips (ed.), *Ambassadors for God. Envisioning Reconciliation Rites for the 21st Century* (New York: Church Pension Fund, 2010), 54–69: 66.

<sup>20</sup> See Rowan Williams, 'Bartholomew I', [http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1733748\\_1733757\\_1735535,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/article/0,28804,1733748_1733757_1735535,00.html) (accessed 03.10.2016).

<sup>21</sup> Popularized in the media from 1996 onwards, used publicly and to much acclaim by Vice President Al Gore in 1997, see: <https://www.apostolicpilgrimage.org/the-green-patriarch> (accessed 03.10.2016).

<sup>22</sup> See for their writings, which, in the case of John Chryssavgis, also include editions of writings by Bartholomew I: John Zizioulas, 'Preserving God's Creation. Three Lectures on Theology and Ecology', *King's Theological Review* 12 (1989) 1–5.41–45; 12 (1990), 1–5, and especially: *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*

representative and rather programmatic expression of his perspective can be found in the so-called *Quasimodo* lecture, entitled “Faith and Environment. An Inspirational Perspective”, delivered by Patriarch Bartholomew in the Netherlands in 2014, and hosted by the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup>

Bartholomew’s argument can be summarised as follows. First, he outlines an Orthodox vision of creation, highlighting its goodness and its sacramentality:

In its foremost and traditional symbol and declaration of faith, the Orthodox Church confesses “one God, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.” An Orthodox Christian perspective on the natural environment derives from the fundamental belief that the world was created by a loving God. The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures state, in the opening book of Genesis, that “God saw everything that was created and, indeed, it was very good.” (Gen. 1.31) Indeed, all of creation was granted by God to humanity as a gift, with the command to “serve and preserve the earth.” (Gen. 2.15) If the earth is sacred, then our relationship with the natural environment is sacramental; that is to say, it contains the seed and trace of God. In many ways, the ‘sin of Adam’ is precisely his refusal to receive the world as a gift of communion with God and with the rest of creation.<sup>24</sup>

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(London: T&T Clark, 2011) – for a systematic consideration of Zizioulas’ view of creation, see, e.g., Jaroslav Z. Skira, ‘The Ecological Bishop. Metropolitan John Zizioulas’ Theology of Creation’, *Toronto Journal of Theology* 19 (2003) 199–213; for representative works by John Chryssavgis, see: *Grace* (see note 19); *Beyond the Shattered Image. Insights into a Christian Orthodox Ecological World View, Light and Life Books* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1999); *In the World, Yet Not of the World. Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University, 2009); *Speaking the Truth in Love. Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University, 2010); *On Earth as in Heaven. Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University, 2012); *The Patriarch of Solidarity. Ecological and Global Concerns of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (Istanbul: Istos, 2013); with Bruce V. Foltz (eds), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration. Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation* (New York: Fordham University, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> The visit is documented in: Jan Jorrit Hasselaar/Peter-Ben Smit (eds), *An Ongoing Conversation. The Green Patriarch in the Netherlands* (Amersfoort: Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, ‘Faith and Environment. An Inspirational Perspective’, in: Hasselaar/Smit (eds), *Ongoing Conversation* (see note 23), 48–57: 49.



Having thus identified the ecological crisis as a theological issue, Bartholomew goes on to observe: "This is where healing is needed first. This is where change needs to take place. Man's conversion from having to being. Religious faith, which bears crucial values and truths for the human being and his precious gift of freedom, can surely contribute to this conversion."<sup>25</sup> To show this, he first outlines how Orthodox belief in the goodness of creation is linked to Orthodox soteriology, which for Bartholomew is expressed primarily through the notion of transfiguration, that is, the permeation of creation by divine energies and its consequent transformation – for which Christ's transfiguration on Mount Tabor is paradigmatic – to its state of original in-corruption. The Patriarch illustrated this understanding with references both to classical homilies and to a liturgical prayer:

The Homilies of St. Macarius underline this connection between the Transfiguration of Christ and the sanctification of human nature: *Just as the Lord's body was glorified, when he went up the (Tabor) mountain and was transfigured into glory and into infinite light (...) so, too, our human nature is transformed into the power of God, being kindled into fire and light.* (Homily XV, 38) And the hymns of the day further extend this divine light and transformative power to the whole world:

*Today, on Mt. Tabor,  
in the manifestation of your light, O Lord,  
You were unaltered from the light  
of the unbegotten Father.  
We have seen the Father as light,  
and the Spirit as light,  
guiding with light the entire creation.*<sup>26</sup>

From this and the preceding perspective on creation, Bartholomew draws conclusions concerning the interrelatedness of humankind and (the rest of) creation, arguing that "the natural creation [is] inseparable from the identity and destiny of humanity, because every human action leaves a lasting imprint on the body of the earth."<sup>27</sup> Developing this line of thought further, while drawing on his earlier insight that the environmental crisis is a spiritual matter, to be associated with Adam's fall, Bartholomew focuses on two key terms from the Orthodox spiritual and theological tradi-

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<sup>25</sup> See Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 55.

