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Rediscovery of Early Twentieth-Century Ecotheology

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Abstract: In this article, I examine the early history of Christian environmentalism (“ecotheology”) in the twentieth century. I delineate four strands of early ecotheology: agrarian ecotheology; social Christianity; British contributions; and “post-liberal” foundations for later ecotheological movements. I show that ecotheology was a slowly-rising movement, which had notable proponents. I argue that these early ecotheologians are significant for several reasons. First, these writings support the view that there are momentous roots of environmentalism in the late 19th and early 20th Century. Second, these texts reveal important information about the relation of Christian and other environmentalism. Third, early ecotheologians contributed to discussion about themes which would later form distinctive environmental disciplines, such as environmental aesthetics, education, ethics, history and philosophy. Their thoughts offer interesting reflections pointing to these fields. Fourth, the contributions by the early ecotheologians are not only historically interesting, but they have relevance for the current discussion. These theologians were in a special position to notice the major changes brought by technological development in the twentieth century and they provided important critical reflections about these issues. Because they developed their thought independently, they display creative thinking, although often in an unfinished manner.

Keywords: environmental theology, religion and nature, religion and ecology, environmental history, social ethics

Introduction

If God created the earth, so is the earth hallowed; and if it is hallowed, so must we deal with it devotedly and with care that we do not spoil it, and mindful of our relations to all beings that live on it.¹

An oak-tree is to us a moral object because it lives its life regularly and fulfils its destiny.²

Many people are surprised to hear that the quotations above are from 1915, from a book called *The Holy Earth* by Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858–1954). Bailey was for decades one of the best known natural scientists in North America. He published an enormous amount of scientific writings and his influence reached also overseas. Bailey, a very liberal Christian with Masonic background, was also one of the earliest pioneers of what

1 Bailey, *Holy Earth*, 11.

2 Ibid., 12.

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is nowadays called ecotheology: religious thought and action concerning the human-nature relationship. Bailey spread his views by publishing popular books and by presenting a large number of lectures.³

In this article, I examine the early history of Christian environmental thought (“ecotheology”⁴) in the twentieth century.⁵ A common assumption is that environmentalism truly began in the 1960s or the very early 1970s. However, in research on environmental history, scholars have pointed out that there was “environmentalism before the environmental movement”, as historian Joachim Radkau puts it.⁶ A major change happened in the 1960s and 1970s and that which we know as the environmental movement was generated, but it was founded on the efforts of pioneers who were active for several generations before that.

In my paper, I argue that a similar phenomenon has happened in ecotheology: I study “ecotheology before the ecotheological movement”. Bailey was a key figure, but there were several others also. I argue that ecotheology was a slowly rising movement, which had notable proponents. However, in society and in the churches, the time was not yet ripe for a strong rise of environmental consciousness: that happened only gradually. The next ecotheological generation, which was active in the 1950s and 1960s, carried the ideology further into those discussions that are usually thought to be the beginnings of ecotheology.

In my research in Europe and North America, I found four strands of early twentieth-century ecotheology (later: “early ecotheology”). The way that I label these strands is partly heuristic, for they have connections with each other. First, there was agrarian thought with ecotheological dimensions in North America. Second, socially active Christians started from quite early on to include at least some environmental elements in their thought and action. Third, British theology contributed strong insights about the value of “creation”⁷ and Anglicans made perhaps the first church-level statements about ecotheology. And fourth, various theologians situated in different ways between liberalism and conservative theology provided more reflection about ecotheology and were the bridge builders for later Christian environmentalism.

I shall discuss these strands and analyze their contributions briefly. More information is available in my dissertation *Joseph Sittler and Early Ecotheology*.⁸ Some of these strands of early ecotheology have been discussed in previous research, some have not, and I provide a wider overview and analysis than previously. I hope that this would spark further interdisciplinary research on early Christian environmentalism. My study is based on extensive archival work, but there are evidently more examples of early ecotheology than what is shown here, especially since my sources are limited mainly to works in English. For example, I am aware of certain writings on early ecotheology in German and Finnish. I will briefly discuss these kinds of other sources later in this article. Even more materials are found if one includes texts which emphasize the value of nature (or “creation”), even if ethical care for the environment is not (strongly) stressed.⁹

³ For general information and recent research on Bailey, see Minter, *Landscape*, 17–50; Azelvand, *Forging*.

