

SENSITIZING CHRISTIANS TO THE VALUE OF CREATION: EXPLORING THE  
ROLE OF THE EUCHARIST

By

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We accept this thesis as conforming  
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## Abstract

Many Christian churches incorporate environmental policies as part of their mission while others appear hesitant to embrace ecological concern. I set out to explore the nature of this difference and the possible reasons for it by interviewing 12 clergy from a wide variety of Christian traditions. I also examined the possible role of the Eucharist as a catalyst for environmental mission. A grounded theory approach to my interview data revealed two commonly held clerical beliefs, each with potential ecological implications: Christ's redemption extends to all creation, not merely the human soul, and God intends the Earth to be transformed into a new creation—a transformation that began at Christ's resurrection. The study concludes with a recommendation for continued research into the effect of frequent Eucharist observance and regular teaching about the biblical mandate of creation care.

Dedicated to Richard Mitchener (1939 - 2006)

By his lectures as a professor of Geography at Trinity Western University, he inspired me  
to environmental concern.

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## Preface

The creation waits in eager expectation ... in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Romans 8: 19 - 22 (New International Version)

## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Background*

The degradation of the Earth's ecosystems has become a primary concern to people around the globe. Soil degradation, forest removal, water contamination, climate change and species extinction are examples of topics requiring immediate attention. It is apparent that a concerted global effort is necessary to avert a staggering disruption of life on Earth. Within North America, this necessary collaboration seems unlikely due to misunderstandings between people of differing worldviews.

Christianity, followed to some extent by over 33% of the Earth's population (CIA, 2007, p. 13), has often been accused of leading its disciples to ecological complacency. Lynn White famously presented this accusation in an address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1966 (Hiebert, 1996). The address was published in this organization's journal, *Science*, in 1967 as an essay entitled *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*. Repeatedly anthologized, it has become the standard critique of Christianity's impact on the environment.

This indictment against the world's leading religion, however, raises complexities often ignored in the secular academy. Empirical testing of White's theory that anthropocentric Judeo-Christian beliefs lead to environmental damage have been inconclusive (Brennan, 2009). What is more, environmental sociologists work from an a priori assumption that people with anthropocentric attitudes are more damaging to the environment than those without such beliefs (Brennan, 2009). For example, widely used surveys for measuring people's pro-environmental attitudes such as Dunlap's New Ecological Paradigm (Dunlap, Van Liere, Mertig, & Jones, 2000) presuppose that an

anthropocentric worldview is harmful to the environment (Brennan, 2009). While many in the name of Christianity have exploited creation, I contend that such behaviour is a *departure from* rather than a *result of* an understanding of the Christian meta-narrative.

Biographies of prominent Christian leaders across the centuries reveal a respect for creation that would be considered radical by today's standards. St. Irenaeus, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Patrick are examples of leading Christians from earlier times with a strong "environmental" ethic. More recently, many Christian theologians have pioneered ecological concern long before Western society was interested—inspired by their faith and theology. For example, Christians desiring to serve as guardians of creation<sup>1</sup> have created active environmental organizations such as the Au Sable Institute and A Rocha.

Conversely, many Christian leaders, especially within evangelicalism<sup>2</sup>, have been hesitant to publicly advance the environmental cause. As recently as 2006 in the United States, 22 prominent evangelical leaders signed a letter trying to persuade the National Association of Evangelicals not to issue a statement on global warming (Goodstein, 2006). The contributing influences behind this letter are complex. For example many prominent North American Christians may believe environmental action is necessary but not the responsibility of the church. Yet, to my way of thinking, a disconcerting fact remains—regardless of their reasons, many Christians influencing a large segment of

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<sup>1</sup> The term *creation* as used throughout this thesis implies belief in a Creator but not the young earth, literal six-day version of Christian belief as advanced within some sectors of Christendom.

<sup>2</sup> Evangelical churches are defined in part by their emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus as a means of eternal human salvation. The Baptist and Pentecostal churches fall within this category.

North American society are not convinced they should commit to an anti-climate change policy.

This response to climate change by influential Christians must serve to confirm the suspicion of their critics. From outside this faith community, Christian belief appears to be a hindrance to a united attempt to resolve perhaps the largest global crisis of our times. Hearing nothing positive and much negative about the potential of the Christian church to assist with contemporary environmental threats I was compelled to research the problem explained below.

### *Problem*

Many Christian leaders in North America have been reluctant to acknowledge the existence of an environmental crisis and the need to work towards its alleviation. The clergy of many North American churches have been hesitant to talk about ecological needs from their pulpits. I have attended various churches for nearly half a century and have seldom heard mention of the environmental crisis during a sermon, despite the Bible's description of Creation as being loved and cared about by the Creator<sup>3</sup>. The criticism of Christian disinterest in the "the cares of this world" is not new nor has it come only from outside the faith community. In *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach wrote: "Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul" (Feuerbach, 1957, p. 287). More recently, Peter Harris, the international chair of *A Rocha Trust*, a Christian environmental organization, wrote:

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<sup>3</sup> In the creation story of Genesis chapter 1, the phrase "and God saw that it was good" is repeated seven times (very good the seventh time) in response to the various stages of creation.

The need for Christian initiatives in environmental work is greater than ever. Worldwide, in nearly every area, the unprotected earth is subject to rapid and ill-judged assault, and yet there is little sign of prophetic and sacrificial response from the church. (Harris, 1993, p. 174)

### *Purpose of Study*

Of course many within Christendom do care deeply for creation. They have been working hard at tending it and educating others to do the same. What intrigues me is the apparent difference between churches in their sensitivity to the non-human world. Since December 2007 I have been attending an Anglican church, which has practical environmental policies and programming in place. I could not help but notice a contrast with the Baptist tradition, to which I have long been a member, where publicized concern for ecological needs is rare.

The objective of this study was to place Christian belief and practice under close scrutiny along a major denominational division to see if an attitudinal difference could be empirically detected concerning environmental education (EE). If a denominational difference in opinion proved consistently observable, I also hoped to isolate potential reasons for difference. A series of one-on-one qualitative interviews with clergy from several denominations proved an effective means of eliciting opinions about the church's role in environmental education.

For the purpose of this research, I divided churches into two categories: Sacramental and non-sacramental. An explanation of what differentiates these churches and the meaning behind the Eucharist (bread and wine) tradition is here required due to their importance to this thesis. A major qualification of a sacramental church is the centrality of the Eucharist (also referred to as Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper) in a worship service—most likely each Sunday. Alternatively, in non-sacramental churches

the ceremony is observed less often—commonly once a month, although its frequency can slightly vary from church to church. Moreover, as the name suggests, within sacramental churches the Eucharist is viewed as a “sacrament”, meaning a sacred practice during which God mediates His grace. Conversely, non-sacramental churches view the Eucharist as an ordinance. An ordinance in a Baptist church, for example, does not convey the same degree of divine presence as a sacrament in sacramental churches. In other words, Christians from non-sacramental churches do not believe God is any more present during Eucharist/communion observance than at other times during the service.

In summary, within non-sacramental churches the tradition of Communion is more of a symbolic reminder of Christ’s sacrificial death by way of bread (representing His body) and wine (representing His blood). In contrast, sacramental churches traditionally observe the Eucharist as a weekly medium of the *real presence* of Christ (Packer, 1993).

The Eucharist tradition is central to my research. The tangible, created bread (grain) and wine (grapes) held and tasted by believers should to some extent convey the Divine presence of the Incarnate Christ—the Creator and redeemer of all things (John 1: 1-16, Colossians 1: 15 - 20). I set out to determine if this tactile tradition fuses physical and spiritual realities in the mind of its participants. If so it should combat the seemingly ever-present tendency to dualistic thinking that places more value on spiritual over tangible pursuits. This potential effect of the Eucharist on a Christian seems to be corroborated by the thinking of Irenaeus, a prominent second century theologian and bishop. About the Eucharist, he wrote:

For we offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the flesh and Spirit. For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it

receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity. (Irenaeus in Casey, 2003, para 15)

Joseph Sittler, in a famous and seminal 1961 address to the World Council of Churches also points to Irenaeus' view of the Eucharist as a model with, I suggest, implications for the Christian view of creation and thus ecology: "For Irenaeus the union of spiritual and material benefit in the Eucharist symbolizes the ultimate unity of nature and grace implied in Christian salvation." (Sittler, 1962, p. 180).

### *Research Questions*

The following three research questions guided my study. The interview questions are included in Appendix A.

1. To what extent, if at all, do clergy perceive themselves as providers of environmental education (EE) within their parishes?
2. Is there a difference between church denominations in the degree to which their clergy perceive themselves as environmental educators?
3. What is the relationship, if any, between a cleric's Eucharist/communion observance and his/her perception of his/her environmental education role?

### *Significance and Opportunity*

For the "believer" the Judeo-Christian meta-narrative, when untangled from its various cultural influences and perversions, is one of good news for all creation. The Christian scriptures teach that creation is intrinsically good and our original mandate to care for it (Genesis 2: 15) has been restored to us by the redeeming work of Christ (1 Corinthians 15, Colossians 1: 15-20, Romans 8). We are to keep the ultimate restoration

and consummation for all creation in mind (Wright, 2008) while working towards justice and healing for “all things” (Colossians 1: 15-20). While I do not wish to downplay the environmental benefits of other traditions, I take exception to both the indiscriminate use of Christianity as a scapegoat for our ecological crisis and the unbiblical indifference to creation by many Christians, which understandably fuels such criticism.

The church with its schools and seminaries is the primary source of Christian education. The natural outflow of a thorough Christian education—the Creation, the fall, redemption, the restoration, the new creation and ultimate consummation—should be a commitment to justice for the Earth and each other. The church is one of several places where over a billion people should at least occasionally hear a message of hope and moral direction as to how to treat what Eucharist Prayer 4 of the Book of Alternate Services calls “our fragile earth our island home” (Anglican Church of Canada, 1985, p. 201).

In June of 2009, The Yale Project on Climate Change and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication released a report on American public perceptions of global warming (Leiserowitz, 2009). This report advises that the United States can be divided into several opinion groups on the topic of global warming from alarmed and active to skeptical and disengaged (Leiserowitz, 2009). He goes on to explain how people become convinced of an issue’s importance. Societal subcultures are inspired to act for different reasons. Not everyone will trust Al Gore’s message, for example, but many will believe their pastor. I believe this to be true in Canada as well.

The work of environmentalist Susan Drake Emmerich, as documented in her film *When Heaven Meets Earth: Faith and Environment in the Chesapeake Bay* provides a



stunning example of a Christian subculture being led to an environmental commitment. On the Skunkfilms website, it is explained how Drake Emmerich was able to persuade Christians in resource based communities in Virginia and Pennsylvania to be better stewards of land, water, fish and their local economy based on the moral requirements of the Bible. Previous efforts to improve the growing crisis in the crab industry of this region were unsuccessful (Pohorski, 2006).

Some scholars advocate the abandonment of or at least a radical updating of the Judeo-Christian worldview, which they argue is no longer relevant to the needs of contemporary society (T. Berry, 1988, 2006). My contention is these are unreasonable suggestions. We are religious beings and do not quickly abandon or alter our beliefs, whatever they are. Instead, I argue in favour of a more comprehensive teaching of the entire biblical story within our churches and Christian schools. A personal friend recently expressed his eco-theological hope to me in this way:

The Biblical mandates for earth-care, the covenants which God has made with all living things, and the all-encompassing intent of redemption combine to declare nothing short of an original “great commission” for the tasks of earth-care. Given this immense pre-built foundation for environmental reformation, the large and influential domain of the Christian Church is a natural place for environmental education and communication. (Robinson, 2009)

In fact this education has begun. The leaders of the largest Christian denominations are making public statements announcing the moral implications of being wise stewards of God’s Earth. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have both delivered clear announcements on this issue (Jacobs, 2009; Wooden, 2007) as has the world’s top Anglican, Rowan Williams (Williams, 2009), the Archbishop of Canterbury. Perhaps the most strongly worded ecologically related sermon, however, was preached by the leader of the world’s 300 million Eastern Orthodox Christians, Patriarch

Bartholomew. In 1997 he declared that to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin (Tal, 2006). Evangelical leaders are also joining the cause as is evident by the Evangelical Environmental Network's list of nearly 500 signatories of the Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation (EEN, 1993).

If the Christian scripture direct its followers to be exploiters of nature, the implications are significant. Christianity is the leading world religion comprising 33.3 % of the global population (CIA, 2007, People ).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Christianity is “a religion of the book” (Bouma-Prediger, 2001, p. 88). This is especially true within the evangelical community, which esteems the Bible as the authority that “trumps all other authorities” (Bouma-Prediger, p. 88). If these scriptures influence Christians to exploit nature, one cannot expect this sector of the human population to interact sustainably with the Earth.

Conversely, if the Bible promotes a sustainable relationship with the land, as I will argue it does, its disciples should be as committed to environmental causes as they are to other Christian missions. The world-renowned biologist E.O. Wilson in *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* beckons the church to contribute effectively and powerfully to a healing of the planet. “Religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today... If religion and science could be united on the common ground of biological preservation, the problem would soon be solved (Wilson, 2006, p. 5).

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<sup>4</sup> While this percentage includes a wide variety of Christian belief and practise, the same Bible is used with the exception of minor variations such as the additional Apocraphal books within the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

### *Study Delimitations and Limitations*

This study was limited to Christian clergy that practice the Eucharist or communion service and which believe in the divinity of Christ. This was a necessary delimitation because I was researching the effect of this belief on the clergy's perception of their roles as environmental educators.

In addition, the following limitations to this study may have affected the generalization of its findings. Although 30 clergy were contacted, only 12 agreed to an interview and all were male. The lack of female responses to my interview questions further limits the potential scope of opinion samples. What is more, all clergy interviewed live in British Columbia, and all but one on Vancouver Island, limiting the regional representation of opinion. The ministers interviewed were from the communities of Langley, Victoria, Parksville, Courtenay and Campbell River. Although this sample includes people from a variety of communities and economic bases, all research participants live within 300 kilometers of each other in a part of the country traditionally priding itself in its natural beauty and abundance of primary resources. It is difficult to measure this regional influence on my data.

There are other demographic influences that could have impacted my participants' attitudes towards environmental topics. For example, the age of the men may have affected the results of this study. Half of the clergy were under 50. These men are more likely to have encountered environmental content in their education as ecological issues have increasingly been given a more prominent place in school curriculum. Another external factor impacting the outlook of those interviewed could be family influence. For example, those raising families are sometimes presented with environmental topics as

their children bring them home from school. These factors may have also shaped the opinions of the pastors I spoke to, and must be acknowledged alongside the theological influences I set out to study.