<sup>26</sup> Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 49.

<sup>27</sup> Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 50.

tion that indicate a redemptive and, therefore, potentially transformative approach to the relationship between humankind and creation: Eucharist/Eucharistic and asceticism/ascetic. Both denote a distinct approach to creation. He outlines the meaning of the Eucharistic ethos by arguing that a consumerist approach to the world turns this world into a collection of goods to be acquired and consumed, and that this leads to a situation of competition, a '*bellum omnium contra omnes*' which cuts off human beings from the creator of the world and from each other. A Eucharistic approach to the world, in contrast, functions quite differently:

A eucharistically minded person understands that God created the world, not for it to disappear, but rather for it to be transformed. He did not create humans to be the owners or exploiters of creation, but rather priests of Creation, who use all of its 'goods' eucharistically, not by destroying creation, but by beautifying it. He or she does not own things, but participates in them, while being in communion with the others, as sharers of common life. Thanksgiving, then, is a distinctive and definitive characteristic of human beings. A human is not merely a logical or political being. Above all, human beings are eucharistic creatures, capable of gratitude and endowed with the power to bless God for the gift of creation. Without such thanksgiving, we are not truly human.<sup>28</sup>

In the Patriarch's thought, this Eucharistic approach is accompanied and complemented by the notion of asceticism: "The ascetic way is the moving away from what we want as individuals to what the world needs as a whole. It is valuing everything for itself, and not simply for ourselves. It is regaining a sense of wonder and being filled with a sense of goodness."<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, this "ascetic ethos is the struggle for self-restraint and self-control, whereby we no longer wilfully consume everything, but instead manifest a sense of frugality and abstinence from certain things. This protection and the self-restraint as well as sharing are expressions of love for all of humanity and for the entire creation."<sup>30</sup> The result of an ascetic attitude, which enables a person to appreciate others for themselves, and creation for itself, is the transformation of a person from an instrument of violence to an instrument of peace. Bartholomew argues that both economy and ecology are related to the notion of a dwelling place (*oikos*), so that care for creation as a dwelling place should, logically, extend to both humans

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<sup>28</sup> Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 53.

<sup>29</sup> Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 53, quotation in the text from: Chrysavgis, *Grace* (see note 19), 360.

<sup>30</sup> Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 53.



and other parts of creation. He notes that the essence of the Orthodox tradition is exemplified by and communicated through its ecclesial and especially liturgical life, in which the interrelationship between God and creation is celebrated by humankind as they experience in an anticipatory way the eschatological *koinonia* of all things with God and act as the 'priest of creation', living out and celebrating the paradigmatic "Thine own from Thine own we offer to Thee, in all and for all." (Liturgy of John Chrysostom, cf. 1 Chr. 29:14). This tradition has something significant to offer:

This is where the importance of Orthodox Tradition, theology, the experience of its Eucharistic and ascetic ethos, which expresses man's relationship with God, himself, with his fellow man and the world, is hidden but also demonstrated. Orthodox ethos is person-centered and oiko-centered. The Church's entire life is a witness to how we can live in this world without exploiting and without destroying it. Ecclesial being is the response of man to God's calling (*klesis*) to live eucharistically and ascetically, to be faithful in love, to protect and preserve creation, which we will offer back with humility to the Creator.<sup>31</sup>

In this way, Bartholomew develops the main contours of his approach to an ecological theology and offers it to the world. This sketch, based largely on Bartholomew's 2014 public lecture, provides a good starting point for the next section, which seeks to compare this outline of Bartholomew's theology to approaches to this issue in the Old Catholic theological tradition. The aim is not only to note similarities, but also to point out areas in which the Old Catholic tradition could be further developed.

#### **4. The Constantinopolitan Tradition and Old Catholic Theology**

When turning to a comparison of mainstream Old Catholic theology and the 'Constantinopolitan tradition' of ecologically sensitive theology, a number of similarities can be observed, both in terms of approach and in terms of orientation. In both cases, the dominant theological paradigm is a liturgical theology with a strong emphasis on the notion of *koinonia* (communion, or fellowship). Old Catholics and Orthodox alike have adopted this perspective since the mid-twentieth century, and it has been articulated by Orthodox theologians such as Nicholas Afanasieff (Russian Orthodox) and John (Zizoulas) of Pergamon (Ecumenical patriarchate) and by Old Catholic theologians such as Werner Küppers and Kurt Stalder,

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<sup>31</sup> Bartholomew, 'Faith' (see note 24), 55.