⁴ “Ecotheology” (or “ecological theology”) is increasingly used as an umbrella term for the field. Another option is “environmental theology”. All terms related to “nature” and “environment” are notoriously difficult to define in a precise manner. For my critique of the use of terms such as “theology of nature” and “creation theology” (or, “theology of creation”) as umbrella terms, see Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 1. For an excellent overview of ecotheological research and literature, see Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology*. A picture of current themes in research can be gained by reading the articles in Conradie et al., *Christian Faith*.

⁵ An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in Atlanta 2015 as part of a session of the Religion and Ecology Group.

⁶ Radkau, *Age of Ecology*.

⁷ The term “creation” is here used to refer to Christian views of the material reality. In the context of ecotheology, “creation” usually refers in practice to Earth. For discussion, see Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 1; Verhey, *Nature*; Hall, “Creation”.

⁸ Sittler (1904–1987) was an American Lutheran and ecumenical theologian and an elementary figure in the development of ecotheology.

⁹ For a historical overview of various views on the value of creation (or “nature”), see the wide article collections edited by Ernst Conradie, *Creation and Salvation Volume 1* and *Volume 2*.

Agrarian Ecotheology

Scholars have briefly noted the role of Christian agrarian activities in the 1930s as providing ground for further development of ecotheology.¹⁰ However, recent studies, such as my research and a new book by Kewin M. Lowe, show that there was more agrarian ecotheology than has been presupposed and highlight its importance.¹¹ Agrarian ecotheology has been overlooked because rural living has been in crisis in industrialized countries and the later environmental movement was born in an atmosphere dominated by a situation where most of the population lived in urban or semi-urban areas.¹²

North American agrarian thought was especially important for ecotheology, but it was connected with British thought regarding rural areas and economy. A crucial influence was distributism, the bold social program devoted to economic democracy and shared ownership of productive means, which was developed principally by Catholic Britons G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936) and Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953).¹³ Both in Britain and in North America, rural leaders were inspired by this vision, but after the Second World War both distributism and rural living confronted a growing crisis.¹⁴

Liberty Hyde Bailey was a key figure for the American agrarians. He held governmental positions for improvement of rural conditions and lectured around the country. His spiritual vision for tending “the Holy Earth” was well received among various Christians. Already in the 1920s the Christian agrarians produced ecotheological reflections, but this happened especially after a major environmental disaster, the Dust Bowl - a series of devastating dust storms in the prairie areas of the U.S. and Canada.¹⁵

Thus, a Christian agrarian agenda with ecotheological dimensions partly preceded Dust Bowl, but it was strongly strengthened by the experience of an environmental crisis. Christian activists reacted in a similar manner than others did after later environmental concerns: they built organizations in order to give incentive for more sustainable lifestyles. Already in the 1930s, they published materials for prayer life and group discussions, and Bailey’s *The Holy Earth* was a key source for such materials.¹⁶

Among the active promoters of ecotheological insights were the ecumenical organization The Christian Rural Fellowship and various denominational organizations, such as the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. The leading figure of the latter, priest and agrarian activist Luigi Ligutti (1895–1983), gathered fame by his leadership in a rural community project in Granger, Iowa. Ligutti, who later gained prominent international positions, included in his thought a stewardship ecotheology. Conservation of the soil was a main theme.¹⁷

Later, the soil conservationist Walter C. Lowdermilk’s (1888–1974) work was strongly joined with such efforts. Lowdermilk had influential positions in governmental and international organizations, and he made his mark as an environmental historian also. His international studies on soil erosion are still been used.¹⁸

One of the areas where Lowdermilk conducted his soil studies was the Near East. It was there in 1939

10 Nash, *Rights*, 98; Santmire & Cobb, “World of Nature”, 135; Hamlin & Lodge, “Ecology and Religion”, 295. One of the best historical overviews, especially as regards the earliest phases, is the introduction in Bakken, Engel and Engel, *Ecology*, 3–38.

11 Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 3; Lowe, *Baptized*; Hitzhusen, Fick & Moore, “Theological”.