*Researcher's Perspective*

Due to my attendance in both Baptist and Anglican churches over many years, I expected to find more environmental education taking place within the sacramental traditions. Though I was not sure if a causal correlation could be isolated, I wondered if the regular, physical Eucharist ritual within the sacramental churches was a conduit by which a “greener” Christianity” has developed.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

For over a century and a half, many scholars have blamed the Christian worldview for the current state of the earth's exploited environment. Influential British historian Arnold Toynbee, for example, argues the command to have dominion and subdue the earth in the Bible's Genesis 1:28 instructs humankind to exploit the planet (Toynbee, 1974). This biblical passage reads as follows:

God blessed them (man and women) and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28 (New International Version).

### *The Accusation Against Christianity*

As mentioned in the introduction, much has been written to implicate the Christian worldview for the current state of the earth's exploited environment. In his influential essay, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, Lynn White Jr. (1967) critiques the Christian belief in a transcendent God who created humankind alone in his image. White complains this elevation of the human species over the rest of nature has had detrimental consequences. He accuses Christianity of bearing a large share of guilt for nature's worsening state. The essence of White's argument is that Christianity in its evolved Western form has departed from the ancient belief that inanimate objects have spirits. The result, he argued, is "an ability to exploit nature in a mood indifferent to the feelings of natural objects" (White, 1967, para 21).

More recently, the Roman Catholic priest and eco-theologian Thomas Berry has argued, "the Christian redemptive mystique is little concerned with the natural world. The essential thing is redemption out of the world through a personal savior relationship

that transcends all such concerns” (T. Berry, 1988, p. 129). Berry calls for a “New Story” by which he means one that diverges from the Christian preoccupation with salvation from this world. In *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as a Sacred Community*, Berry contends that the excessive Western religious concern for redemption out of this world causes an indifference to the “dissolution of the planet Earth” (T. Berry, 2006). Berry goes on to argue that religion “is in need of a profound rethinking of itself and of its role in Earthly affairs (T. Berry, 2006, p. 48).

While I concur with Berry’s dissatisfaction with the neglect of Creation by many Christians, I am uncomfortable with his complaint that the Church’s creeds are “overbalanced in favour of redemption” (T. Berry, 1988, p. 126). I argue in favour of retaining the theme of redemption as central to the teachings of Christianity. Foundational to these teachings and rooted in the canonical scriptures is the fact that humans have been redeemed *for* creation not *out of* it (Wilkinson, & Wilkinson, 1992). Creation (or nature) need not and should not be left out of any Christian education relating to redemption.

#### *The Bible’s Mandate to Care for the Earth*

I am convinced that Western Christendom’s emphasis on “getting to heaven” while ignoring the desperate needs of the Earth contrasts with earlier orthodox Christian practice. Hence, I propose a *return to* rather than a *departure from* biblical Christianity.

#### *Synopsis of the Biblical Story*

The ultimate source of Christian doctrine has always been the books of the canonical Bible as confirmed in 397 CE at the Council of Carthage and esteemed as

Divinely inspired for centuries before that (Cairns, 1981). A thorough reading of these Hebrew-Christian scriptures would reveal a deep respect for the land, water and sky and all life contained therein. A brief synopsis of the major biblical themes will be helpful.

The Bible begins with the Creation story. Significantly we are repeatedly told that God saw creation as good (Genesis 1:1-31), an endorsement that should signify its value. Moreover, God is described as having a caring relationship with His creation in the Old Testament book of Psalms. In Psalm 104 it is written:

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate-- bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. Psalm 104: 10-16 (New International Version)

In the Genesis story, Adam, (the Hebrew word for humanity), was given the responsibility of naming each animal and bird. In Hebrew tradition a naming is not merely a labeling but carries the weight of a covenant relationship (Wilkinson, 1991). What is more, the main task of the woman and man as described in Genesis 2:15 was to care for the region in which they were placed: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *work* it and take *care* of it.” The Hebrew word for *work* as used here is *abad* meaning to “serve” or even “to be slave to”. The second verb *care* is from the Hebrew word *samar* which means to “keep,” “watch,” or “preserve” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 287).

The ultimate example of such sacrificial service of creation reaches climax in the death of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God. This sacrifice is described by St. Paul in

Colossians as being for all of creation, not merely humankind. “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, (Jesus) and through him to reconcile to himself *all* things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” Colossians 1:19-20 (New International Version).

The coming of this sacrificial Messiah was foretold by prophets such as Isaiah (Isaiah Chapters 7 and 53) who also writes of a later time when God’s full restoration of creation will take place in a “new heaven and a new earth” (Chapters 65 and 66). This restoration is “longed for” even by non-human creation as famously described by St. Paul in Romans Chapter 8. In this passage all nature is described as groaning as in childbirth in anticipation of a time it will be free from bondage and decay.

A crucial New Testament chapter pertaining to the beginning of the Creator’s restoration of nature is 1 Corinthians 15. Here Paul uses the image of first fruits to describe Jesus as the first to rise from the dead thus precipitating a new creation. This restoration he implies, will eventually result in every authority in the cosmos being subjected to our Messiah (Wright, 2008).

The final book of the Bible, Revelation, contains more prophesy relating to the earth’s future. Here, a new heaven and a new earth are described. The Christian *good news* for the Earth, however, seems to be its complete healing and restoration not its discard and replacement. But not only good news is foretold. A more sobering prophesy is also mentioned in Revelation. There will be a day of judgment for all who work against God’s plan for creation:

The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth. Revelation 11:18 (New International Version)



*Recent Scholarly Writings*

The theme of creation-care as highlighted in this biblical survey is congruent with the recent writings of Tom Wright (2008), Bishop of Durham, in *Surprised by Hope*. Wright expounds the story of Genesis as the beginning of an epic narrative of redemption and renewal that climaxes in the Incarnation of the Redeemer. This renewal is ultimately fulfilled in the new heaven and new earth as foretold by the Old Testament prophets and by the writer of Revelation. Wright acknowledges several other significant scriptural references to a much relieved, healed and renewed creation woven throughout the biblical story. He cites nature's ongoing groaning for liberation as mentioned in Romans Chapter 8 and the Redeemer's sacrifice for all of creation as described in Colossians Chapter 1 and 1 Corinthians 15.

These passages are elegantly explained by Wright (2008) in his sixth chapter entitled "What the Whole World is Waiting For." Here Wright insists the New Testament<sup>5</sup> does not support the notion of heaven as a distant, otherworldly place but a continuation of an earthly existence where people will continue to serve their Creator and creation. He uses the analogy of marriage to explain this eventual merging of heaven and earth. A wedding is

... a creational sign that God's project is going forward; that opposite poles (heaven and earth) within creation are made for union, not competition; that love and not hate have the last word in the universe; that fruitfulness not sterility is God's will for creation. (Wright, 2008, p. 105)

The implication for Christians is that they should partner with the Creator as stewards of the good creation rather than neglect the earth while they wait for an eventual and permanent salvation *from* this world. Loren Wilkinson, a leading Christian scholar,

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<sup>5</sup> The last 27 books of the Protestant Bible from St. Matthew to Revelation.

writer and environmentalist, corroborates with Wright in *Caring for Creation in Your Own Backyard* (1992) by claiming the Christian's renewed relationship with the Creator provided by the cross<sup>6</sup> does not leave creation behind. Wilkinson challenges the prior assumptions of many of his primarily Christian readers when he writes: "We are saved *for* creation not *out of it*" (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 1992, p. 15).

### *Christian Treatment of the Earth*

What now begs an explanation is the discrepancy between the biblical mandate for earth-care and the hesitance of the Western church to actively encourage such stewardship. On this topic, essayist Wendell Berry, is scathing in his criticism of the church.

Christian organizations, to this day, remain largely indifferent to the rape and plunder of the world and its traditional cultures. It is hardly too much to say that most Christian organizations are as happily indifferent to the ecological, cultural and religious implications of industrial economies. (W. Berry, 1992, p. 94)

Although he is critical of Christian organizations, Wendell Berry, unlike White and Thomas Berry, does not reject the biblical story as ecologically uninspiring. He instead expresses an understanding that the cause of environmental destruction is not rooted in the Scriptures. He writes: "however just it [indictment of Christianity] may be, it does not come from an adequate understanding of the Bible and the cultural traditions that descend from the Bible" (W. Berry, 1992, p. 94). I concur with Berry's challenge for people to make "very precise distinctions between the biblical instruction and the behavior of those people supposed to have been biblically instructed" (W. Berry, p. 95).

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<sup>6</sup>The "cross" refers to the wooden apparatus used to execute criminals in Roman times.

In *What Are People For?* Berry (1990) heralds the biblical directive to be stewards of nature. An important quotation of Berry's is included here to counter the typical complaint against the scriptural reference to human dominion over nature in Genesis 1:28.

Such a reading of Genesis 1:28 is contradicted by virtually all the rest of the Bible, as many people by now have pointed out. The ecological teaching of the Bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished title to it. And He has never revoked the conditions bearing on His gift to us the use of it that oblige us to take excellent care of it. If God loves the world then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it? (W. Berry, 1990, p. 98)

*Why did Christianity's emphasis shift?*

#### *Non-Christian Influences*

Over the centuries, several influences have interfered with the earlier, more original Judeo-Christian concept of human responsibility to creation. The misguided understanding that resulted has led to a shameful exploitation of land, air and water and an unbalanced emphasis on spiritual pursuits, at least in branches of Western Christendom. I will separate these influences into three categories: Gnostic, Hellenistic and Pre-Enlightenment.

Gnostic philosophy peaked in the Mediterranean region about 150 CE (Cairns, 1981). An essential Gnostic belief involved a separation of "evil" matter from what they perceived as "spiritual" and good. In an attempt to arrange an avoidance of evil, the Gnostics separated the concept of a "good" Deity from "evil" earthly matter. The Gnostics concluded that a good God could not have created this "evil" world therefore assumed the Creator to be completely "otherworldly" and separate from Earth. Salvation

in heaven was only for the spiritual side of people (1981). The impact of Gnostic thought on early Christianity was the formation of a sect who rejected the teaching that Christ was present in a physical body (1981). A vestige of Gnosticism in the contemporary Christian milieu is the idea that “spiritual” pursuits trump earthly concerns- even concerns of immanent threats to all life on the planet.

Another cultural influence that has affected Christendom is the Hellenistic philosophy of Platonism. Essentially, Platonism drove a wedge between tangible nature and the mind/soul. Loren Wilkinson’s *Earthkeeping in the 90’s* thoroughly outlines the Platonist’s belief in nature as “an impediment to the soul” (Wilkinson, 1991). To the Platonist, the body and nature were distractions “from the soul’s proper task” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 115) to transcend nature with more noble pursuits of the mind and spirit. Nature itself, Wilkinson explains, would not be worthy of the Platonist’s serious attention. Bringing order to nature would be worthwhile but not necessarily in a way respectful of creation’s inherent goodness as explained in the Genesis account (Wilkinson, 1991). The influence of Platonism on Christian thought would be impossible to measure but one can safely conclude the philosophy has not been conducive to a healing relationship between humans and land.

It would be difficult to overstate our third major influence on Western Christian thought—that of the pre-Enlightenment writers René’s Descartes (1596-1650) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Wilkinson explains the dualism of Descartes (as a differentiation between “ ‘thinking things’ and ‘extended things’ ” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 154). As with Plato, Descartes perceived “thinking things” (minds) as more certain than material “extended things” (nature). One major consequence of this Cartesian assumption

has been the treatment of nature as a vast machine for manipulation. In addition, Descartes believed “the body of an animal was simply a machine without a mind” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 155). To Descartes’ followers, animals had no feelings. The resulting cruelty to animals and land goes without saying. While this attitude towards non-human life has pervaded modern culture, it has not met with sufficient resistance by Christians.

The other pre-Enlightenment thinker I want to highlight is Francis Bacon. More than any of his contemporaries, Bacon championed Genesis 1:28 as humankind’s license to exercise power over nature. Some historical empathy would permit an understanding of why such power was desired. In *Earthkeeping in the 90’s* Wilkinson reminds his readers that in Bacon’s day, plagues, high infant mortality and poverty interrupted the enjoyment of life as we know it today. Bacon proposed a “great instauration” by which the rightful power over nature granted humankind at creation would be restored (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 158). Bacon insisted that the acquisition of human knowledge should lead to power over nature. The view from 400 years later reveals disastrous ecological results. The disasters have not stemmed from genuine knowledge made possible by Bacon’s useful scientific methods, but from the exploitive way this knowledge has been applied.

Such historical influences as Gnostic, Hellenistic and pre-Enlightenment thinkers have distorted the original Hebrew and Christian understanding of a good Creation worthy of our sacrificial stewardship (Wilkinson, 1991). More recently, however, the Christian church has largely succumbed to another influence: A materialistic worldview. Bouma-Prediger effectively quotes Granberg-Michaelson (1990) saying “Christian faith

in the West has been captive to the assumptions of modern culture which sever God from creation and subject the creation to humanity's arrogant and unrestrained power" (Bouma-Prediger, 2001, p. 80). Together these philosophies have derailed Christendom from a thorough understanding of its Divine call to serve and care for the land in which we have been placed.

There have been some good stewards of creation since Christianity's first couple of centuries, however. For example, St. Patrick's understanding of Christ's connection to all of creation is exemplary (Wilkinson, 1991). Moreover, the medieval era produced some exceptional Christian thought and action that was highly respectful of the earth. St. Francis of Assisi is a case in point. His insight into the role of animals within God's purposes and his recognition of "spirit" in the inanimate should inspire us to whom everything has been reduced to matter. Wilkinson's effective inclusion of hymns written by both St. Patrick and St. Francis does much to convey their "appreciation of the intrinsic worth of creation and the Creator's abiding closeness to it (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 144)." I respect these people and their views of nature as an antidote for what ails our land today.