and developed further by theologians including Herwig Aldenhoven, Urs von Arx, Jan Visser, and Mattijs Ploeger. The (re)discovery of this perspective seems to have been to some extent a parallel development in both traditions, with, on the Old Catholic side, significant influence from the liturgical movement and the *nouvelle théologie*, but Old Catholic theologians have also actively engaged with the work of both Afanasieff and Zizioulas. In the work of all these theologians, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch have played a key role. To be sure, within Old Catholic theology the reception of Ignatius has taken place primarily with an eye to the development of an ecumenically viable ecclesiology with roots in the faith and order of the early Church. Such an ecclesiology has enabled the reformulation of the self-understanding of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches in the face of a number of challenges, arising both from ecumenical dialogues (e.g., with the Roman Catholic Church) and from internal discussions (e.g., concerning the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry), in a new manner, developing further the (not unproblematic) ecclesiology of the “national church” which had been a main paradigm in Old Catholic theology in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>32</sup> These developments led to the drawing up of new statutes for the International Bishops’ Conference, which were published in 2001 and which incorporated an ecclesiological preamble that outlined an explicitly Eucharistic ecclesiology of the local church. This ecclesiology also underlies the ecological theology of the ecumenical patriarchate. Therefore, at a very fundamental level there is a striking similarity between the two theological paradigms.

These similarities of theological orientation, sources, and paradigms can also help to explain the fundamental agreement between the Old Catholic and Orthodox approaches to the theology of ecology. The fundamental soteriological vision, inherent to both these theological approaches, looks forward to the redemption of the entirety of creation through its eschatological transformation in a way which is analogous to the transformation of bread and wine in the Eucharist into the body of Christ. To articulate this transformation in Old Catholic theology, liturgical language would be more commonly used than the parallel to the transfiguration of

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<sup>32</sup> On this, see Smit, *Ecclesiologies* (see note 10). Ecclesiologies of the national church became somewhat problematic due to their development in an outspoken nationalistic direction in the 1930s and 1940s.

Jesus on Mount Tabor, to which Patriarch Bartholomew appeals.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, the redemption of humankind, which is celebrated liturgically and proleptically with the people of God acting as the priests of creation (also a term less commonly used in Old Catholic than in Orthodox theology), is one aspect of the redemption of the entirety of creation.<sup>34</sup> In both theologies, the material matters – the human body just as much as the rest of the material creation – since all is meant to be transformed and thus redeemed. Accordingly, each part of creation that facilitates an experience of God (or of the divine energies – a term decidedly less used in Old Catholic theology than in Orthodox theology, given that the theological concerns and debates, notably those of *hesychasm*, associated with it are much less prominent in Western than in Orthodox theology)<sup>35</sup> can be regarded as sacramental in character, just as the elements used in the sacra-

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<sup>33</sup> Without a doubt, this has everything to do with the distinctive reception of this narrative in Orthodox theology, especially as it was associated with *hesychasm*, as it is currently reflected in the first of the 'Chapters against Barlaam and Akindynos' in the 'Synodikon of Orthodoxy'. – See for an overview of the New Testament and patristic sources (and their reception in Anglicanism) also: Benjamin Thomas, *An Anglican Hermeneutics of the Transfiguration* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> On it, see also: John Zizioulas, 'Proprietors or Priests of Creation', in: Chrysavgis/Foltz (eds), *Ecology* (see note 22), 163–171.

<sup>35</sup> A circumstance that is duly noted by the Old Catholic systematic theologian Herwig Aldenhoven, 'Die Unterscheidung zwischen einer erkennbar-zugänglichen und einer unerkennbar-unzugänglichen Seite in Gott und die Trinitätslehre. Zur Auseinandersetzung westlicher Theologie mit der ostkirchlichen Lehre von den ungeschaffenen Energien Gottes', *IKZ* 72 (1982) 214–232, while both its importance in the East and the lack thereof in the West are also stressed by John Chrysavgis/Bruce V. Foltz, 'Introduction. "The Sweetness of Heaven Overflows onto the Earth": Orthodox Christianity and Environmental Thought', in: Chrysavgis/Foltz (eds), *Ecology* (see note 22), 1–8, esp. 3–4; in the same volume, David Bradshaw, 'The *Logoi* of Beings in Greek Patristic Thought' (9–22) considers the matter at further length. Also from the contributions of Kallistos Ware, 'From Creation to the Creator' (86–105) and Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Creation as Communion in Contemporary Orthodox Theology' (106–120) the importance of the notion of 'divine energies' is clear. The issue was also mentioned in the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, even in such a way that the fundamental compatibility of this notion with Western theological thought is implied; see the joint Orthodox-Old Catholic statement 'Doctrine of God', in: Harding Meyer/Lukas Vischer (eds), *Growth in Agreement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 391–393, esp. 392: "In Jesus Christ, the Triune God, whose essence is inaccessible and incomprehensible to us, revealed himself in his salvific energies and, indeed, in his whole plenitude: 'We say that we do indeed know our God from his energies, (...) but his essence remains beyond our reach' (Basil the Great, Letter 234,1)."

ments or the sacramentals – although to be sure neither tradition attributes much value either to this distinction or to the precise number, e.g., seven, of the sacraments. However, it is likely Old Catholic theology, aware of the predominantly Western debates concerning ‘natural theology’ which were, and continue to be, part of the theological landscape of post-Reformation and especially twentieth-century theology, and the related debates concerning epistemology and revelation, would be somewhat more reluctant than, for example, Patriarch Bartholomew, to speak of the sacramentality of creation except in a qualified way.