12 Cf. Hamlin & McGreevy, “Greening”.

13 For basic information about them, see Bergonzi, “Belloc”; Bergonzi, “Chesterton”.

14 For distributism and the Catholic Land Movement in Britain, see Lanz, “Introduction”. For discussion on the influence of distributism in America, see Carlson, *New Agrarian*. Kevin Lowe (*Baptized*) focuses on Protestants, but includes discussion also on Catholics and distributism.

15 For the Dust Bowl, see Worster, *Dust Bowl*; Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 221–253; Hitzhusen, Fick & Moore, “Theological”.

16 Leigh E. Schmidt (“From Arbor Day”) has traced the roots of Christian activities related to the environment in America to the latter part of the 19th Century and such practices as the Arbor Day, Bird Days and Flower Days, and later Nature Sundays and Rural Life Sundays. See also Lowe, *Baptized*, 162–169; Duffin, *Plowed*, 90, 123–124.

17 For the NCRLC, including Ligutti, see Bovée, *Church*; Hamlin & McGreevy, “Greening”, 466–471; Carlson, *New Agrarian*, 149–176. See also Woods, *Cultivating*; Marlett, “Down on the Farm”.

18 For Lowdermilk’s environmental work, see Radkau, *Age of Ecology*, 53–54, 308; Montgomery, *Dirt*, 44–46, 69–73, 155–156; Showers, “Soil Erosion”, 390–393. For a discussion of Lowdermilk’s legacy in conservationism, see Nash, *Rights*, 97–98; Helms, “Walter Lowdermilk’s Journey”.

that Lowdermilk composed an “Eleventh Commandment” for environmental stewardship. As background to his new commandment, Lowdermilk argued rhetorically that if Moses had known what destruction humans would wreak on nature, as well as on themselves, he “doubtless would have been inspired to deliver an Eleventh Commandment to complete the trinity of man’s responsibilities to his Creator, to his fellow men, and to Mother Earth.”¹⁹

Lowdermilk’s Commandment became another key text for agrarian ecotheological activities. It was much used by congregations, seemingly especially in the Dust Bowl area. It was quoted in worship services and publications and it was posted on walls. Lowdermilk lectured intensively in America and promoted his Commandment at the same time.²⁰ However, his ecotheological insights were interwoven in a complex way with his Zionist activities. He wrote a famous book on Palestine and included his ecotheological views also in it.²¹

Social Christianity

The agrarian proponents of ecotheology made use of writings by the second strand I delineated, socially active Christians who included environmental dimensions in their work. It may come as a surprise that perhaps the most significant of these was Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918), a major figure in the Social Gospel movement which aimed at making social responsibility a key theme in Christianity.²² Many of the agrarians, including Bailey, were shaped by a Social Gospel spirit.²³

Rauschenbusch included themes related to environmental justice in his various works, but perhaps the most striking of his ecotheological contributions is a prayer he published in 1910 in his popular collection *Prayers of the Social Awakening*. This prayer was used for decades by Christians who were ecotheologically active.²⁴ However, since the 1980s the prayer has been attributed in numerous books to be written by St. Basil the church father from the fourth century.²⁵ This has evidently been partly due to the reputation of Orthodox theology as environmentally friendly.

Rauschenbusch’s prayer is extraordinary in its treatment of non-human animals:

Enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all the living things, our little brothers, to whom thou hast given this earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the Earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for thee, and that they love the sweetness of life even as we, and serve thee in their place better than we in ours.²⁶

Overall, Rauschenbusch’s theology was more anthropocentric. The value that he attributes to

¹⁹ He continues: “XI. Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt protect thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hills from overgrazing by the herds, so that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, his fertile fields shall become sterile stony ground and wasting gullies, and his descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from off the face of the earth” (Lowdermilk, “Eleventh”). The concept of the Eleventh Commandment has been used in many ways, both before and after Lowdermilk’s formulation. In ecotheology, the term was picked up in the 1980s by an American organization called the Eleventh Commandment Fellowship, which produced its own version (Nash, *Rights*, 111).

²⁰ “Soil, Forest, and Water Conservation”, 378.