### *Misinterpretations of Scripture*

#### *2 Peter 3:10.*

Another factor still playing a role in the distraction of Christians from environmental concern has to do with the mishandling of some key scriptural passages. One of these is 1 Peter 3:10, which is often translated to read: "And the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up." According to Bouma-Prediger, however, the most faithful Greek translation of this verse reads "and the earth and the works upon it

will be *found*” (Bouma-Prediger, 1995, p. 3-4). In Bouma-Prediger’s opinion “a creation negating worldview has played a decisive role in the translation of this text resulting in the words “burned up” (Bouma-Prediger, p. 4). The more accurate translation gives the impression that “there will be a basic *continuity* rather than a *discontinuity* of this world and with next.” (Bouma-Prediger, p. 4)

*Fallen nature.*

Another common mishandling of a biblical concept has to do with the perceived curse on nature. In Genesis 3 God says to Adam: “Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you” (Genesis 3: 17-18 New International Version). Wilkinson contends the passage actually teaches that human sin sets us against creation so that the ground becomes a curse to us. An accurate translation of the phrase in question could read, “cursed is the ground to you” (Wilkinson, & Wilkinson, 1992, p. 25). A broken relationship between people and nature is implied.

*Joseph Sittler*

One of the most inspiring pioneers of contemporary Christian scholarship on ecological needs was Joseph Sittler (1904-1987). I close the historical portion of this literature review with a summary of Sittler due to the implications of his interpretation of St. Paul for the Christian understanding of creation.

Sittler demonstrated an impressive ability for original thought in “Called to Unity,” his address to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi, India on November 21, 1961 (Sittler, 2008, Bibliography Section, para 2).

Although orthodox by western religious standards, he likely rankled as many as Lynne White with his unique conclusions. In this seminal address, Sittler is almost as hard on western Christianity as White, yet mentions no need for major doctrinal revisions concerning the creation story. Sittler's main contention was with Christendom's turning from a more inclusive perception of grace (Sittler, 1962).

Sittler posited that since the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the emphasis in the Christian church has been the salvation of the human soul. Other components of nature have not been included. Irenaeus, according to Sittler, believed nothing should be declared unclean or common because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ extends grace to all of creation, not merely the human soul. Sittler continues, by referring to a division, or "doctrinal cleavage" in Western Christianity. He criticized the church for its inability to "relate the powers of grace to nature" (Sittler, 1962, p. 181). Although the original Reformed<sup>7</sup> theologians of the 16th century believed all of nature was a realm of grace, Sittler complained that we in the west have stopped believing this. The Enlightenment, he argues, completely severed nature from humans and due to the mindset of rationalism, redemption by grace is extended to merely the human moral soul and nothing else. This, Sittler claims, is also counter to St. Paul's teaching in the Bible's letter to the Colossian church. Although mentioned above, this extremely important passage needs to be more fully quoted here. Central to Sittler's premise, it states:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him *all things* [emphasis added] were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; *all things* [emphasis added] were created by him and for him. He is before *all things*, [emphasis added] and in him *all things* [emphasis added] hold together. And he is the head of the

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<sup>7</sup> Reformed theologians are those who followed the teachings of the reformation leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin.



body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, [emphasis added] whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:15-20 (New International Version)

The significance of the five uses of the phrase “all things” in the above passage can hardly be overstated. St. Paul is making it abundantly clear that all of creation—vegetation, soil and animals as well as humans—are potential recipients of God’s omnipotent care, redemption and renewal. This all-inclusive grace has not been emphasized within modern Christian teaching as much as the redemption of merely the human soul.

One more significant reference used by Sittler is Romans chapter 8. In this passage St. Paul writes:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons [and daughters] of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Romans 8: 19-22 (New International Version)

Sittler interprets these passages in Colossians and Romans as teaching a broad dispensation of grace. Based on the texts from Colossians and Romans, I concur with Sittler. Although the claim is debatable, the scriptures can be interpreted as describing all of nature with an ability to *wish* and *long* for a just future. What is certain, the biblical reference to “all things” being “reconciled to God through Christ,” and to a “groaning” creation has significant implications for the Christian view of creation. If Joseph Sittler’s interpretation of Saint’s Irenaeus and Paul is accurate, stewardship of nature should be a natural outflow of Christian faith.

In contrast to Berry's and White's recommended departure from the biblical story, I identify with scholars like Tom Wright, Loren Wilkinson, Wendell Berry, Steven Bouma-Prediger and Joseph Sittler whose scholarly and passionate writings have for decades espoused a return to a more biblically aligned "earthy" Christianity.

*The Transformational Potential of the Eucharist*

I would like to conclude the literature review by considering the role of the Eucharist within Christian worship. I have reason to believe environmental policies develop best in churches with a sacramental focus. For example, where the Eucharist service is observed each Sunday, a more "earth-friendly" Christianity seems to result. Alternately, where this physical ritual is observed less often, there seems not to be as formal an environmental policy in place nor as much time spent discussing environmental issues. I am setting out to determine if more frequent handling and consumption of this bread and wine serves as a defense against the spiritualization of contemporary Christianity (Wilkinson, 2008). I suggest the Eucharist fosters a connection to the physical world because the bread and wine represent the physical presence of the resurrected Deity as described in the Gospel of John. John writes:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1: 1-3, 14 (New International Version)

The writings of St. Irenaeus in the second century CE are particularly fascinating when applied to this topic. Combating the Gnostic challenge to Christian belief that Jesus was the Incarnated Creator, Irenaeus wrote his famous *Against the Heresies* (von Balthasar, 1990) In his introduction to this treatise, Swiss theologian Hans Urs von

Balthasar summarizes the significance of Irenaeus' claims: "The fact that God has become man, indeed flesh, proves that the redemption and resurrection of the entire earthly world is not just a possibility but a reality" (von Balthasar, 1990) In *Against the Heresies* Irenaeus highlights the connection between Eucharist and land:

(Our bodies) are nourished by the cup, which is His Blood, and is fortified by the bread, which is His Body. The stem of the vine takes root in the earth and eventually, bears fruit, and "the grain of wheat falls into the earth" (John 12:24), dissolves, rises again, multiplied by the all-containing Spirit of God, and finally after skilled processing, is put to human use. These two then receive the Word of God and become the Eucharist, which is the Body and Blood of Christ. Similarly, our bodies, having been laid to rest in the earth, and having there dissolved, will rise again at their appointed time, for the Word of God will grant them resurrection..." (Irenaeus in Urs von Balthasar, 1990)

Irenaeus has greatly inspired the Orthodox Church's emphasis that all surrounding creation is a sacrament, which is offered back to God in the form of the Eucharist. Influential Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann began his seminal book *For the Life of the World* with the phrase, "We are what we eat" (Schmemmann, 1970). He goes on to explain the Eucharist:

...This offering to God of the bread and wine, of the food we must eat in order to live, is our offering to Him of ourselves, of our life and of the whole world. 'To take in our hands the whole world as if it were an apple' said a Russian poet. It is our Eucharist...that in Christ has become the very life of man. (Schmemmann, 1970)

After interviewing three Orthodox clergy, it is my opinion this inter-connection between the Christ, the bread and wine and the land on which we depend is what leads to their church's advanced environmental thinking.

The ability of the Eucharist to mediate an attitude of openness towards creation is further corroborated by contemporary theologians such as John Habgood and Craig M. Mueller. Habgood was the Anglican Archbishop of York when he claimed the Christian

cross could be interpreted in light of the sacraments<sup>8</sup> in order to strengthen the link between the redemption of humans and the redemption of the rest of creation (Birch, Eakin, & McDaniel, 1990). In the same essay Habgood advocates for a human role under God's grace in which ordinary things can be offered and broken in consecration as a way to anticipate heaven on earth (Birch, et al., 1990). Habgood is suggesting the Eucharist fulfils this role.

Mueller, a Lutheran theologian, also links Eucharist observance to ecological awareness. In his essay *Earthly Elements: The Sacraments as Celebrating Creation and Forming Vocation*, Mueller makes a case for the Eucharist as a sign that God is not hostile to creation and a means by which Christ's presence is born into a church assembly. Moreover, Mueller claims that the sacraments remind us that we depend on God's creation (Krause, 1994). He concludes his essay with a reference to the need for church leaders to make a connection between sacramental theology and care for the earth (Krause, 1994).

Tom Wright in *Surprised by Hope* describes the Eucharist as an event during which "Jesus comes to meet us in the symbols of creation, the bread and the wine, which are thus taken up into the Christ story, the event of new creation itself, and become vessels, carriers, of God's new world" (Wright, 2008, p. 275).

An appropriate conclusion to this literature review is a consideration of Michael Northcott's recent writing on the ecological implications of the Eucharist. He explains that in the early Christian church the Eucharist would be consumed in the context of a regular communal meal. After reminding his readers that we are all part of a cyclical and communal web of life he has this to say about the Eucharist:

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<sup>8</sup> Baptism and the Eucharist are the two primary sacraments, or sacred rituals in Christian practice.

The offering of food in the Eucharist feast is equally significant for Christians in connecting the Church-constituting rite of Eucharist with the whole of the divine creation. The Eucharist is in effect a microcosm of the history of creation-redemption as it finds its completion in the Incarnation of Christ. (Northcott, 2009, p. 263)

Northcott, an Anglican priest and professor of Ethics at the University of Edinburgh, goes on to recommend the recovery of the Eucharist as the central act of worship in all Christian churches (Northcott, 2009). My research is in part designed to determine if this Eucharist practice influences its participants towards ecological sensitivity.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### *Introduction*

My research objectives were to determine if there is a discernable difference in attitude and approach to creation-care between types of churches and to determine the cause of this difference. To meet the requirements of the Royal Roads University Master of Arts degree in the Environmental Education and Communication program, I isolated clerical perceptions of environmental education for study. Before continuing, I want to re-iterate why I believe the “environment” should be a concern of the church.

It is my claim that a sufficient understanding of genuine and original Christian teaching would lead to a concern for all injustices within creation’s realm. I do not wish to imply that other faith traditions cannot be followed with the same result. My upbringing was Christian, however, and much study and reflection has led me to believe adherence to the Scriptures upon which this faith is founded would lead to a healing of creation. With these beliefs in mind, I looked for their “environmental” implication within several churches.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first will provide an overview of how the research was carried out as well as a rationale for the chosen methodology. The second section will describe my research procedures in detail beginning with the interviews followed by the analysis of the resulting data. In addition, this section will provide an explanation of how the reliability of research results was guarded throughout the study. The final section will explain the procedure followed to ensure ethical standards of research were met.

### *Overview and rationale*

To find answers to my questions I employed an ethnographic<sup>9</sup> qualitative approach to my research, specifically adhering to grounded theory, initially developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960's. Glaser and Strauss advocated this methodology as a way of "arriving at theory suited to its supposed purposes" not from "a priori assumptions" (Glaser, 1967) but from theory "systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser, 1967, p. 2). The aim of grounded theory is to gather data with an open mind, making note of themes and theories as they emerge. One continues to gather data and compares it with previously gathered data, revising the emerging theories until no new insights emerge. This is called theoretical saturation (Cohen, 2007).

### *Interviews*

One-on-one interviews proved a suitable instrument of data collection. I concur with McClaren and Morton (2003) that interviews are the best way "to explore attitudes, values, beliefs and motives" (McClaren, 2003, chapter 10, para 5) which was exactly what I wanted to do. I ruled out the use of closed survey questionnaires early in my research plans. Such surveys are an efficient means of gathering and organizing data, yet a trial use of the New Ecological Paradigm questionnaire revealed some shortcomings of such instruments. I was in search of more than such surveys would provide. While a series of closed questions could have been designed with a range of responses such as "strongly agree," "mildly agree," "agree," "mildly disagree," and "strongly disagree," I was aiming to understand the *reasons* for the clergy's beliefs and attitudes towards

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<sup>9</sup> Ethnography is the study of a particular group. In my case the group was Christian clergy and indirectly, their parishioners.

environmental problems. The face-to-face interviews allowed me to probe more deeply into such beliefs.

Rich data is the goal of interviewing (Charmaz, 2006). It is characterized by significant and helpful information revealing ideas, feelings and motivations that probes “beneath the surface of social and subjective life” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 13). This kind of data is more likely to be gathered when the research participant is prompted to talk at length by a few open-ended questions, rather than a long series of questions to which short answers are required. I determined to “stay out of the way” during the interviews, allowing the clergy to talk openly. I improved at this type of questioning with subsequent interviews.

Another advantage of the interviews was my ability to gain additional non-verbal insights provided by body language and pauses. For example, a long pause following a request for biblical themes pertaining to God’s care for creation could be an indication the pastor had not previously thought about this topic.

Several other personal influences led me to choose interviewing as my means of data collection. I have spent a lot of time on church committees and boards and have been friends with many pastors over the years. I even entered university with the aim of becoming a pastor. I share these people’s Christian worldview and was confident I would be trusted. In addition, I enjoy talking to people. I fully anticipated my ability to establish a rapport that would result in honest communication.

I first piloted the interview to eliminate any unnoticed impediments to objective data collection. While listening to the recording and reading the transcription from this field test, I noticed I was talking too much and was occasionally too helpful when



prompting the minister to clarify answers. In doing so I was “putting words in his mouth” and I decided to avoid that practice in subsequent interviews even in the midst of uncomfortable silences. Such promptings could skew results by leading a research participant to answer in a way he would not have on his own. I did attempt to prompt with nods and agreeable “uh huh’s” so as to encourage the respondent to speak freely and confidently.

I interviewed twelve clergy—eleven face-to-face and one by telephone. All but one of the face-to-face interviews were carried out in the offices of the clergy, the one exception in a café. I was aiming to interview approximately six clergy from sacrament-based churches (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox) and six from churches without the sacrament focus (Baptist, Pentecostal, Vineyard). A minimum of one Eucharist service per week was the qualifying characteristic of those churches considered sacrament-based.

I strove to triangulate my findings by interviewing several pastors from a wide range of Christian denominations. From the sacramental churches I interviewed clergy from Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican churches. From the evangelical churches I spoke with clergy from Baptist, Pentecostal and Vineyard churches.

I took several precautions to create as random and valid a sample of ministers’ opinions as possible. To begin, I sent 30 invitations to churches all over Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia. This resulted in a total of twelve interviews in Campbell River, Courtenay, Parksville, Victoria and Langley. I knew nothing about these churches aside from their major doctrinal beliefs. The two exceptions were the Baptist church I attended for several years and an Anglican church with a minister I knew to be

the chair of a diocese level committee on environmental stewardship. I did not provide the clergy with the questions in advance. The same questions were asked of all pastors in the same order giving each the opportunity to respond from their personal and denominational perspective. In many cases the same themes emerged cross denominationally as will be discussed in Chapter 4. These precautions bolstered the reliability and transferability of my findings.

The list of churches represented can be seen the Table 3-1. Specific church names are not listed with their communities in order to promote non-traceability as promised in the preamble to my letter of informed consent.