The similarities in theological approach are thus accompanied by some differences in theological terminology which relate to the different historical trajectories and controversies that have shaped the Eastern and Western traditions. However, some further differences may also be noted. Two of these are of particular importance and can be understood as a challenge to Old Catholic theology. The first is the emphasis on transformation in the Orthodox tradition, which extends into an ethos (in the sense of a way of life) that is both Eucharistic and ascetic and therefore transformative in nature. Both of the latter two aspects of the orthodox ethos have a liberating and redemptive quality when it comes to addressing the spiritual roots of the current ecological crisis. When this is compared to the Old Catholic Eucharistic theology of the local church, such as that presented by the theologians mentioned above, it is striking that the Eucharistic dimension is certainly present, as is also an emphasis on the Eucharistic nature of the church, which has a sacramental character which points towards a fully redeemed creation and makes this redemption already present proleptically. However there is much less emphasis on *askesis*. It would be incorrect to say that this aspect is absent, but it would be even less correct to argue that there is a strong ascetic ethos in Old Catholic Churches, whether in terms of personal *askesis*, of corporate *askesis*, or of a public witness that emphasizes an ascetic lifestyle. It might possibly be argued that the Old Catholic Churches, at least one of which has a very strongly ascetic heritage,<sup>36</sup> are somehow ‘in recovery’ from too strict an

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<sup>36</sup> I.e. the tradition of Augustinianism (often referred to under the misnomer ‘Jansenism’) that is part of history and tradition of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, in particular during the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries; see for a brief outline, e.g., Dick J. Schoon, *Van bisschoppelijke Cleresie tot Oud-Katholieke Kerk. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Nederland in de 19e eeuw* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2004), 18–30.

ascetic discipline in the past, co-heirs as they are to the various 20<sup>th</sup> century emancipatory movements.<sup>37</sup> However, it is also worth asking whether the Western ascetic tradition, or that of the early church, might not have more to offer than currently is apparent from the lives and public witness of the churches which are its heirs. The forty-day period of Lent continues to be kept, and there has been, at least to some extent, a rediscovery of Lenten fasting, often with an eye to spiritual growth. However, it can reasonably be asked whether such practices are connected in any meaningful way to the notion that to engage in asceticism is to allow one's body, as an integral part of the human person and as part of material creation, to be transformed as part of its redemption. One may also wonder whether the lack of monastic communities in the Old Catholic Churches and absence of a strong monastic tradition such as that found in Orthodoxy might offer an explanation for this difference. This is certainly a point on which Old Catholic theology could allow itself to be challenged by its Orthodox partner, especially given the potential of an ascetic ethos for the development of a theological approach to the current environmental crisis.

The second major difference between the Orthodox and Old Catholic discourses pertains to their respective audiences. As may be obvious from the discussion above, the ecological witness of the ecumenical patriarchate is explicitly, and quite consciously and effectively, addressed to a broad audience. Thus Bartholomew's 2014 lecture received formal responses from a former Dutch prime minister and the CEO of a company pioneering green approaches to energy.<sup>38</sup> In stark contrast, virtually all Old Catholic articulations of a Eucharistic and ecological theology are either directed at internal ecclesiological issues or contribute to ecumenical dialogue of the 'faith and order' variety. There are exceptions, such as the report of a dialogue commission on Catholicity and Globalization (2006–2008) which sought to articulate a Eucharistic vision which was consciously oriented towards society, but they are so rare as to serve to confirm the rule.<sup>39</sup> This

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<sup>37</sup> See for a consideration of the interrelationship between Old Catholic theology and liberal approaches to theology: Mattijs Ploeger, 'De relevantie van een door-dachte geloofsvisie. Over het vak "systematische theologie" in oud-katholiek perspectief', in: Kees van der Kooi et al. (eds), *Vele gaven, één geest. Meedenken met Martien Parmentier op het gebied van oecumenica, patristiek en theologie van de charismatische vernieuwing* (Gorinchem: Ekklesia, 2012), 63–77.

<sup>38</sup> See the documentation in Hasselaar/Smit (eds), *Ongoing* (see note 23), 56–61.

<sup>39</sup> See Dutton (ed.), *Globalization* (see note 3), Segbers, 'Vision' (see note 3), and Smit, 'Pilgrimage' (see note 3).