²¹ Lowdermilk, *Palestine*. See “Soil, Forest, and Water Conservation”, 188–192, for a discussion of the volume’s publication difficulties in the political climate of the time and of its popularity. Lowdermilk’s wife, Inez Marks Lowdermilk, contributed significantly to the book. For analysis, see Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 3. For Lowdermilk’s environmental activities in Israel, see Miller, “Bible”.

²² For Rauschenbusch, see Evans, *Kingdom*; for his place in the history of (American) social ethics, see Dorrien, *Social Ethics*, 83–108.

²³ Minter, *Landscape*, 25–26; Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 3.

²⁴ For example in agrarian ecotheology: see Schmidt, “From Arbor Day”, 313–314.

²⁵ See, for example, Linzey & Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah*, 84.

²⁶ Rauschenbusch, *Prayers*, 47–48. He also writes that “even the thornbush by the wayside is aflame with the glory of God.”

non-human creatures in his prayer is not reflected in his systematic theology. However, besides his inclusive prayer, he was a pioneer in integrating social and environmental concerns. He criticizes existing power structures for not taking care of the poor and nature.²⁷ Rauschenbusch is aware of the concerns of the Conservation Movement and discusses the problems related to erosion, deforestation, water pollution and air pollution.²⁸ Most of his concerns are anthropocentric: for example, he argues for nature preservation for the sake of future generations, thereby anticipating a major theme in environmental ethics.²⁹ However, he also laments the destruction of natural beauty, which “no skill of man can replace”,³⁰ and emphasizes the importance of retaining a sense of “wonder and reverence, tenderness and awe,” and he believed that active participation in social Christianity would generate such attitudes.³¹

Rauschenbusch had a rather bad reputation for a long time in much theological writing, because the following theological generation wanted to emphasize the ways in which they thought their theology was better than the Social Gospel. However, in recent research it has been shown that Social Gospel was influential and not as naïve as has sometimes been thought. The next generations of Christian social ethicists built on the work of Rauschenbusch and others.³² The ecotheological legacy was carried onwards by the Niebuhr brothers and Daniel Day Williams, who will be discussed below. They included in their thought elements from international and ecumenical theology, and in ecotheology a major influence was British theology.

Early British Contributions

The British and Anglican ecotheological contributions seem to generally be undervalued in current research, probably partly because they have for a long time been integrated into practical action. There has been a long tradition in the British Isles in discussing the indwelling of God in nature. Important contributors in this include the natural scientist-theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially John Ray (1627–1705), and the theological treatise *Lux Mundi* from 1889.³³ In early 20th Century, early versions of process thought were discussed in British theology, well before process theology in the vein of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897–2000) became famous.³⁴

A key theologian regarding ecotheology was Charles Raven (1885–1964), a keen botanist and birder, whose major topic was religion and science. Raven was one of the best known British theologians of his time and a controversial figure. He served as a military chaplain in the First World War but was later marginalized by his keen pacifism; he integrated theology and evolution in many of his books, but was

²⁷ See, for example, his striking paragraph on the economic and environmental dimensions of love: “It is indeed love that we want, but it is socialized love. Blessed be the love that holds the cup of water to thirsty lips. We can never do without the plain affection of man to man. But what we most need to-day [sic] is not the love that will break its back drawing water for a growing factory town from a well that was meant to supply a village, but a love so large and intelligent that it will persuade an ignorant people to build a system of waterworks up in the hills, and that will get after the thoughtless farmers who contaminate the brooks with typhoid bacilli, and after the lumber concern that is denuding the watershed of its forests. We want a new avatar of love” (Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 44).

²⁸ Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 98, 254, 421; Rauschenbusch, *Christianity*, 240. See the discussion in Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 3.

²⁹ “In using up the resources of nature faster than we can replace them, we graft on our own children, for they will have to live in a land of wasted forests, gutted mines, and dried water courses” (Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 254).

³⁰ “Nature, our common mother, sits like a captive queen among barbarians who are tearing the jewels from her hair. Beauty that ages have fashioned and that no skill of man can replace is effaced to enrich a few persons whose enrichment is of little use to anybody” (Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 253).

³¹ Rauschenbusch, *Christianity*, 24 (quotation); Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 121.

³² See Dorrien, *Social Ethics*.