Table 3-1 Churches represented by interviews

Sacrament-based churches	Non-sacrament churches
Anglican # 1	Baptist #1
Anglican # 2	Baptist #2
Greek Orthodox #1	Baptist #3
Greek Orthodox #2	Pentecostal
Greek Orthodox # 3	Vineyard
Roman Catholic	
Lutheran	

#### *Criterion for Selection of Interview Participants*

My research questions required me to interview clergy from pastors from conservative Christian belief. Those from churches that adhere to the beliefs as listed in the Apostles' Creed<sup>10</sup>, for example were sought after. This was a necessary criterion for selecting participants because I was researching the potential effect of such belief and

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix C.

related practice (Eucharist) on the clergy's perception of themselves as environmental educators.

The average duration of an interview was 43 minutes, the longest being 62 minutes and the shortest 27 minutes. The interviews were recorded with a small recording device and the audio-files sent away for professional transcription. The transcribed texts consisted of over 70 000 words and in keeping with grounded theory I analyzed the responses to my questions in search of themes and theories.

The interviews consisted of twenty questions and were semi-structured—designed as a series of open-ended questions based on my research questions. For example, I queried the clergy as to their beliefs about the scope of salvation, eschatology, and the implications of the Incarnation for creation. Some questions were more specific, seeking to determine the extent of the clergy's role as environmental educators within their church settings.

Throughout the interviews I fought the tendency to desire certain responses which would support my preconception that evangelical churches are not as advanced in their theology of creation care and environmental policy. As I will explain in my findings, I was in for some surprises. I was able to curtail my bias and preconceptions, however, and carried on with my interviewing with as open a mind as I could muster.

### *Data analysis*

A Grounded Theory method of content analysis requires one to approach data with an open mind. I sought to adhere to this policy by guarding against forcing my preconceptions on the data I coded (Charmaz, 2006). This meant seeking the actual beliefs and theological understanding of the ministers around the topic of environmental

concern rather than looking for a confirmation of what I preconceived these beliefs to be. I tried to be receptive to the emergence of unanticipated clerical beliefs that could steer my research in a direction I had not planned. Maintaining such an open mind was counterintuitive. I allowed the following guidelines for grounded theorists as listed by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) to guide me:

- “Tolerance and openness to data and what is emerging”
- “Tolerance of confusion and regression when the theory does not become immediately obvious”
- “Resistance to premature formulation of theory” (Cohen, 2007, p. 492)

*Initial Coding.*

The transcription of my twelve interviews generated over 70 000 words of text. The first task was to read through each interview while coding the clergy’s responses to the questions. I began by narrowing the text of each interview into 3-inch columns to create space to the right of the text in which to jot notes. This procedure of “line by line” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50) coding was my initial step of analysis. When I had completed notes for an entire interview, I began creating codes for almost all emerging ideas. I created a codebook form on which to record these codes, their definitions and criterion for use as well as to keep track of the clergy who referring to the coded topic. Another space on each code page was available to write brief initial theories called memos. A sample of a page from this codebook is included in Appendix D. Ninety-eight codes were generated by the twelve interviews. I initially avoided grouping codes into broader categories and grouping responses into “sacramental” and “non-sacramental.” Given my hunch that clergy from sacramental churches may be more “environmentally inclined,” I

did not want to be distracted by the awareness of one or the other side “winning” the tally early in my analysis.

To check the credibility of my codes and their definitions I arranged an external peer review of my notes and the transcriptions to which each code was linked. The person who did this for me concluded my codes and their definitions were logically connected to the raw data.

*Theoretical Sampling.*

After each interview was transcribed I would add codes as new concepts emerged that did not fit the definitions of existing codes. The first nine interviews generated ninety-two codes that needed sorting into theme categories. Each code was written on a separate piece of paper, which I sorted into thirteen theme piles. During this process, a few codes began to lose relevance and were culled. I further reduced the thirteen categories to seven themes (explained in Chapter Four). In keeping with grounded theory this “constant comparison” (Cohen, 2007) between existing and incoming data as well as between categories of data, enhanced the robustness of the emerging theories. This process of sorting, culling and categorizing data using codes to guide the procedure is a type of focused coding.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe the need for the grounded theorist to use existing codes and analyzed data to decide what data to collect next. Heeding this advice, I conducted three more interviews with a reduced number of questions to test the robustness of my seven themes. These three interviews resulted in only three new codes— an indication the research was nearing theoretical saturation.

*Axial coding.*

After initial coding, focused coding, sorting and categorizing I concluded this stage of my analysis with axial coding. Axial coding is using a strong over-arching theme-code as a focal point, to then build sub-categories under it. This procedure enabled me to organize my data on the Eucharist, the theme code that yielded the widest variety of beliefs from the clergy. For example, the sacrament-based churches believe the Eucharist to be the most sacred of Christian traditions—the highlight of every service during which Christ’s presence is (to ranging extent depending on the church) very real. The evangelical style churches call this tradition “communion” or “the Lord’s Supper” and view it as an ordinance not a sacrament, a symbol of remembrance, rather than a conduit of God’s presence. Within these two belief camps there are further divisions of practice and doctrine. Radiating out from the main code Eucharist, therefore were many subcategories such as Eucharist as spiritual nourishment, as a spiritual weigh-station, as a spirit strengthener, as an expression of thanks to God, as a connection to all creation offered back to God, as the actual body and blood of Christ, and as a memory prompt.

Especially where the Eucharist was concerned, I found this axial coding important. I wanted to pursue all Eucharist related connections and theories because I was researching the effect of this tradition on the clergy’s environmental opinions.

*Memos.*

All throughout the analysis process I wrote memos. To a grounded theorist, a memo is a personal response to the data and codes he or she created. Charmaz describes memo writing as “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts

of papers...it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process (Charmaz, 2006, p.72).” A sample of one of my early memos is included in Appendix D. My memos tended to be short, informal and often referring to a single idea prompted by a single code or a small cluster of codes. Writing these memos increased my confidence to experiment with ideas. I did not concern myself with syntax but approached this as a “free writing” activity to generate potential theories based on the interviews. These memos contributed to the first draft of my fourth and fifth chapters, however I developed them further at the draft writing stage. Prior to my first draft, I did not write as many memos nor develop such as thoroughly as pure grounded theory would demand.

#### *Validity and Credibility*

Validity is a demonstration that an instrument of research measured what it claimed to measure (Cohen, 2007). In qualitative research it is enhanced by the depth, scope and honesty of the data (Cohen). Guba and Lincoln also list credibility as an important characteristics of qualitative research (Guba, 1989). Below is a description of my attempts to maintain these characteristics of good research as well as an explanation of some influences threatening to compromise these characteristics.

#### *Threats to objective research*

The factors potentially affecting the reliability and transferability of my findings are as follows. Because this was qualitative research based on twelve interviews, it would be inappropriate to claim the opinions expressed as representative of the global Christian church. In addition, there is a chance some of the ministers’ responses to my questions

were skewed by their desire to give “right” answers to appear sensitive to environmental needs. Another possible threat to my study’s validity was the fact one participant knew my interview questions in advance, allowing him time to prepare his thoughts. This may have compromised the degree of randomness of his responses.

My personal biases and pre-conceived notions of Christian attitude and belief within the evangelical tradition were also a threat to the reliability of this study. Some of these pre-conceptions were generated by personal conversations within this tradition and others by a year’s worth the reading on the topic. Grounded theorists are divided as to whether a researcher should study existing literature prior to conducting interviews. Contrary to the purist version of this methodology, I could not resist doing my literature review before I began my interviews. Although these writings were helpful and I believe accurately researched I made some erroneous generalizations about the attitude of evangelical pastors towards environmental issues. I was surprised while interviewing to find some of these preconceptions incorrect. For example, three of my discussions with evangelical clergy revealed a sophisticated theological understanding of the biblical justification for creation care. This caused me to alter some of my questioning in subsequent interviews.

#### *Countering the threats to objective research*

Despite these obstacles to unbiased research, I took several precautions to ensure as much validity, reliability and credibility as possible. Many of these precautions have already been mentioned but will now be explained in detail.

To begin, I had three people assist in the creation of the interview questions. This increased the ultimate validity of my findings; I was likely using the best questions to



measure what I claimed to be measuring. Also, to secure accurate data, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Having a verbatim record of each pastor's thoughts on the pre-determined topics reduced the chances my assumptions about their beliefs would creep into the report. An external audit of my codes confirmed my accurate interpretation of the transcriptions. Moreover, a second external audit of parts of the transcripts and my corresponding interpretation further strengthens the reliability of this study. The auditor interpreted the data the same way I did. Nearer the last stages of analysis I invited "member checks" in which my research participants reviewed my notes on their responses to my questions. This also corroborated with my interpretation of those discussions and thus enhances the internal validity of my findings. What's more, quality interviews with twelve pastors representing six different denominational varieties (Baptist, Anglican, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Vineyard) provided a triangulated, wide and rich database. My prolonged interaction with this data also bolsters the credibility of my findings. Finally, I reported the unanticipated clerical opinions that challenged my understanding of evangelical belief. Though surprises are common in research, I mention them here to emphasize my attempt at credibility.

Finally, for the purposes of objectivity, I re-examined the effect of my biases after completing the writing process. After reading about Reflective Bracketing, a means of checking for objectivity in one's own qualitative research, (Ahern, 1999) I was uncomfortably surprised to discover the previously undetected sway my bias had over me, even after determining to harness its influence. For example, familiarity with the tendency of non-sacramental evangelical churches to avoid environmental topics (Berry, 1992), and that bolstered by a year of reading on the subject, contributed to my

overzealous desire to find confirmation of this trend. Thus in my initial reporting of research results, I was aiming to make a clear distinction between non-sacramental and sacramental church approaches to environmental subject matter. I found I had made statements about a clear contrast between these churches that were not accurate.

Moreover, I had been paying more attention to the pro-environmental comments of the sacramental clergy and somewhat overlooking the same from the non-sacramental clergy.

I found the need to re-write some of my conclusions to better reflect the ecological sympathies of non-sacramental clerics.

#### *Ethical Protocol*

In order to adhere to the ethical requirements of research involving human participants, I followed the policies of the Royal Roads University Ethical Review Board. My research participants were assured participation in the interviews would not exceed the minimum risk of harm one could expect to face in regular daily activities. Moreover, my participants signed the informed consent form that followed the letter of invitation both of which are included in the appendix of this document. The research participants were made aware of my intent to record and transcribe the interviews. They were told of my research interests but not the specific questions in advance. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the interview any time they wanted and that I would destroy any recordings of the interview that had been gathered until that time if they so desired.

Lastly, the clergy were assured of anonymity and non-traceability. I informed them in the letter of invitation I would refer to them by pseudonyms within my thesis, which I have done.

## Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter will describe my research findings in three main sections. The first section will explain the general beliefs of the interviewed clergy about what the bible has to say about earth-care, the scope of God's redemption and His future plans for the earth. I will point out this theological foundation as being quite "pro-nature", without an obvious difference in belief between sacrament based and non-sacrament based churches. The second section will describe the clerical responses to four interview questions that relate to my first research question: *To what extent, if at all to clergy perceive themselves as environmental educators within their parishes?* This is where we will take a close look at the clergy's application (or non application) of environmental beliefs. In the last section of the chapter we will look at some additional, unanticipated themes that emerged from the data. Some of these unanticipated themes may explain hindrances to public expression of environmental concern in the non-sacramental churches.

Before we proceed, however, I wish to issue a word of caution in interpreting the table summaries. In some cases these responses are deceiving out of the context of the entire interview, as will become apparent later in the chapter. Some clergy don't immediately appear to be keen to use their role as pastor to promote EE, but by the end of the interview had explained a lifestyle and holistic teaching approach within their tradition that is impressively harmonious with nature. The Orthodox clergy are examples of this. Other clergy immediately gave the "right answers" but as the interview progressed they could only provide superficial examples of how they implement EE in their parishes. It is also important to note that some clergy will not teach on

environmental topics as “stand alone” issues, but only as they come up while preaching through the bible. It may not be fair to assume these men are unconcerned about environmental issues yet it appears to at least indicate their lack of priority for EE.

*Environmentally related beliefs of the clergy*

Prior to the interviews, I assumed there would be a positive correlation between certain theological beliefs and the existence of EE in a church. Below is a partial list of these beliefs.

1. The Creator sees all of creation as good (Genesis Chapter 1).
2. The Creator has given humankind the task of sacrificially tending the Earth (Genesis 2:15).
3. The Creator in the Person of Jesus (the Incarnation) came to redeem all creation by His sacrificial death and resurrection (John 1: 1-14 and Colossians 1: 15-20).
4. The earth will not be destroyed but transformed by God (Revelation 21)

Although I did not inquire about the first in this list of beliefs, the interview questions were designed to determine the pastors’ adherence to these and other doctrines. Though I did not inquire specifically as to their belief in the “goodness” of creation in God’s eyes, five out of the twelve men used the word “good” to describe God’s creation. I did not consider this highly significant as it would be difficult for a pastor to justify thinking otherwise—the phrase “and He saw that it was good” is repeated seven times in the first chapter of the Bible.

Second, all twelve pastors believe the bible provides instruction to humankind to care for the earth, although half had trouble citing specific examples. As for the third in

my list of “eco-theological” beliefs, ten of the twelve men described Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection as redemptive for all creation, rather than merely for humans. This was one of the strongest emerging themes of my study. Significantly, I asked only for the pastors’ definition of salvation. I did not expect so many of them to discuss this wide scope of God’s grace. I had not heard this concept in over forty years of attending evangelical churches yet all but one of my evangelical research participants mentioned it. Conversely, one sacramental (Lutheran) and one non-sacramental (Baptist) did not.

Last, all five non-sacramental pastors surprised me by referring to a continuum between earth and heaven, rather than an apocalyptic end to the earth and a new heaven somewhere else. Two of the sacramental clerics (Catholic and Orthodox) were unsure of God’s ultimate plans for the Earth and would rather leave it a mystery. Heaven is not likely going to be on Earth in the view of the Roman Catholic priest.

A summary of these and other key findings pertaining to the cause of ecological degradation is displayed in Table 4 -1. Together they demonstrate a theological foundation quite sympathetic towards the physical Earth. In summary, God calls the Earth “good” and gave people the task of tending it. Christ died for the entire “cosmos” (Sittler, 1962, p. 179) with the intention of it lasting for eternity. These beliefs are held by a clear majority of the pastors interviewed. I admit to assuming such a theology would pre-dispose a pastor to implement “green” policies and environmental education in his or her church. After interviewing the twelve clergy, I have concluded this is a faulty assumption.