‘introversion’ of the Old Catholic reception of the paradigm of a Eucharistic theology belies the fact that the Old Catholic theological heritage is in principle very open to interaction with society, as it is beginning to rediscover.<sup>40</sup> Certainly such introversion is neither a necessity, as its Orthodox counterpart shows when it comes to matters of ecology,<sup>41</sup> nor a characteristic of the Western tradition, as shown by the example of the Anglo-Catholic social gospel,<sup>42</sup> a tradition with which Old Catholicism has felt, and

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<sup>40</sup> Notice should be taken, in this respect, not just of the societal position and influence of many figures associated with the monastery of Port-Royal (as well as of the institution itself) – given the extent to which church and society could coincide in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, ecclesial renewal always implied societal renewal – but also of some of the programmatic statements of the early phases of the Old Catholic movement, such as a declaration of the congress of Catholics held in Munich in 1871 that observes the following concerning the education of the clergy: “Wir halten bei der Heranbildung des katholischen Klerus die Pflege der Wissenschaft für unentbehrlich. Wir betrachten die künstliche Abschliessung des Klerus von der geistigen Kultur des Jahrhunderts (in Knabenseminarien und einseitig von Bischöfen geleiteten höheren Lehranstalten) bei dessen großen Einflüssen auf die Volkskultur als gefährlich und höchst ungeeignet zur Erziehung und Heranbildung eines sittlich frommen, wissenschaftlich erleuchteten und patriotisch gesinnten Klerus. Wir verlangen für den sog. niederen Klerus eine würdige und gegen jegliche hierarchische Willkür geschützte Stellung. Wir verwerfen die durch das französische Recht eingeführte und neuestens allgemeiner angestrebte willkürliche Versetzbarkeit (*amovibilitas ad nutum*) der Seelsorgsgeistlichen.” For the statement, see Johann Friedrich von Schulte, *Der Altkatholizismus* (Aalen: Scientia, 2002 [= Giessen: E. Roth, 1887]), 22–24: 24 (it concerns the statement’s fourth point). – Even if this focus may not have always been at the forefront of Old Catholic theologizing, it has been anything but absent in recent decades either, see, e.g., the pastoral letters of Hans Gerny, published during his service as bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, entitled as they are *Predigt auf dem Marktplatz* (Basel: Christkatholischer Schriftenverlag, 2001), while also some of the efforts of the Dutch Old Catholic Church in this respect are apparent from Hasselaar/Smit (eds), *Ongoing* (see note 23), as well as from its support for the translation of works of public theology, such as Rowan Williams, *Geloof in de publieke ruimte* (Vught: Skandalon, 2013), as translation of *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> For the suggestion that Old Catholic ecclesiology might be somewhat ‘introverted’, see Smit, *Ecclesiologies* (see note 10), 477.

<sup>42</sup> On which see, e.g., the contributions in: Kenneth Leech/Rowan Williams (eds), *Essays Catholic and Radical. A Jubilee Group Symposium for the 150th Anniversary of the Beginning of the Oxford Movement 1833–1983* (London: Bowerdean, 1983).

continues to feel, much affinity,<sup>43</sup> or by Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In other words, the way in which the Ecumenical Patriarch is able to identify and discuss contemporary societal problems in spiritual, and therefore theological, terms, using the lens of its Eucharistic theology and often drawing on a quite traditional conceptuality and language, is certainly a challenge for contemporary Old Catholicism, which arguably possesses a very similar theological 'lens' through which it might look at society, but seems to use it to a much lesser extent. The comparison presented in this paper suggests that there are ample opportunities for Old Catholic theology and praxis in this respect. These might take the form of a more conscious expression of the interrelationship between 'heaven and earth' in the liturgy, for instance, through a conscious celebration of the offertory in order to establish a tangible and visible connection between the gifts of creation and the Eucharistic gifts, or of a more explicitly sacramental understanding of the whole of creation in theological reflection.

Having now outlined a number of fundamental similarities between the two theological paradigms under consideration here, as well as identifying two differences between them that can both be conceptualized as challenges to Old Catholic theology, we turn our attention to a final issue, the question of how such theological growth might most appropriately be encouraged. This can never consist of simply copying whatever is being said in another tradition (the transmission of something from one context into another one always leads to a change of meaning). The aim is to sketch a means of developing more fully the seeds of an ecological theology which are, without a doubt, already present *in nuce* in the Old Catholic tradition both in its systematic theological reflection and in its liturgical expression.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., the ample attention given to this tradition in Ploeger, *Celebrating* (see note 2).

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., the critical comments made by both Angela Berlis, 'Die Sprache des Gebets im alt-katholischen Eucharistiebuch', in: Birgit Jeggle-Merz/Benedikt Kranemann (eds), *Liturgie und Konfession. Grundfragen der Liturgiewissenschaft im interkonfessionellen Gespräch* (Freiburg: Herder, 2013), 125–139, and David Holeyton, 'Old Catholic Eucharistic Prayers in Ecumenical Context: Some Current Questions', *IKZ* 103 (2013) 53–79, concerning the role of creation in Old Catholic (Eucharistic) liturgy. Yet, what these contributions might not take into account sufficiently is the emphatic role of creation in the (optional and frequently silent) prayers at the offertory, e.g. in the service book of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands (Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland, *Kerkboek van de Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland* [Baarn: Gooi en Sticht, 1993], 480–481 [first series of prayers]), which