³³ See Price, “Invigorated Chaos”; Peacocke, “Evolution”; Allchin, “Theology”; and the discussion in Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 4.

³⁴ Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 4. Whitehead and Hartshorne were both sons of Anglican (Episcopal) ministers.

critical of certain aspects in Darwinian theories and himself criticized for this. Raven is still esteemed as a historian of biology and a biographer of John Ray, his idol.³⁵

Raven included some ecotheological reflections and provided an extensive discussion about the views of nature in the Bible. He emphasized the creative integration of Hebrew and Greek views of nature in the Bible and discussed the nature relationship of Jesus in this light.³⁶ Raven discusses the indwelling of God in nature and develops the beginnings of a Trinitarian ecotheology.³⁷ While he did not make very strong statements about ethical treatment of nature,³⁸ he emphasized the value of nature and participated in conservation efforts.³⁹

The Archbishop William Temple (1881–1944), who was a friend of Raven, chaired an important theological conference in Malvern in 1941.⁴⁰ The Malvern conference dealt with Anglican social thinking and issued also the first church-level statements on environment. Stewardship ecotheology was included in the preparatory materials, presentations and in the resolutions. Sociologist and theologian Vigo A. Demant (1893–1993) was the major ecotheological spokesperson, but, for example, the writer and lay theologian Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957) contributed also to the theme. Sayers even referred to the world as God’s body, anticipating later ecofeminist contributions.⁴¹

Demant was in his time a major proponent of social Christianity in Britain and a member of the Christendom Group of Anglo-Catholic thinkers.⁴² In his Malvern speech, he included a section on “Respect for the Earth”. Remarkably, Demant emphasized that “There is a profound religious side to the need for recovering a respectful attitude to the earth,” and argued that this notion had been expressed much more effectively by Vladimir Solovyev than by most Western thinkers.⁴³ Solovyev, a Russian mystical Orthodox theologian, has in recent years received increasing ecotheological attention.⁴⁴ It should be noted that Demant collaborated with key ecumenical theologian J.H. Oldham (1874–1969), who discussed Solovyev and related notions in the Oxford Conference of 1937.⁴⁵ The interchange between Orthodox and Western theology in relation to environmental matters thus began very early.

The statements of the Malvern conference were clearly affected by Demant’s input. The conference stated that “we must recover reverence for the earth and its resources, treating it no longer as a reservoir of potential wealth to be exploited, but as a storehouse of divine bounty on which we utterly depend. This will carry with it a deliberate revival of agriculture”.⁴⁶ Thus, stewardship and agrarian arguments linked the statement with the work of the American agrarians. The environmental side in the Malvern statements was

35 For information on Raven, see Dillistone, *Charles Raven*; Chadwick, “Raven”; Bowler, *Science*, esp. 277–286. Recently, Ian M. Randall has published articles on Raven (“Evangelical”; “Living”).

36 “Jesus inherited and revealed this knowledge of the sacramental value of nature and drew from its simple rhythm material for his deepest lessons” (Raven, *Science*, 16–17); for a fuller account of his views on Jesus’ relation to nature, see Raven, *Natural Religion Vol 1*, 29–33.

37 Raven, *Natural Religion Vol 2*, 148–166, esp. 156. See also 146, where he writes of “the belief that there are three modes of being in the deity, God experienced as the source and ground of all existence, God manifested in the creation and development of the universe, the educative Logos of the Greek Fathers, and God immanent in His creatures as ‘life-giver’ and inspiration.”

38 See, however, Raven, *Gospel*, 173, 194, 196.

39 See the discussion in Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 4.

40 For the conference materials and presentations, see *Malvern 1941*. For Temple, social thought and Malvern, see Dorrien, *Kantian Reason and Hegelian Spirit*, 439–441; Hastings, “Temple”; Machin, *Churches*, 128–131.

41 Sayers emphasized “the sacramental position by which the material and human is held to be the medium in which the divine is manifested,” stressing the Incarnation in the line of Anglican sacramental tradition. She continued that the church “must include a proper reverence for the earth and for all material things; because these also are the body of the living God” (Sayers, “Church’s Responsibility”, 66–67).