Table 4-1 Clerical beliefs pertaining to a theology of creation-care and the Earth's future.

Church Category	Denomination /Clergy	Earth has been exploited contrary to God's intention	"Christian" world-view is at least partly to blame for ecological destruction	The bible instructs humankind to care for the Earth	Christ's redemption applies to all creation	God intends Earth to last forever
S	Orthodox/Fr.Jason	√	√	√	√	√
S	Orthodox/Allan	√	X	√	√	X
S	Orthodox/Lyle	√	√	√	√	√
S	Lutheran/Tyler	√	X	√	X	√
S	Anglican/Brian	√	√	√	√	√
S	Anglican/Keith	√	√	√	√	√
S	Roman Catholic/ Fr. Mason	√	X	√	√	X
NS	Baptist/Daniel	√	√	√	√	√
NS	Baptist/Phil	√	X	√	√	√
NS	Baptist/Richard	√	X	√	X	√
NS	Vineyard/Ben	√	√	√	√	√
NS	Pentecostal/Norman	√	X	√	√	√
√ = indicates agreement		X = indicates uncertainty, hesitation or disagreement				
S = Sacramental		NS = Non sacramental				

Table 4-1

*Research Question 1: To what extent, if at all, do clergy perceive themselves as providers of environmental education within their parishes?*

Table 4-2 displays the pastors' responses to the question: What is your role, if any, as a provider of environmental education within your parish?

Table 4-2 Clerical perception of their role as environmental educators.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Anglican	Brian	I	It's a key part...one that, um, I have fallen short of in many ways, but I think from a diocesan point of view ...we certainly have a very strong environmental commission ...
S	Anglican	Keith	I	A variety of roles at a variety of levels...we've had special liturgical events here...bike to church week...I definitely try to shape liturgy so it has an educational component...so people can see why this is gospel business...
S	Orthodox	Jason	I	First of all, there must be a deep and profound connection with the preaching and <i>kerygma</i> of Christ, and the doing of his commandments... we are fundamentally disconnected from the human experience. So...the first thing that has to happen is that we get our hands in dirt. We understand what food is and where it comes from...(and) That we would understand time, and keep time in a festal, liturgical, sacramental way, you know?

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Orthodox	Allan	H	Good question. I don't think you can avoid (it). Again, always under the premise that this isn't our main teaching, but it comes in some other teachings like Paul says, "Be content with whatever you have"... But I don't see myself as teaching, ah, like using a blue box and stuff like that, okay, but I think (it's) the idea of teaching real Christianity...
S	Orthodox	Lyle	I	[It is done] holistically. It is built into the Divine liturgy. If you regard the world sacramentally, why would you wreck it?
S	Roman Catholic	Fr. Mason	I	I would think it's something that's actually part and parcel of most Christian teaching. Certainly in Catholicism it has been the role of every Christian to be a good steward of what they've been given. That quite often is preached about.
S	Lutheran	Tyler	I	I mean something that I think is important is for us to realize that it is a trust that we've been given. I mean, the world is a trust we've been given from God, but also on a little more, a concrete basis, I am a member of the Simms Creek Stewards Society and fairly active, and we often will take our Youth Group and do stream enhancement.



Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
NS	Baptist	Daniel	I	Currently I think it is just trying to encourage individuals that have an interest or any kind of a passion about that. We have been pretty good at concentrate on merely the spiritual at the expense of the physical. The bible isn't really into that separation.
NS	Baptist	Phil	H	Well, I think my role as a pastor is to teach the whole council of God. So, I don't take on environmental issues. I don't take on environmental causes, but I do try and, you know, we've talked about some of those earlier passages. Last Easter I spoke on the cosmic implications of Christ's death and resurrection. When I teach on Genesis, I teach on our responsibility to the earth...
NS	Baptist	Richard	I	I would think first of all you would want to be an example of the best you can be ...and two I would think he would be able to encourage his people not to exploit the earth as it were but to do their very best to...help it.
NS	Pentecostal	Norman	I	This is a place where you talk about all aspects of life...to steward the world around you...a lot of people don't know how to start...
NS	Vineyard	Ben	I	I think part of it is, for me, and this is sort of where I think I'm most passionate, is to kind of undo some of the wrong thinking. So, some of that understanding of popular language, undoing the idea that it's all going to burn up in the end, so why care?

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	=	Sacramental	I	= important
NS	=	Non sacramental	H	= hesitant

Table 4-2

By the answers given, it appears most ministers are willing to use their position in some way to advance EE. Yet there is a wide range in the extent to which these clergy will do this. Some like Keith (Anglican) discuss environmental topics in church on an ongoing basis, while others like Phil and Richard (Baptist) said they will not go out of their way to promote ecological causes in the church setting. Fr. Jason, Fr. Lyle and Fr. Allan (Orthodox) perceive caring for the earth as a natural result of a good understanding of God's character and what He has done to create and redeem, but they won't teach environmental topics as stand-alone issues. A closer examination of practice within these churches will clarify how these ministers perceive their EE role.

Tables 4-3, 4-4 and 4-5 display the clerics' responses to questions about the suitability of sermons, Sunday-school curriculum and adult Bible studies as mediums of EE.

*Interview question: How appropriate is it, if at all, to use a sermon or homily to teach parishioners about Creation-care?*

Table 4-3 Use of sermons to express environmental concerns

<i>Category</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Response</i>
S	Anglican	Brian	I	The more the better.
S	Anglican	Keith	I	As a preacher from time to time I am drawing attention to biblical texts which make special connection with environmental themes...I try to shape liturgy to show people this is gospel business.
S	Orthodox	Jason	I	I have, on many occasions, and in fact last year I did 11 hours of lecture on this subject in Saskatchewan, and then I have a podcast on Ancient Faith radio in which I did four hours of lecturing on that podcast.
S	Orthodox	Allan	I	I don't think it would be inappropriate, because ... there's a lot of teaching in that, you know.
S	Orthodox	Lyle	I	I have spoken about ecology in homilies ...don't wreck the environment because it does not belong to us – the world is a sacrament.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Response</i>
S	Roman Catholic	Fr. Mason	I	Well, I think it's often been done, in different ways, we might not call it creation care, but that's been done, I've done it myself here, you know, preaching on the environment, how we have to be good stewards of the environment, we generally put it like that, good stewards.
S	Lutheran	Tyler	I	Well it's a few years ago now, but I actually did it. Ah, so I think it is....It was within a series of sermons, and I don't remember them all but just the idea of stewardship was the one.
NS	Baptist	Daniel	I	I think it's highly appropriate and I will do it ... but I think there's a sense generally amongst sort of middle class white Evangelical Christians that ...we don't see massive environmental destruction or any of those things, ... People just kind of look at it and go, "Sounds great. Sounds awesome. Not really a priority. Like, I got a million other things I'm worried about, not that."

<i>Category</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Response</i>
NS	Baptist	Phil	H	...I'm an exegetical preacher, so if I were to preach through the Book of Romans and come to Romans, Chapter 8, I'd be all over it. If I was preaching through Genesis 1 to 11, I'd be all over it... if I was preaching through Colossians, I'd be all over it ...that for me gives me the balance, as I think wherever I find it in scripture I'll preach on it, but I won't go out of my way to preach on that, as I won't go out of my way to preach on any other topic.
NS	Baptist	Richard	H	Probably... text don't readily come to my mind as to where I would gain some strength there...I think evangelicals tend not to do it because ...there's a new heaven and new earth coming ... so let it go down because there's a new one coming anyhow.
NS	Pentecostal	Norman	I	I think environmental issues are a fantastic application of biblical principles that would be addressed in a talk at church. So ... I want to be a better follower of Christ, what does that mean? It means reading your bible, it means praying, it means, caring for the environment, it means loving your family, it means staying healthy ...I think that's where I would put it.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Church</i>	<i>Clergy</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Response</i>
NS	Vineyard	Ben	I	Oh, absolutely, I think it is. I think some Christians would say, “Look, every sermon should be about the cross, and every sermon should be about personal salvation.” I don’t think so. I think, again, that’s understanding the bigger picture of salvation.

S = Sacramental      I = Perceived by clergy as important

NS = Non sacramental      H = Clergy is hesitant

Table 4-3

When asked about sermons, the clergy I spoke with expressed a variety of opinions as to the suitability of this medium for environmental-education. Six of the clerics cited examples of having preached on environmental themes (one Anglican, two Orthodox, a Lutheran a Catholic and a Baptist). Two others (Daniel-Baptist and Ben-Vineyard) mentioned the possibility of parishioner opposition to EE in sermons. Phil (Baptist) explained that he addresses creation care only as the topic surfaces as he preaches through the Bible and that he is not an environmentalist. When I asked Phil what he meant by this, he clarified he would not worship creation—something Christians are forbidden to do in Scripture. In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans it is written, “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Romans 1:25 New International Version). A pastor of an evangelical church would certainly be in trouble with some of his or her parishioners if he/she did not draw a clear distinction between *caring for* creation and *worshipping* creation.

In summary, it appears none of the 12 clergy are outright opposed to discussing the needs of the Earth during a sermon. Only Richard and Phil (Baptist) expressed some hesitance towards this use of the pulpit. Ten of the 12 expressed a ready willingness to talk about environmental needs during a service. Of the six clergy who gave examples of having preached about the environment, five of them were from sacramental churches. Still, this sample is too small to be considered reliable evidence of a greater EE role within sacramental churches as compared to non-sacramental.

*Interview question: How appropriate is it, if at all, to use children's Sunday-school time to promote Creation-care?*

Table 4-4 Use of Sunday-school Curriculum to teach environmental care.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Anglican	Brian	I	Yes ... one of the things we do is link up to the Community Gardens,...one Sunday of the year we actually go over there and she gives a whole talk to the kids on little worms and what they do and the importance of them,... So, it's beautiful creation stuff... It gets their hands in the dirt kind of thing.
S	Anglican	Keith	I	Yes, this is very important.
S	Orthodox	Jason	I	Absolutely. I think it's vital. And kids yearn and seek it. Absolutely.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Orthodox	Allan	H	We don't have really a Sunday school. But yeah, if we had one, using that same tenure as I just said, yeah, the same idea, yeah, you know, bring it up. I just don't think that the church needs to be, ah, environmentally active. I think there are a lot of people out there that are doing that. We've got a more important job.
S	Orthodox	Lyle	N/A	Was not asked.
S	Roman Catholic	Fr. Mason	I	Oh, I think that would be very good. And I think that's very appropriate, you know, a good creation care program, taught here with Christian teaching, and careful again not to kind of hitch it to any political agenda, yeah, I think that's most important to get children thinking about it when they're very young.
S	Lutheran	Tyler	I	Oh, yeah. It'd be very appropriate, and I mean I'm not that involved or aware, but I would be very surprised if it was not a part of it. Yeah.
NS	Baptist	Daniel	I	Oh, I think it's hugely appropriate. Would you get some flak? Probably.



Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
NS	Baptist	Phil	H	Again, for me, it's within the context of the Bible. I would be reluctant myself to just push environmentalism as an issue without any biblical context behind it, without sort of any creational mandate behind it, because we're not here to promote causes, and we're not here to push secondary issues.
NS	Baptist	Richard	I	Well I think probably Sunday school is good because you're starting the children young and that would help them to honour the Creation that God gave them ... then it would become part of a natural thing as they grow.
NS	Pentecostal	Norman	I	Yeah, I think so, if we teach them...even recycling...a sense of responsibility for what we have been entrusted with...
NS	Vineyard	Ben	I	I think absolutely. I think it would be great.

S = Sacramental                      I = Clergy perceives it is important

NS = Non sacramental    H = Clergy is hesitant

Table 4-4

Nine of the eleven pastors questioned about the use of Sunday school curriculum for EE readily agreed to the suitability of teaching children the need to care for God's Earth. That said, only one (Brian-Anglican) cited an example of children receiving EE in his Sunday school, although that does not mean environmental topics are avoided in the

Sunday schools of the other churches. Two pastors (Phil-Baptist and Allan-Orthodox) expressed a reticence to the use of Sunday-school time for EE. The rationale for their hesitance appears to be a belief that ecological topics are secondary to more important “spiritual” topics. Another concern as expressed by Fr. Mason (Roman Catholic) is a fear of using his role as a clergy to advocate a “political” cause. In summary, the interviewed pastors are not united in a willingness to support the use of Sunday school time for EE, although most were supportive of the idea.

*Interview question: How appropriate is it, if at all, for adult bible studies to include Creation-care topics?*

Table 4-5 Use of adult Bible studies for teaching about environmental care.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Anglican	Brian	I	I think that’s something that really needs to happen. I think you can do a lot of thematic Bible studies, and I think that would reconnect us ... how we look at the world.
S	Anglican	Keith	I	Yes.
S	Orthodox	Jason	H	Of course. It would be a vital possibility understanding Creation Care, but...if you put it into an alphabet would be in like the t, u, v part of the alphabet. There is an a, b, c part... that people need to understand first, such as who God is... and who Jesus is and all that stuff. But yes, absolutely.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Orthodox	Allan	H	No, I wouldn't be opposed to it. I just ... think we sometimes...major on the minors. You know, I think that the development of the soul of the individual, that's, there's so much that needs to be done there, but this is way down the list of things that I would do. It wouldn't be, I wouldn't be opposed to it, but it's not something that I would necessarily start.
S	Orthodox	Lyle	N/A	Was not asked.
S	Roman Catholic	Fr. Mason	I	I could see that being, and I would think that many people would be very attracted to a program like that. As a matter of fact, I know they would be here. Creation care, the Christian teaching of creation or something like that. I think that would be well received.
S	Lutheran	Tyler	I	Oh, yeah. Kind of coming back to that as far as my role, that's an education kind of thing.
NS	Baptist	Daniel	I	Yeah, I think teaching and learning always have a strong component, and I think if you could translate a Bible Study group into getting out of the chairs and start working in some project somewhere in the community,

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
NS	Baptist	Phillip	H	I don't know if I would be terribly warm to that. I'd have to see it and understand the context of how it was written... I think there could be some value to it, but I'd have to think that one through ... how do you teach earth care or environmentalism in the Christian context?
NS	Baptist	Richard	H	I would imagine that there are bible studies on creation care, I am not familiar with any but I would imagine that even Evangelicals [have] some...
NS	Pentecostal	Norman	N/A	Was not asked.
NS	Vineyard	Ben	I	It is definitely appropriate.
S = Sacramental		I = Clergy perceives as important		
NS = Non sacramental		H = Clergy is hesitant		

Table 4-5

As seen in Table 4-5 the question about the suitability of Bible studies on a creation-care theme also produced a range of responses. Six ministers seemed enthusiastic about the idea, one (Jason-Orthodox) was agreeable to such studies only if from a broad theological context, two (Phil-Baptist and Allan-Orthodox) expressed skepticism and one (Richard-Baptist) came across as indifferent. Given the nature of the responses, I am assuming there are no such studies presently taking place in the churches represented. This does not mean environmental topics are not discussed during studies that do exist, however. Once again clergy are divided on how much they perceive the use of church sponsored programming suitable for EE.