## 5. A 'Synodal Approach'?

### 5.1 *The Example of the Ecumenical Patriarchate*

Outlining an interesting theological paradigm, discovering a fit between two paradigms, or identifying ways in the one paradigm that might challenge the other, as has been done above, is one thing. Answering these challenges in a way that is both ecclesiologicaly sound and contextually appropriate is quite another, especially the intention is to develop a method by which newly gained insights can be effectively communicated to an audience broader than that defined by the canonical boundaries of the Church, in the hope of embarking on a journey towards a more sustainable treatment of creation. It is in this respect that the contribution of the ecumenical patriarchate to the ecological debate is all the more striking, because its vision is so broadly received. In what follows, it will be proposed that, even though it would make little sense to simply 'copy and paste' the paradigm used by the ecumenical patriarchate, its method, which can be termed 'synodal' whether in the traditional sense of the word (referring to formal church gatherings) or in the looser sense of the word (when no formal synod is involved) or in the literal sense of the word etymologically speaking (a process that has to do with being on the road together, or of discovering a common path), may also be helpful in a Western European context. In taking such an approach, the relationship between church and society becomes dialogical rather than antagonistic; both those 'in the church' and those 'outside' (canonically and sociologically speaking) become participants in the same conversation. This can best happen when all consider themselves to be stakeholders in the issues which are the subject

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includes the following two *berachot*, the first concerning the bread, the second concerning the wine: "Gezegend zijt Gij, God, Heer van al wat leeft. Uit uw milde hand hebben wij het brood ontvangen. Aan U dragen wij op de vrucht van de aarde, het werk van onze handen. Maak het voor ons tot brood van eeuwig leven." "Gezegend zijt Gij, God Heer van al wat leeft. Uit uw milde hand hebben wij de beker ontvangen. Aan U dragen wij op de vrucht van de wijnstok, het werk van onze handen. Maak het voor ons tot bron van eeuwig leven." Other Old Catholic rites contain similar prayers, which, in principle, can be part of every celebration of the Eucharist and may also be spoken aloud. Also, the various hymnbooks in use in Old Catholic Churches contain plenty of resources for a more ecologically aware way of worshipping. – See for an interdisciplinary approach for analyzing a liturgical tradition from an eco-theological perspective the doctoral thesis of Jeremy M.S. Clines, *Earthing Common Worship. An Ecotheological Critique of the Common Worship Texts of the Church of England* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011).

of the conversation. And in an exchange about ecology and the future of the planet Earth, all can (or at least should) consider themselves to be stakeholders: the future of our planet concerns all who inhabit it.

As noted above, one of the most striking aspects of the ecological vision of the ecumenical patriarchate as it is currently being articulated by Bartholomew I is that although it comes in a rather traditional theological shape, it has nonetheless received a rather broad reception, both within churches and fellowships of churches (such as the World Council of Churches and in the encyclical *Laudato Si*) and beyond the churches. One factor that may have contributed to its broad resonance could well be the 'synodal' approach that was chosen in order to develop the paradigm further after its first articulation by patriarch Demetrios I in 1989. However, both its first articulation and its further development are the work of more than just one or two men. The famous 1989 encyclical, which accompanied the designation of 1 September as a 'Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation', arose from a suggestion to the ecumenical patriarchate made by the second of three inter-Orthodox consultations on the WCC's programme of 'Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation'. This meeting took place in 1988 on the island of Patmos and called for a day to be set apart for the purpose of prayer for the integrity of creation. The ecumenical patriarchate delegated Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) as its primary representative. The 1988 meeting, like the other meetings in this series, was inspired by the WCC's JPIC programme, but it was also guided by an awareness that care for creation was a significant pan-Orthodox topic.<sup>45</sup> The request for such a day – and, *de facto*, for the accompanying encyclical – thus arose out of a synodal process within Orthodoxy, the context of which was provided by the equally synodically organized ecumenical movement in the shape of the WCC. That the designation of 1 September as a day for prayer for the integrity of creation had, and continues to have, significant support within the Orthodox community is apparent by the tradition of annual encyclicals on 1 September, the endorsement of this

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<sup>45</sup> See John Chryssavgis, 'A New Heaven and a New Earth: Orthodox Christian Insights from Theology, Spirituality, and the Sacraments', in: idem/Foltz (eds), *Ecology* (see note 22), 152–162: 153–154. See also the documentation provided by Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation. Insights from Orthodoxy* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990), as well as the more recent overview provided by: Crina Gschwandter, 'Orthodox ecological theology: Bartholomew I and Orthodox Contributions to the Ecological Debate', in: *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 10 (2010) 130–143.