42 Wollenberg, *Christian*, 71.

43 Demant, “Christian Strategy”, 147.

44 See Smith, “Vladimir Solovyev”. There are also other Russian Orthodox theologians who cherished the value of nature, often in a mystical fashion. See Conradie, *Creation and Salvation Volume 2*, Chapter 1; and, for example, the prayer “Akathist of Thanksgiving” from 1934 by the Metropolitan Tryphon of Turkestan. One translation of the text may be found at <http://www.orthodox.net/akathists/akathist-thanksgiving.html>, accessed 8.4.2016.

45 See Oldham, “Church and the World”, and the analysis in Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 4.

46 *Malvern Declaration*, 29.

not what the conference is best known for, but the ecotheological dimension was noticed by many readers, such as the British pioneer of organic agriculture, Sir Albert Howard (1873–1947), who later influenced Wendell Berry, the famous American farmer, poet and environmentalist.⁴⁷ William Temple himself directly quoted the ecotheological statements of Malvern in his bestselling *Christianity and Social Order*.⁴⁸

Another highly interesting strain of thought from Britain is the work of two Reformed professors of theology from Cambridge, John Oman (1860–1939) and Herbert H. Farmer (1892–1981), who integrated an evolutionary approach into their theologies and emphasized the ways in which the natural and the supernatural are connected with each other. Oman's *The Natural & the Supernatural* (1931) was a crucial inspiration also for Raven.⁴⁹ All these theologians argued that a person's relationship with nature and his relationship with God are interconnected.

Farmer provided reflections about environmental aesthetics and emphasized the value of nature. He made careful efforts to discuss the connections and differences between the experience of God in the natural environment and the social environment. Farmer argued that both are needed. The experience of God as personal is stronger in the social environment, while the experience of God as transcendental is stronger in the natural environment. However, he pointed out that both dimensions of the environment contain both types of God-experience. One aspect is dominant in each environment and the other is in the background.⁵⁰

“Post-liberal” Foundations of Later Ecotheological Movements

Fascinatingly, the theologians who most forcefully integrated ecotheology in their thought and carried the idea further into the later ecotheological movement were situated in various ways between liberalism and neo-orthodoxy⁵¹. Ecotheology started as a liberal agenda in the thought of John Muir (1838–1914),⁵² Walter Rauschenbusch and Liberty Hyde Bailey, but it was carried forward by neoliberals and “post-liberals”. I am not referring to the postliberal “school” of theology associated around figures such as George Lindbeck and Hans Frei,⁵³ but instead to post-liberalism in a general sense. Many of the theologians who provided early ecotheological contributions were self-avowed post-liberals: in Walter M. Horton's words, they wanted to salvage what was valuable from the “wreck” of liberal theology after the economic collapse of the late 1920s and world wars had taken away any stronger optimism about human development.⁵⁴

Some of these theologians were called “realist theologians”, again following Horton's language, and many of them were labeled “neo-orthodox” because of their emphases on powers of sin and God's transcendence. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner were major influences on them, but they labored to give more value to nature than Barth and Brunner, or many existential theologians, did. Gary Dorrien has perceptively shown that many of these theologians were in fact neoliberals, since they incorporated major elements from the liberal tradition in their theologies.⁵⁵

The major tendencies in the theological systems of those post-liberal theologians who discussed ecotheology are well captured by John Macquarrie's definition of post-liberalism from 1963:

47 Howard, *Culture*, 13. See also the discussion in Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 4.

48 Temple, *Christianity*, 117–119. Temple's treatment of the subject is anthropocentric and closely related to inter-human justice issues, especially ownership of the land. Nevertheless, the popularity of his book ensured that numerous readers became aware of the ecotheological elements in the Malvern statements.

49 For Oman, see Farmer, “Oman”; Hood, *John Oman*.

50 Farmer, *World and God*; Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 4. See also MacKinnon, “Farmer”.

51 The concept of “neo-orthodoxy” has its problems, but it is used for heuristic reasons.

52 Muir, who was raised as a Calvinist Christian, used much biblical imagery in his books. However, the exact status of his worldview has been a contested issue: Muir has been described either as a Christian, a Buddhist, a neo-pagan and a believer in a transcendental God. Cf. Holmes, “Muir”; Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 61–70; Worster, *Passion for Nature*.