*Research Question 2: Is there a difference between church denominations in the degree to which their clergy perceive themselves as providers of environmental education?*

In an attempt to answer the second research question, I compared the way sacramental and non-sacrament-based clergy responded to four interview questions: The three already discussed as well as the one on denominational programs illustrated in Table 4-6 below.

The findings are as follows: My interviews revealed a variety of opinions about the use sermons to promote environmental concern but no clear delineation between the two categories of clergy. Likewise, there was no detectable distinction in the attitudes of the two categories of clergy towards the use of Sunday-School curriculum or adult Bible Studies for EE. As for the provision of EE programming, a quantifiable distinction between sacramental and non-sacramental churches was noticeable. All but one priest from the sacramental churches were aware of programming from their organizations on the topic of ecology. The “non-sacramental” pastors were equally confident in the lack of such programming from their denominations. Although the availability of such programming does not reflect the views of the interviewed clergy, it may reveal a greater commitment to EE within the sacrament-based organizations. Perhaps the direction provided by the Pope (Roman Catholic), the Archbishop of Canterbury (Anglican) and Metropolitan Bartholomew (Orthodox) has influenced the creation of this programming. The responses of the twelve clergy to the related question are displayed in Table 4-6.

I would like to make clear my conclusion that it would be faulty logic to assume the expressed opinions of the twelve participants is transferable to a broader segment of Christendom.

*Interview question: Does your denomination provide any direction or programming in Creation-care?*

Table 4-6 Availability of church programming on environmental care.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Anglican	Brian	Y	Yes, from a diocesan point of view, yes, we have an actual commission. We have a committee within the diocese that connects with us locally, and we also, and they have representatives nationally. We also have one person within the parish who's just been recently appointed as our parish representative.
S	Anglican	Keith	Y	There are parish committees as well as the Diocese and Environment Committee. There are also international meetings annually. There is a resolution created by the Anglican Communion Environment Network as proposed initially by the Archbishop of Canterbury.
S	Orthodox	Jason	Y	Yes. A great deal. This church, and many Orthodox churches do.
S	Orthodox	Allan	Y	I know ... Metropolitan Bartholomew ...said something about it being a sin...I mean, about pollution.
S	Orthodox	Lyle	N/A	Was not asked this question.

Category	Church	Clergy	Rating	Response
S	Roman Catholic	Fr. Mason	Y	I can't think of anything particular right now, but certainly we are more conscious of the environment ... It's actually in the catechism of the church. So it goes back a long time. Actually I was checking on it just before you came in. It's called respect for the integrity of creation...
S	Lutheran	Tyler	Y	I know they did have like a Bible study that was, you know, put together a few years... That's within our Canadian Lutheran Church, ... a foreign subsidiary of a fairly large Lutheran denomination down in the States. And I, now thinking about it, in their catalogue I have seen several things dealing with, you know, our responsibility to care for the environment.
NS	Baptist	Daniel	N	I can't think of one thing.
NS	Baptist	Phil	N	Not that I'm aware of. It might, but not that I'm aware of. Yeah.
NS	Baptist	Richard	N	No, I think that you would find that more of the churches like the Anglican, United churches...
NS	Pentecostal	Norman	N	Nothing officially that they are aware of.
NS	Vineyard	Ben	N	I think they haven't really had time to get some of those kinds of ideas...

S = Sacramental                      Y = yes

NS = Non sacramental    N = no

Table 4-6

In summary, although I set out to determine if a difference existed between sacramental and non-sacramental clergy in their perception of their EE role, my results are inconclusive. Contrary to my faulty stereotype prior to conducting the study, three non-sacramental pastors (Daniel-Baptist, Phil-Baptist & Ben-Vineyard) expressed a sophisticated theological foundation from which EE could be a natural progression. It was the sacramental Anglican cleric, Keith, however, who provided me with the most practical examples of EE programming taking place within churches. A case in point is the Diocese of BC Environmental Committee's (DEC) nine recommendations. These include energy audits, ground care suggestions, car pooling to church, a bike to church week, and a Sunday service dedicated to the environment (Committee, 2008). A copy of a recently circulated leaflet from the DEC containing these recommendations is displayed in Appendix E. In addition to suggesting sustainable practices the Diocese of BC is encouraging each parish to appoint a Parish Environmental Steward to give leadership at the parish level (Committee, 2008).

While some discrepancy in EE practice seems to exist between the two categories within my interview data, (sermon use and available programming), my sample sizes are too small to project as North American norms.

*Research Question 3: What is the relationship for clergy, if any, between frequent Eucharist observance and perception of self as having an environmental education role?*

The Eucharist/communion tradition is an act of Christian obedience to what is believed to be the words of Jesus on the night of his arrest. The Gospel of St. Luke records the event this way;



And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'this is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. St. Luke 22: 19-20 (New International Version, 1984)

The desire to better understand the reasons for the difference between sacramental and non-sacramental churches in their approach to environmental problems inspired this research. I think it would be ideal if environmental action plans could become commonplace in all churches. I do not claim to know how this could be accomplished; however one possible catalyst of ecological concern is the Eucharist/Communion.

As explained earlier, the Gnostic sect was an early threat to orthodox Christian teachings and much was written to counter its arguments. St. Irenaeus, was one of the most vocal critics of Gnosticism in the second century CE. His main criticism with this heresy, as he called it, was of its claim that Jesus could not have been human due to the Gnostic assumption that all physical matter is essentially evil. Irenaeus famously contended that Jesus was in fact God Incarnate and the physical Eucharist an excellent reminder and defence of this truth (Urs von Balthasar, 1990). With this study I entertain the possibility the Eucharist is still one of Christianity's best defences against the lingering assumption that physical matter is not worth saving.

Table 4-7 displays a range of practice and belief about this 2000 year-old tradition as expressed by the twelve interviewed clergy. Individual churches are not identified.

Table 4-7 Varying Eucharist/Communion practice and belief

Church	Frequency	Effect of Partaking	Implication for Creation
Anglican (S)	2 x week minimum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it is central to our faith</li> <li>- it offers thanksgiving to God</li> <li>- some people sense God's presence</li> <li>- it is a recalling of Christ's sacrifice prompting more than a mere memory, but an active engagement with Him.</li> <li>- it offers hope to world around us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- food connects us to land</li> <li>- it reminds us of creation's intrinsic worth</li> <li>- nourishes us to go back to world</li> <li>- not a lot written about this but there is a lot to explore there – that's good for me to start thinking about</li> </ul>

Church	Frequency	Effect of Partaking	Implication for Creation
Orthodox (S)	1 x week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it is the defining act of our faith</li> <li>- it provides spiritual nourishment</li> <li>- it brings fullness of Holy Spirit over time</li> <li>- it is the medicine of immortality</li> <li>- God changes me by it</li> <li>- God works through it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creation is being offered back to God in Christ</li> <li>- God uses creation as an instrument of salvation</li> <li>- bread and wine from the earth are used</li> <li>- communion cannot be separated from creation</li> <li>- it should push one in direction of living sacramentally (thus respectfully of the earth)</li> <li>- the cosmos is redeemed so why would we wreck it?</li> </ul>
Lutheran (S)	2 x month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-it is central to our faith</li> <li>-it unites us with Christ</li> <li>-it is an important collective event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- nothing directly</li> <li>- we recognize that God is the Creator</li> </ul>

Church	Frequency	Effect of Partaking	Implication for Creation
Roman Catholic (S)	daily	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it is the defining act for Christians</li> <li>- it provides spiritual nourishment</li> <li>- it is a reminder of Christ</li> <li>- God changes people over time</li> <li>- some people give up possessions over time</li> <li>- many people have profound experiences with God during communion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it connects us with the world</li> <li>- Christ died because creation is worth something to God</li> <li>- it connects us to world around us</li> <li>- people sometimes get rid of extraneous material possessions</li> </ul>
Baptist (NS)	monthly (2 x month in one of the Baptist churches)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it provides spiritual nourishment</li> <li>- it is a reminder of Christ's sacrifice</li> <li>- it could expand the human imagination</li> <li>- it unites us with Christ</li> <li>- it reminds us of Christ's death</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- causes us to reflect on God's good gifts</li> <li>- it reminds us of God's redemption which applies to more than humans</li> <li>- it reminds us when Christ returns there will be a perfect environment with him.</li> </ul>

Church	Frequency	Effect of Partaking	Implication for Creation
Vineyard (NS)	monthly	- it is a reminder	- it signifies God is supremely concerned with and committed to the restoration of all of creation.
Pentecostal (NS)	monthly	- it is a reminder of Christ's death and resurrection	- it might be a stretch - reminds us of...earth's provision of food.

S = Sacramental  
NS = Non-sacramental

While I was not able to isolate a causal connection between frequent Eucharist observance and a greater incidence of EE in churches, some of the clergy's comments indicate possible implications of this sacrament for the surrounding creation.

Two interview questions were asked about the Eucharist/Communion. The first was "*Why do you partake of the Eucharist / what does it accomplish?*" and the second was "*What are the implications, if any, of the Eucharist, for creation?*" As is evident by Table 4-7, a range of responses resulted from these questions including "It is a symbol of remembrance," "It unites us with Christ," "It could expand the human imagination over time," "It is central to our faith," and "It is the defining act of the Christian church." Clergy from sacrament-based churches described communion as the centerpiece of a church service without which it would not be Christian. The Roman Catholic priest I spoke to recounted the story of early Christians receiving the Eucharist as depicted in

paintings on the catacomb walls in Italy. His point was the Eucharist has always been the most important Christian tradition.

The second interview question probes directly into the clergy's thoughts about a possible connection between the Eucharist and nature. While the initial response was sometimes a long pause, several answers reveal a potential ecological link.

Ben, a Vineyard pastor, explained that creation was on a downward spiral until the death and resurrection of Christ. The Eucharist, he explained, is a reminder of that moment in time when creation took a 180 degree turn. It signifies the promised hope for the future of all creation.

In response to the same question, Fr. Jason, an Orthodox priest, had this to say: "The Eucharist is the creation offered up in the incarnation of Christ. It has the earthly elements in it. The Divine Liturgy says, 'Thine own of Thine own we offer unto you, on behalf of all and for all.'"

Another Orthodox priest, Fr. Lyle, excitedly expressed that the Eucharist is from God's earth. He went on to recount how God's synergy produces the grain and grapes, which become the bread and wine. He poignantly explained that a nobler destiny could not be imagined for an element of creation than to be offered as bread or wine on the Eucharist table. This certainly aligns with the teaching of St. Irenaeus, as discussed in the literature review. Fr. Lyle concluded by reminding me of the Eucharist's power to change a life over time: "The Eucharist should push one in the direction of living life sacramentally ... in the direction of righteousness. The tongue that has tasted the Eucharist cannot slander its neighbour, how could you use your members for sin now, or treat the ozone badly...or the beggars in the street?"

The thoughts of a Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Mason, will conclude this section on the ecological implications of the Eucharist. He described many who come into the church well before the Eucharist is served to prepare themselves for long periods of time, laying prostrate in front of the tabernacle. I queried if these people were merely bargaining with God during personal crises. Fr. Mason said this was not the case and recalled noticing substantial changes in parishioners who maintain this practice for years. I believe this account demonstrates that pious lifestyles are at least partially influenced by the Eucharist. An expected result would be a shrinking ecological footprint as can be extrapolated from the following quotation:

The more a person grows in faith it's almost always the same, the more a person grows in their faith, certainly the more in tune they are with the world around them, with the creation around them. And oftentimes you'll see them make, sometimes make a drastic change but certainly a gradual one, of divesting themselves of so many things they don't need. Their lives will change dramatically sometimes. They get rid of the things that they consider extraneous. I've witnessed this many, many times. (Fr. Mason, Roman Catholic, personal interview, April 30, 2009)

It is difficult to quantify the effect of frequent Eucharist observance on a cleric's willingness to implement EE in church. It is equally difficult to determine if the Eucharist is the stimulus for the characteristic environmental concern observed in the sacramental churches. In my judgment, the above responses have at least revealed the need for continued research into the environmental implications of this tradition.

#### *Unanticipated Themes*

The last section of this chapter will present four unanticipated themes that emerged from the interviews. They are listed below and will be examined in turn.

*1. Humans are called by God to be stewards of creation*

The majority of the clergy used the term “stewards” in reference to the human need to care for the earth. I was initially hesitant to report this due to the overuse of this term over the past 25 years. A term loses its potency once it becomes too familiar within a given context. I first heard the term “steward” in a course entitled *Human-Environment Relations* at Trinity Western University in 1981. The professor was using it to describe the moral mandate of humans to care for the earth as implied in Genesis chapter 2. The term was effective in correcting a tired and harmful interpretation of human “rule” and “dominion” as mentioned in Genesis chapter 1. While the term was initially effective, I think it has become too easy to use without sincerity. What’s more, I suspect many from outside the faith community would agree which inhibits the prospects of cooperation. That said, the term “stewards” has become part of the Christian vernacular within the context of environmental discussions. Ten of my twelve research participants used the term to describe this largely forgotten task of humanity.

*2. Salvation is wider in scope than what has traditionally been emphasized*

Ten of the twelve interviewed clergy were asked for a description of the purpose of the church in the world. Four of the ten clergy named human salvation as the church’s primary objective. Two others mentioned human salvation as part of a wider purpose. Two other clergy claimed the mandate of the church is to manifest the kingdom of God on Earth, and similarly one said the church is to be a living witness to the presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Lastly, one clergy cited the main purpose of the church as being a “beacon of hope” (Brian) in the world. While these responses display a wide



range of thought, most churches, especially within the Evangelical branch, have long considered their primary purpose as the salvation and care of the human soul.