day by all Orthodox patriarchs and primates in 1991, and from the level of resources that the ecumenical patriarchate is able to muster in order to develop and communicate its ecological vision. In addition, from 1989 onwards, the ecumenical patriarchate also embarked on a highly successful process of interdisciplinary engagement which was characterized by an intentional dialogue with voices from beyond the realms of theology and the church as well as those of theologians and the ecclesial tradition. Indeed, already the 1988 Patmos meeting was organized in cooperation with the Greek government and was not a purely theological affair. From 1992, and from 1994 under the aegis of the patriarchate's Religious and Scientific Committee, chaired by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas), a series of symposia and conferences, some of which took place in private in the Halki theological school, others of which took place in affected regions, such as on the Black Sea, have succeeded in bringing together prominent environmentalists, politicians, scholars of a variety of disciplines, ecclesial leaders, activists and artists, to cooperate in developing an ecological vision.<sup>46</sup> This has resulted in an ecological vision, which is not only very well-informed, but also cast in language which seems to be understood well beyond the realm of church and theology. It has proved a highly successful attempt at articulating a 'public theology' and allowing theology and religion to operate as integral parts of the human conversation.<sup>47</sup> This approach and this vision are much more than an effective way of developing an attractive theology: such cooperation is grounded in the conviction that any approach to questions of ecology and sustainability must involve the cooperative and collective response of scientific disciplines, media, business, government and faith traditions, working together to respond to a crisis that has much to do with humanity's separation from the remainder of creation through an approach based on unity and communion. As a result, in this approach religion is not understood as a phenomenon pertaining to the private sphere, as it is increasingly common in Western societies, but as an integral, even leading, component of the conversation. One result has been to make apparent how Christian core teachings can address the dilemmas of the secular world.

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<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Chryssavgis, 'Earth' (see note 45), 154–155.

<sup>47</sup> See for this also the proposal made by Jonathan Sacks, e.g., in *The Home We Build Together* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

## 5.2 A 'Synodal Approach' and Old Catholic Theology: Considerations and Examples

This process and the method of theological discernment used by the ecumenical patriarchate can also speak to the Old Catholic tradition, which is strongly synodal.<sup>48</sup> Old Catholics have also sought to undertake theological discernment in conversation with ecumenical partners, for instance in the case of the ordination of women, or with regard to questions about living in a globalized world,<sup>49</sup> and Old Catholic theology has traditionally, at least since the late nineteenth century, been open to insights from the academic world, which have influenced, for example, ethical decision making. In recent years attempts have been made to develop a 'public theology', here expressed in Old Catholic theology engaged with initiatives in the public sphere. Some of these initiatives, in particular two 'round table' conversations on theology and sustainable development in the Netherlands, were directly inspired and influenced by the example of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, while also drawing on insights from the British rabbi Jonathan Sacks and his side-by-side approach to public theology. They brought together leading personalities from the fields of politics, business, academia, church, and media.<sup>50</sup> The trajectory that led to these 'round table' conversations has its roots both in the long-standing relationship between the Old Catholic Churches and Eastern Orthodoxy and in a study and research project directed by Jan Jorrit Hasselaar,<sup>51</sup> currently also the chair of the working group on Ecological Sustainability of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. This led to the organization of a

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<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Jan Hallebeek, 'The Old Catholic Synods. Traditional or Innovative Elements within the Constitution of the Church?', *IKZ* 101 (2011) 65–100.

<sup>49</sup> On the first, see, e.g., Urs von Arx, 'Die Debatte über die Frauenordination in den Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union,' in: Denise Buser/Adrian Loretan (eds), *Gleichstellung der Geschlechter und die Kirchen. Ein Beitrag zur menschenrechtlichen und ökumenischen Diskussion* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1999), 165–211; Angela Berlis, 'Women's Ordination in the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht', in: Ian Jones et al. (eds), *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches. International Perspectives* (London – New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 144–154. On the second, see Dutton (ed.), *Globalization* (see note 3).

<sup>50</sup> For a report on the first round table, see Hasselaar/Smit (eds), *Ongoing* (see note 23), 98–133.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Jan Jorrit Hasselaar, 'The Good News About Climate Change', in: Stephan van Erp et al. (eds), *Salvation in the World. The Crossroads of Public Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 163–179.

first ‘round table’ conversation on sustainable development in the context of the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch’s visit to the Netherlands in 2014. This meeting, which focused on ‘food and sustainable development’, used the model of the seminars and symposia organized by the Religious and Scientific Committee of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and was a joint effort of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. It took place at a farm pioneering sustainable approaches to agriculture; the ‘round table’ was chaired by Cees Veerman, a former Minister for Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries who is currently professor of Sustainable Rural Development at Wageningen University, and included distinguished speakers such as professor Rudy Rabbinge, University Professor of Sustainable Development and Food Security at Wageningen University and Member of the High Level Panel of Experts Steering Committee Food and Agriculture Organisation (United Nations). The meeting was opened and attended by the Ecumenical Patriarch. A second meeting took place on October 28, 2015, again a joint effort of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, on the theme ‘We Have a Dream: About Climate Change, Dilemmas and Hope in the Dutch Context.’ While the work of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the contribution of Rabbi Sacks, in particular his notion of the Sabbath and his side-by-side approach,<sup>52</sup> are continuing sources of inspiration, both conceptually and methodologically, input for the 2015 meeting was also derived from the encyclical *Laudato Si*. This meeting took place in the dunes near the North Sea beach of The Hague, where the effects of rising sea levels can be observed first-hand. While this ‘round table’ again brought together senior participants, it was also designed to facilitate real and potentially heated discussion, bringing a wide variety of perspectives and interests to the table.<sup>53</sup> Alongside the

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<sup>52</sup> See Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation, Exodus: The Book of Redemption* (Jerusalem – London: Maggid Books, 2010), 16–17.