Considering Christianity's founder commissioned his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, New International Version, 1984), perhaps this goal of human salvation should not be criticized. What has become a point of contention, however, is the exploitive neglect of non-human creation-accelerated since the Industrial Revolution. In 1961, Joseph Sittler's reminder of a long forgotten "cosmic" (Sittler, 1962, p. 178-179) salvation at the World Council of Churches would have been considered a stretch to many then as now. That said, I was surprised by my research participants' responses to a request to define salvation.

Nine of the twelve clergy described salvation as being wider in scope than the church has traditionally understood it. Four of the nine volunteered this information without being prompted to speak specifically about the scope of salvation. Once this theme began to emerge I began specifically asking the clergy if the scope of salvation includes non-human life. Out of the nine that described a wider salvation, only one cleric seemed somewhat afraid to admit to this belief. Fr. Mason, the lone Roman Catholic participant, answered tentatively with the following words:

I would hope I am on the right footing here, if I said that at the end of time, God will take back for himself all that he created, all of his creation, ... that he would take it unto himself... Man is going to have a special relationship, even in heaven, in the plan of salvation, ... but I hope I am not being heretical, when I would like to say that... all created things make their way back to God. God in a sense is like a good mother; he'll call it back to himself. (Fr. Mason, personal interview, April 30, 2009)

Many other clergy were more certain of their claim. For example an Orthodox cleric, Fr. Lyle said, “God came to save the cosmos, not just humans!” Likewise, Phil, a Baptist pastor, complained that we often have too narrow a view when we look at salvation. He continued by positing: “The redeeming work of Christ on the cross is not only of benefit for people ... it’s a benefit to the cosmos.” Another response from Daniel, a Baptist pastor was clearly in the same vein: “We’ve been pretty good at concentrating solely on what we would deem the spiritual at the expense of the material, and the Bible isn’t really into that separation.” I believe this description of salvation from nine of twelve rather randomly selected clergy is indicative of a significant shift in Christian thinking. The long-term result of this belief should bode well for the environmental cause.

### *3. The Earth will never be destroyed*

A criticism leveled against Christian belief is the distracting anticipation of a distant blissful heaven. The result, it is claimed, is an ignoring of the Earth’s present needs. Thomas Berry complains, “The Christian redemptive mystique is little concerned with the natural world. The essential thing is redemption out of the world through a personal savior relationship that transcends all such concerns” (T. Berry, 1988, p. 129).

However legitimate this criticism has been, it may no longer apply.

Ten of the twelve pastors interviewed expressed belief in the eternal existence of the Earth as heaven. When I asked for thoughts on God’s ultimate plans for the earth, Pastor Ben from a Vineyard church said: “I believe that the earth, this earth, is not like a BIC lighter that we’re going to throw away and burn up at the end. This earth is going to actually be restored and renewed fully.”

Brian, an Anglican responded with: “I don’t believe that God has, you know, created this world just to finish at some point. I think there’s—I think there’s a continuum.”

To the same question, Daniel, a Baptist pastor replied with: “It seems pretty clear that there’s a new heaven and a new earth and continuity with the old earth and the old heaven, and that what God is after ... is a transformation rather than a destruction”.

Phil, another Baptist pastor said, “God’s ultimate plans for the earth are to remove all the vestiges of evil ... and all the implications of sin and to restore the earth to perfection ... And we will go on enjoying, cultivating, managing, living in the world that God has created.

And finally, Jason, an Orthodox priest said, “This earth is the creation of God which is meant to last forever and ever, and indeed will, ...we will bodily...dwell with God forever and ever, in the midst of this earth which will be transfigured and transformed.” Jason went on to wax eloquently, an impressive accomplishment considering he did not know the questions in advance:

So, earth is not waiting to be discarded. Why would God create something and then recreate it through his Son, only to throw it away and cast it off as nothing? But that in fact, he’s coming back to claim it. Claim it as his own, Wayne. This is the thing. Christ on the cross, okay, cries out ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Now earlier in the gospel, he has said that a man leaves his mother and father that he might become one flesh with his wife. Upon the cross he is alone. His mother is with his disciple, he is crying out as the bridegroom, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ I am utterly alone. But it’s at that moment that in fact, he is the bridegroom, he has married the creation. The church, and the creation it represents. He has become one with it. In fact, St. Teresa of Avila...said that the cross is the marriage bed upon which God consummated his wedding with his bride, the church. It’s an amazing thought! Well, what’s the church? It’s the creation. It’s human beings and the creation and everything called up before God. You see? It’s all those things. It’s the sacramental presence of God localized, expressed, so the point is, earth will in

fact last for ever and ever. He's claiming it as his bride, like Odysseus returning to Penelope at Ithaca... (Fr. Jason, personal interview, March 28, 2009)

The implication of the above remarks by Fr. Jason and the others is that the Creator intends the Earth to last eternally. They believe He will transform Earth in time, and though we are to partner with Him in the tending and transformation of it, we have not been doing this with a sufficient degree of foresight.

#### *4. Evangelical pastors perceive human crises to be more urgent than ecological ones*

This fourth and final theme was raised by only three of the pastors yet deserves consideration. I may be breaking with purist grounded theory by reporting on such a flash in the data pan, but I think it reflects a tension felt by a wider number of pastors. Clergy perceive their role as mainly serving humans. One cannot fault them for that. While environmental needs are looming ever larger on the horizon of our consciousness, a pastor's day planner is overloaded with people-problems. Social problems are on the rise and pastors are becoming busy counselors. Daniel (Baptist) expressed this frustration in the following way:

I find it a real struggle. There is so much that is so pressing in the church world that—you've got people in hospital, you've got people, you know, marriages falling apart. You've got huge needs all around you. I care about the environment, and I'm passionate about getting people there. Sometimes it just feels like that could wait till next week because their marriage is falling apart today. (Pastor Daniel, personal interview, April 7, 2009)

Richard, also a Baptist pastor, explained a similar tension when I spoke to him on April 19th, 2009. He is the head pastor from a team of five who minister to a church of approximately 600 members. Richard spoke of having to use a triage approach to his counseling duties to keep up with his parishioners' problems.

I think again the sense of need not just time but need cause you see 7 out of 10 marriages breaking down and almost every person coming in to our church here literally 7 out of 10 comes to our church they have marriage problems ... they're divorced they're broken down you know ... yesterday I was dealing with a case of addiction um... marriage breakdown Sunday, so right away you put all your energy into that... your staff is so limited... (Pastor Richard, personal interview, April 19th, 2009)

A third clergy, Keith from an Anglican church, also mentioned the triage approach used by pastors to decide who is helped. I raise this dilemma as a perceived obstacle to the implementation of EE within churches. Some would call it a shame that the problems of people constantly receive priority over the crises of creation—with no voice but the groan described in Romans 8. Moreover, it could be suggested it is time to plan EE into the liturgical year of all churches. When I asked Norman, a Pentecostal pastor, if he found the needs of his flock a distraction from environmental needs, he answered no. He said a pastor can plan ahead to make certain all topics are dealt with. Nevertheless, he gave no examples of EE being offered in his church—something I expect he would be eager to do if it were, given the nature of our discussion. This contradiction between acknowledgement of environmental needs and practical attempts to address them seemed common in the non-sacramental churches I sampled.

## Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first is a synopsis of my findings and corresponding interpretations as linked to the three research questions. The second section explains the implications and significance of these findings and the third is a description of my recommendations.

### *Findings and interpretations*

In response to the claim that Christianity precludes environmental concern (T. Berry, 1988, 2006; Feuerbach, 1957; Toynbee, 1974; White, 1967) I set out to examine a primary source of Christian thought and action: The church. The research was steered by three questions:

1. To what extent do Christian clergy perceive themselves as environmental educators?
2. Are there certain types of churches more inclined to EE than others?
3. If some types of churches are more inclined to environmental solutions, what causes the difference?

Having informally observed and read about a greater tendency towards societal and ecological justice in sacramental churches, I determined to interview several clergy from this branch of Christendom as well as from the non-sacramental. As explained in Chapter 2, the criterion for “sacramental” was frequent Eucharist observance (an average of once per week).

#### *Do clergy perceive themselves as having an EE role?*

All twelve pastors indicated *some* degree of willingness to use the church for EE. They described a range of EE implementation from mere intellectual acknowledgement

to hosting a “Bike to church Week” and playing “A Bicycle Built for Two” during the service. I clustered the pastors into four categories according to how “green” they are at church and came up with four divisions:

1. Practical approach: Use a combination of sermons, liturgy, committee work, and active involvement of parishioners.
2. Holistic approach: Advocate living in harmony with creation is a natural outflow of their theology. Will include environmental topics in sermons but within a thorough theological framework.
3. Intellectual approach: Have a sophisticated theological understanding of the need for creation care and will preach about it in biblical context. Will not single out environmental topics for their own sake nor encourage environmental action from parishioners.
4. Superficial approach: Will acknowledge environmental concerns when asked about them but have not considered integrating such concern with church activities. Focus primarily on matters of human, spiritual health.

Table 5-1 displays clergy and their churches under a descriptor of approach to EE.

Table 5-1 Clergy approach to EE in church

Practical Approach	Holistic Approach	Intellectual Approach	Superficial Approach
Keith (Anglican S)	Fr. Jason (Orthodox S)	Ben (Vineyard /NS)	Richard (Baptist /NS)
Tyler (Lutheran S)	Fr. Lyle (Orthodox S)	Daniel (Baptist/ NS)	Fr. Allan (Orthodox /S)
Brian (Anglican S)	Fr. Mason (Catholic S)	Norman (Pentecostal /NS)	
	Phil (Baptist/NS)		
S = Sacramental	NS = Non sacramental		

Regardless of denomination, concern for the planet is evident in all of these churches. At the least, some clergy merely acknowledged the existence of ecological problems but provided no evidence of a response from their congregations. More practically, serious discussion and practical action (sermons, committees, and some “environmental” activities) are happening in seven of these churches. None of the clergy came across as overly skeptical towards the topic of environmentalism. Of course, skepticism may have been a response from some of the 18 clergy who chose not to be interviewed.

*Are clergy and parishioners from sacramental churches really more environmentally active?*

Table 5-1 illustrates my sample’s lack of a faultless delineation between sacramental and non-sacramental churches where the environment is concerned. Though it is true the more “hands on” approach to ecological need was evident in the sacramental churches, the “holistic” and “intellectual” groups include many non-sacramental clergy who demonstrated a sophisticated theological foundation for EE. A much larger sample of clergy would need to be surveyed in order to confirm the existence of a widespread difference in approach to “environmentalism” between these two categories of churches.

*Is the Eucharist really a catalyst of environmental concern?*

It is not clear if the Eucharist is the means by which environmental concern is mediated in churches. My initial research question was seeking the effect of the Eucharist on the clergy alone, yet I did ask them about the effect of the Eucharist on their congregations.



Some clergy seemed puzzled by the question about Communion / the Eucharist. Initially, it does not seem to have much to do with the environment. Yet what could be causing the practical concern for air, soil, and non-human life in these churches? I wondered if it could be the tangible nature of this bread and wine from the earth. In other words the earth-focused tendencies of sacramental churches could be caused by the frequent tactile reminder of the Incarnate Christ dying for the life of the cosmos (Colossians 1:19-20). This theory is supported by the Orthodox' perception of the sacramental creation offered back to God with the Eucharist prayer: "Thine Own of Thine Own we offer unto Thee on behalf of all and for all" (Chrysostom, nd, p. 49).

My interest in the possible effect of the "Lord's Supper" was sustained by:

1. Fr. Lyle's expectation that the Eucharist would guide a person towards sacramental (reverent) living; interacting in a caring, respectful way to the surrounding creation.
2. Pastor Daniel's musings about the Eucharist's potential sway on one's imagination over time.
3. Fr. Mason's repeated observation of people living more simply as they deepen in their Eucharist-enhanced faith.
4. Fr. Allan's observation of his own personal change which he described by saying: "But this is where I learned to pray, and when I started to live the sacraments is when I started to really see changes in my life. Looking back, you know, it was like this is what's changing me." (Fr. Allan, personal interview, April 22, 2009).

I must acknowledge Fr. Allan does not describe the change being towards environmental mission. However, he implied earlier in the interview that we are to become God's image bearers in a transformation known as *Theosis* (Fr. Alexis, personal

interview, April 22, 2009). My assumption that this change would involve treating creation respectfully is consistent with Orthodox teaching, but not necessarily borne out in Fr. Alexis' church.

In contrast, there were also comments from the interviews that make it seem unlikely the Eucharist has a transforming effect on clergy. Two participants (one Orthodox and one Anglican) implied they are too busy while serving the bread and wine to be aware of any effect these elements may be having on them. Moreover, there are many other factors that could cause differing beliefs and behaviours between churches.

Keith, the Anglican rector in the “practical” group, observed that his evangelical counterparts are not much into justice and ecological issues. He attributes their avoidance of these concerns to the theological bent under which they are trained in seminary. Conversely, Richard, a Baptist, guessed the Anglican and United clergy spend time on ecological needs because they believe the soul is automatically “taken care of” thus they are freed up to deal with non-spiritual matters. These are speculations however—the factors causing the observable differences between sacramental and non-sacramental churches remain elusive.

#### *Obstacles to EE implementation in churches*

Several obstacles to EE came to light during the interviews. First, three pastors expressed a determination to avoid hitching to a political agenda. In their view some environmental issues are in fact, political. A second obstacle to EE in churches as implied by Philip (Baptist) is an unwillingness to flirt with creation-worship. This is forbidden in the bible (Romans 1: 25) and pastors will steer clear of any chance of being considered heretical. A third obstacle to EE in churches is the urgent counseling needs that place

time demands on pastors. These urgencies seem to be having much more of an influence in the non-sacramental churches. Finally, some pastors (Allan, Phillip, Norman in Table 4-4) conveyed an opinion that EE is not the church's business. These men appear to believe earthly matters are a distraction from the "more important" (Allan) work of ministering to the human soul. This biblical but over-emphasized mandate will be critiqued in the conclusion.

*A reflection on the chosen methodology*

At the tail end of a sixteen-month research journey, I am wondering if a different approach to this study would have been more efficient. Two alternate methods are briefly considered in turn. A more general qualitative, grounded theory study of clerical approaches to EE, regardless of denomination is one. Yet, I don't think this approach would have satisfied my longstanding curiosity about differences in contemporary Christian response to justice and ecology—a curiosity deepened by the present study.

Another approach to this study could have employed a mixed-methods strategy. Although more time-consuming, I think it would have been a better fit for my research objective. A combination of qualitative interviews and quantifiable surveys of larger numbers of clergy would have yielded results more transferable to a wider segment of the Christian population. Five or six clergy on each side of a categorical divide did not prove a sufficient population from which to comprehend wider trends of thought.

*Implications and significance*

It is safe to say Christianity does not enter people's minds during discussions of ecological solutions. Conversely, this worldview is more likely to be listed as a primary cause of the despoiling of earth. Many contemporary scholars have shelved Christianity as having nothing to offer the troubled planet. The complaint of Ludwig Feuerbach, cited also in the problem section of this thesis is clear: "Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul" (Feuerbach, 1841/1957, p. 287). Thomas Berry dismissed our western religious traditions as having "little relevance to what is happening" (T. Berry, 2006, p. 48).

These criticisms are partially deserved, yet not because the abusive, capitalization of Earth was commanded by the writers of scripture. Rather, the neglect of creation has been more common since the Reformation's emphasis on individual salvation (Wilkinson, 1991) and accelerated by the Industrial Revolution.

A Gnostic assumption lingers within the western church. It reinforces an imagined division between the perceived impurity of all that is tangible and the purer otherworldliness of the spiritual realm (Wilkinson, 1991). Yet this view has not had equal influence everywhere in Christendom.

The Eastern Orthodox branch of the church has held to a more exalted view of creation. This became evident during my interviews and was corroborated by further reading. Eastern Orthodox teaching has always placed humans as the priests of creation—a "mediator" between God and the earth (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 304). The honoured Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemmann, explains the world was "created

as the ‘matter,’ the material of one all embracing Eucharist, and man was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament” (Schmemmann in Wilkinson, 1991, p. 304).

This “Orthodox” doctrine assumes God is very present within His creation (Wilkinson, 1991). St. Paul talks of this divine presence in his letter to the Colossian church and part of the New Testament: “In Him (Jesus) all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17, New International Version). St. Paul goes on to describe the cosmic scope of the Creator’s redemption: “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” Colossians 1: 19-20 (New International Version).

It is clear that within Christian scripture, the Creator is described as sustaining and suffering for creation through the person of Jesus (Wilkinson, 1991). Christian doctrine refers to this Divine earthly presence as the Incarnation. What is lesser known is the clear biblical mandate humans have been given to assist in the sustaining of creation.

In fact, we are to be the “saviours of nature as Christ is the Saviour of humans” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 298). During an interview on March 28, 2009, Fr. Jason referred to this biblical mandate as our “restored Adamic purpose,” with reference to the story of humankind being placed in the “garden” to tend and care for it recorded in Genesis 2:15. Elsewhere in the scriptures redeemed humans are called to suffer as “co-heirs” with Christ (Romans 8: 17, New International Version) in this ecological labour of love (Wilkinson). What follows in this New Testament passage is perhaps the most referred to and moving biblical statement on behalf of all without a human voice:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the

one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Romans 8: 19-22 (New International Version)

In the second century CE, in his *Against Heresies* Irenaeus wrote “It is right therefore, for this created order to be restored to its pristine state”(Irenaeus in Wilkinson, 1991, p. 300). Amazingly relevant to our present discussion, Irenaeus was countering Gnosticism.

In his final major work before his death, eco-theologian Thomas Berry fairly observed western Christians’ “strange indifference” to the needs of the earth due to their “excessive concern for the redemption processes out of this world” (T. Berry, 2006, p. 47). More accurately, Loren Wilkinson claims Christians need to perceive themselves, as being saved “for creation not out of it” (Wilkinson, & Wilkinson, 1992, p. 15).

#### *Relevance of this study*

The teaching of the described Judeo-Christian theology to inspire a radical approach to earth-care creates tremendous potential for hope and healing. It seems certain, however, that a large number of pastors are not actively promoting the cause. Collectively, Christian clergy have a weekly audience numbering over a billion. If even North American churches uniformly embraced the biblical call to environmental mission, an unprecedented ally would be gained.

I was encouraged and surprised during interviews to find evidence of belief in a cosmic grace that reaches all creation. In addition, I did not expect to hear so many clergy speaking of their hope in an eternal, redeemed earth. Admittedly, these concepts are quite new to me and I foolishly assumed I would not come across them amongst my research

participants. Notwithstanding, I suggest they are “re-emerging” concepts, as I did not learn them growing up in evangelical churches. I was taught that salvation is for humans alone, that heaven is a distant place and that Earth will one day be destroyed. Only two of my interviewed clergy presently hold to those beliefs. The fallout of the emerging, creation-affirming theology should bode well for the environmental movement.

### *Recommendations*

This report concludes with four recommendations.

#### *1. The implementation of regular environmental education (EE) in all churches.*

The changing theological understanding of salvation’s scope and the need for earth-care suggest the time may be fertile for more biblically based EE within churches. There is curriculum already accessible in the “Resources” sections of such websites as the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN, 1993), A Rocha (ARocha, 2009) and the Christian Ecology Link (“Christian Ecology Link: Ordinary Christians, extraordinary times,” 2009). One sermon a year on the theme of “creation-care” would be a good start for many churches. Sunday school and adult bible study curriculum can also be easily accessed and implemented. In addition, it would not be difficult to begin creating more of such curriculum. Of course, all such education should be taught within the context of God’s entire meta-narrative: Creation, the incarnation, redemption and transformation.

#### *2. The implementation of church-based infrastructures to plan sustainable environmental practices within parishes and communities.*

Three or four meetings a year between several interested parishioners to discuss practical “green plans” would not be too burdensome. Many of these are already in

operation. There are suggestions for parish stewards presently being made available online. For example, *The Anglican Communion Environmental Network* is a resource offering practical guidelines for churches seeking information about greening parishes. ("Anglican Communion Environmental Network," 2009). A sample of a recently circulated leaflet from the Diocesan Environmental Committee of the Diocese of British Columbia is included in Appendix E. It provides another example of practical environmental guidance being made available for parishes.

*3. Inter-denominational collaboration between Christian churches for the sake of EE and the biblical mandate to care for creation.*

During interviews I heard several comments critical of other traditions with only slight variation in belief and practice. Defaulting to criticism instead of collaboration within our subcultures is a fault one would think Christians should avoid. I feel strongly about the need for dialogue between different Christian traditions for the sake of EE and spiritual growth. Partisan politics will always hinder but seldom help the solving of global problems. What is more, churches need to invite specialists from outside the faith community to assist with “green planning” where necessary.

*4. Continued research into the effect of the Eucharist on parishioners.*

I think Protestant churches have a little bit of a tendency to centre everything around the sermon, and then the Catholic churches have a tendency to centre everything around the Eucharist or Communion. I think we've (Protestants) swung the pendulum a little far out, and I think we could come back a little more towards the middle to our benefit I'd say. (Daniel, Baptist minister, personal interview, April 7, 2009)

If the Eucharist is a medium for an expanded awareness of creation's intrinsic value, it deserves serious exploration. A large segment of North American Christianity



presently treats this sacrament as a monthly sideshow. Interestingly, two pastors volunteered an interest for more frequent observance. One example of this is provided above (Daniel).

The present study could be significantly extended by a mixed-method approach; a quantitative survey of a large number of parishioners as well as clergy could be triangulated with data from further interviews with parishioners and clergy. The result should yield a more thorough understanding of denominational differences in ecological practice as well as the sacrament's effect on its recipients. Better yet would be a longitudinal study where participants could be surveyed two or three times over several years.

I am grateful to all whose research has inspired this work. I would be equally grateful to anyone who could continue in this line of study "for the life of the world."

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## Appendix A

### *The Interview Questions*

1. Could you describe the reasons you became a pastor?
2. How long have you been a pastor and in which places?
3. What is the church here for? What is the purpose of the church?
4. What is your interpretation of Genesis 1:27-28 as it pertains to the role of humankind toward creation?

<p><b>27</b> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <b>28</b> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

5. What is your feeling about the criticism that the degradation of the earth has been caused by the Judeo-Christian worldview stemming from this passage?
6. Do you believe the bible has any instruction for humankind as to how to treat creation? Could you elaborate on any related passage that come to mind?
7. What do you believe about God's ultimate plans for the Earth?
8. What is the meaning of "salvation" as described in the Scriptures?

9. What would be your role if any, as a provider of environmental education within the church?
10. Does this denomination provide any church programming for environmental education or earth-care? Could you explain why not?
11. To what extent, if at all would a bible study series on creation care be appropriate?
12. To what extent if it all is it appropriate to use a sermon or homily to teach about Creation-care?
13. To what extent would it be appropriate to include creation care as part of a children's Sunday School curriculum?
14. Do you have an active earth care group within your church that performs services around the parish or church?
15. Do you know of any environmental education or Creation care programs from a Christian worldview?
16. What are the implications if any, of the Incarnation of Christ .... for Creation?
17. How often do you celebrate the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, in your church? Why in that frequency?
18. Why do you partake of the Eucharist? What does taking the Eucharist / the Lord's Supper accomplish? What happens?
19. What does the experience of communion, or the Eucharist imply if anything, for our attitude towards creation?
20. Is there any related topic I have not asked pertaining to the church and creation on which you would like to comment?



## Appendix B

*Letters of Invitation to Research and Informed Consent*

Royal Roads University  
2005 Sooke Road  
Colwood, BC, Canada  
(250) 391-2511  
May 2009

**Letter of Invitation**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Wayne Demerse and I am a studying for a Master of Arts at Royal Roads University. The topic of my thesis research involves the relationship between the Christian church and the environment. My qualifications for carrying out the research project described below can be verified by contacting my Program Head and Faculty Advisor, Tony Boydell (250-391-2501) or by email at [tony.boydell@royalroads.ca](mailto:tony.boydell@royalroads.ca).

I am inviting you to participate in my research in the form of a one-on-one interview. I am hoping to conduct this interview to assist my understanding of the place of environmental education within church settings. My advisor is Dr. Loren Wilkinson, who teaches at Regent College at UBC. I anticipate the interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. The location of the interviews will be left to your choice. Privacy and comfort are important criterion for the settings.

The interviews will be audiotaped with a small hand held recorder as I will be transcribing the conversation for content analysis however such records will be destroyed within five years of the completion of my research. If you would rather not be audiotaped but would rather me make written notes of our conversations please let me know in advance of our meeting.

You may withdraw from the interview process any time you wish. Should this be your desire, the collected data until that point will not be used if you would rather it not be used. Your name and community will be changed in my thesis in order to assure the anonymity and non-traceability of each participant. This is a declaration of a respect of your privacy by the researcher and Royal Roads University.

Besides myself, a peer reviewer will have access to the raw data from these interviews to assure my correct reporting and interpretation of it. Moreover, I will allow you to review the report of our discussions before it appears in my thesis proper, which I will also make available to you when complete should you want to read it.

If you agree to the above procedures and can assist with the interview, please fill out the consent form on the back of this letter and return it to the given address at your earliest convenience or at the beginning of the interview. You can let me know of your intent by telephone or email as well, however I do need the informed consent form to be returned before we begin the interview.

Thank you in advance for your consideration as I respect that your time is valuable.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions before deciding whether or not to participate.

Sincerely,

Wayne Demerse

-----  
 Royal Roads University  
 by Masters of Arts Candidate: Wayne Demerse

#### Informed Consent

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research as described.  
 First name / Surname

The research will not exceed the minimum risk of harm to the individual participants than one could expect to face in regular daily activities. It is expected that the interview could take approximately one hour. Proceedings will be audio-taped although such records will be destroyed after the data has been analyzed and reported on. By signing below, you are declaring your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Clergy (Research participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date:

## Appendix C

*The Apostle's Creed*

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth;  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord:  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit.  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead and buried;  
He descended into Hades,  
The third day He arose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, Almighty.  
Whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints;  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body;  
and the life everlasting.

Amen

## Appendix D

*Codebook and Memo*

<b>Code</b>		<b>Definition</b>
<b>Offering back cosmos.</b>		This code is used to refer to a mentioning of a biblical mandate for humans to offer creation back to God in a redeemed state, with Christ's help. It is not used to refer to mere stewardship or vague references to caring for creation.
<b>Clergy referring to coded concept:</b>		
<b>Interviewed clergy</b>	<b>Tallies</b>	<b>Memo...</b>
Brian Keith Fr. Jason Fr. Allan Fr. Lyle Fr. Mason Tyson Daniel Phil Richard Ben Norman	1 1 1	If true, this concept is essential to my research. It is clearly a central teaching within the orthodox tradition. Schmeman and John both mention it. I think the belief can be traced to the work of Irenaeus who wrote about the need to offer back creation in a "pristine state". Where can I find this corroborated in the Scriptures?

## Appendix E

## Anglican Diocese of BC: Green Parish Possibilities



Material adapted from the Green Parish Accreditation Program formed by the Environmental Unit, Diocese of New Westminster

### **GREEN PARISH POSSIBILITIES**

**Choose from some but not all of the following:**

1. **Energy Conservation**
  - (1a) Conduct a professional energy audit and make recommendations to the appropriate committees
  - (1b) Each year, challenge the congregation to improve their own efficiency of energy use
2. **Reduce, Reuse and Recycle**
  - (2a) Each year, separately weigh trash and recycled materials for at least one representative week and calculate the amount per church member
  - (2b) Adopt a procurement policy for church supplies requiring price comparison with recycled alternatives
3. **Ground Care and Maintenance**
  - (3a) Stop the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides.
  - (3b) Use mulches or other organic material to reduce need for watering flower borders or shrub areas
  - (3c) Replace plants with drought tolerant perennials or shrubs.
4. **Transportation**
  - (4a) Post a sign-up sheet for car pooling or in others ways facilitate pooling to and from church sponsored activities.
  - (4b) Encourage public transportation and bicycle usage by having a bicycle rack
5. **Church Communication**
  - (5a) Provide practical information on energy and environmental practices at church and home
  - (5b) Identify, learn and sing earth-based hymns and songs and engage in other creative ways to keep environmental issues before the congregation.
6. **Religious Education**
  - (6a) If you have church school, teach at least one children's environmental course per year.
  - (6b) Include adults in your educational planning
7. **Worship & Liturgy**
  - (7a) In consultation with your priest, dedicate at least one Sunday worship service per year to the environment.
  - (7b) In consultation with the priest, incorporate environmental prayers, readings and songs in regular worship.
8. **Environmental Justice**

Contact local or regional environmental organizations and commit to working on one of their projects for a minimum of one full year
9. **Visit the Environmental Committee Website**

Goto <http://www.bc.anglican.ca/~environment/> or