<sup>53</sup> This is apparent from the list of keynoters, which include: Pier Vellinga, professor at Wageningen University and international expert in the area of climate change, e.g. co-founder of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Erik Borgman, professor of Public Theology and director of the Cobbenhagen Center (Tilburg University), and Jan Peter Balkenende, prime minister of the Netherlands (2002–2010), partner Ernst & Young, professor of Governance, Institutions and Internationalisation (Erasmus University Rotterdam) and chairman of Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition (AkzoNobel, DSM, FrieslandCampina, Heineken, KLM, Philips, Shell and Unilever).



keynote speakers, senior representatives from the fields of business, science, policy making, and religion participated,<sup>54</sup> together with a number of selected students. The 'round table' succeeded in creating an open and hospitable space in the public domain, a sabbatical in the public square, and thus contributed, in a 'synodal' fashion, to the development of a public discourse in which (Old Catholic) theology played a public role.

Such a synodal approach challenges the Old Catholic tradition to speak to the current ecological crisis, while at the same time making sure that a process of theological discernment is rooted deeply in the church, taking place in communion. In this way, it can do justice to and benefit from the various charismata of the members of the Body of Christ, rather than only those of a few, while also reaching out to and entering into conversation with parties beyond the (canonical boundaries of the) Church. This approach should also ensure that whatever comes out of the process is a public theology, both in the sense that it is positioned 'in the market square', and in the sense that it has been developed in interaction with the 'public' which has become a partner in a process of discernment rather than a passive onlooker or mere recipient of the Church's wisdom. However, this process also offers a means by which the Church's wisdom can be discovered again for a new age, for it allows the Church to enter into the conversation about the 'mother earth, our island home' with its own voice.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the above, a number of brief conclusions may be formulated. To begin with, it has become clear that the Old Catholic and Orthodox approaches, at least as far as they have been considered here, are largely compatible when it comes to the topic of creation and its renewal, both in relation to soteriology and in the paradigm of liturgical theology. Differences have been identified, including the Orthodox preference for referring to the transfiguration of Christ as a theological paradigm, Orthodox understanding of the renewal of creation and, through use of the notion of divine energies, of a sacramental approach to nature. The Old Catholic church is more reluctant to do the latter and refers to the transformation

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<sup>54</sup> Including Karin van den Broeke (President of the Synod of the Protestant Church in The Netherlands), Hans van den Hende (Roman Catholic Bishop of Rotterdam), the Dutch Climate Envoy Michiel Rentenaar and senior representatives of KPN, Royal Dutch Shell, Rabobank, Tata Steel and CNG Net.

taking place in the Eucharist instead of the transfiguration when it comes to the former. The most significant difference, however, concerns the extent to which a theology of creation, and in particular a theological reflection on ecology, has been developed. Given the urgency of the task, Orthodox theology, as it is propounded by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, poses a healthy challenge to Old Catholicism to develop its own, possibly analogous, but not identical ecological theology, drawing on its own sources, including those of the early Church. In terms of method, the approach of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which can, in a loose sense, be termed ‘synodal’, agrees well with the open attitude vis-à-vis culture and the academy that Old Catholicism claims for itself and, transposed to a Western setting, might well offer a way forward. Such an approach could offer a means by which Old Catholic theology might become more ‘public’ and ‘extroverted’ in character than is currently the case.

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### *Zusammenfassung*

Ausgehend von den vielen Berührungspunkten zwischen orthodoxer und altkatholischer Theologie im Allgemeinen geht dieser Beitrag den möglichen Synergien zwischen dem öko-theologischen Ansatz des Ökumenischen Patriarchats und altkatholischer «Mainstream»-Theologie nach. Zunächst wird der Ansatz des Ökumenischen Patriarchates und dessen theologische Methode kurz skizziert; anschliessend wird aufgezeigt, dass es zum Thema der Ökotheologie tatsächlich viele Berührungspunkte gibt, wenn die Thematik auch in der altkatholischen Theologie viel weniger ausgearbeitet ist. Der Vergleich mit dem Ansatz des Ökumenischen Patriarchates kann, gerade wegen seiner Kompatibilität, eine Herausforderung für die altkatholische Theologie sein, auf der Grundlage ihrer liturgisch-theologischen und episkopal-synodalen Verfassung den Bezug zur Schöpfung und zur ökologischen Krise in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Zeugnis und liturgischen Feiern bewusster zum Ausdruck zu bringen.

### *Key Words – Schlüsselwörter*

Orthodoxy – Ecology – Public Theology – Ecumenism – Eucharistic Theology