53 For postliberal school of theology, see DeHart, *Trial*.

54 See Dorrien, *Idealism*, 459–460.

55 See Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 2; Dorrien, *Idealism*, 435–521. Dorrien (*Barthian Revolt*, 10–11) has argued, as Wilhelm Pauck before him, that even Barth inherited more from liberal theology than he himself admitted.

[W]hile the place of revelation is made sure, the notion of an exclusive revelation is rejected; while man's sinfulness is fully recognized, he is not deemed to be totally corrupt; while Christianity is permitted to interpret itself, the world is not shut out; while there is stress on the divine transcendence, the distance between God and man is not made so great as to preclude a genuinely personal relation between them.⁵⁶

Many of the theologians I'm discussing here met each other regularly in an important gathering called Theological Discussion Group. Horton, the Niebuhr brothers and Paul Tillich were members already in the 1930s, while Joseph Sittler joined later. They worked in close connection with ecumenical movements. The group and realist theologians have been credited of making pioneering contributions in Christian social ethics,⁵⁷ and my studies affirm that they were forerunners also in ecotheology.

The most famous of these theologians is Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who is regarded as one of the most significant Protestant theologians of the century. Tillich became later known especially for existential and psychological theology, in addition to his *Systematic Theology*, but he contributed significantly to ecotheology. His three most important early writings on this subject were all published in English in the late 1940s.

In “Nature and Sacrament”, which was delivered in German already in the late 1920s, Tillich stressed that material phenomena have significance and value in themselves. His discussion is brief but wide-ranging, including animals, rhythms of nature, and the water and bread and wine in the traditional sacraments. In “Nature, Also, Mourns for a Lost Good” and “Redemption in Cosmic and Social History”, Tillich argued for the eschatological redemption of all creation. He emphasized the need for humans to “commune with nature”, drawing from his own love of nature experiences and from the German romantic tradition.⁵⁸ Tillich discussed many biblical passages and ideas which would later become key points in ecotheology.⁵⁹

Later, in his *Systematic Theology*, Tillich emphasized that the inorganic realm also has value. He continued to stress the interconnectedness of humans and the rest of nature, but he did not discuss ecotheology *per se*.⁶⁰ An exception in Tillich's late work is his sermon “Man and Earth”, published in 1963, which counts as one of his most focused ecotheological statements.⁶¹ Because of the complex manner in which Tillich tried to integrate nature and history, as well as to integrate an emphasis on personal experience and on the significance of the material world, his theology has been understood in several ways.⁶² Nevertheless, I argue that his ecotheological writings deserve more attention and that they show his efforts to balance existential themes with naturalism.

Tillich went much further than his friends W. M. Horton and Reinhold Niebuhr, who discussed environmental degradation from the point of view of a dominion ecotheology, emphasizing the permission of humans to use nature, although with limits.⁶³ On the other hand, Reinhold's brother and also a member of the Theological Discussion Group, H. Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962) joined Tillich in emphasizing the value of nature. H. Richard argued already in the 1930s that it was a sin to cause unnecessary damage to the environment.⁶⁴ In the following decades, he constructed a system of theological ethics where non-human animals and even inorganic matter was included in the sphere of ethical demands. H. Richard is exceptional

⁵⁶ Macquarrie, *Twentieth-century Religious Thought*, 339–350, quote 349. He discusses the Niebuhr brothers, Herbert Farmer and the Baillie brothers as examples of this post-liberal theology. Macquarrie taught at Union Theological Seminary for a time in the 1960s and knew also Daniel Day Williams well.

⁵⁷ For the group, see Edwards, “Can Christianity Save Civilisation”; Edwards, *Right of the Protestant Left*; Warren, “Theological Discussion Group”; Warren, *Theologians*. The group was first called “The Younger Theologians”. For Sittler and the group, see Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 2.

⁵⁸ Tillich, “Nature, Also, Mourns”, 86.

⁵⁹ Such as Ps. 19:2–5, Rom. 8:19–22, Rev. 21:1 and 22:1–2. See Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Tillich, *Systematic Theology 1*, 170–171; Tillich, *Systematic Theology 2*, 40–43, 95–96.

⁶¹ The sermon builds on Ps. 8:3–6, a key biblical text regarding dominion of nature by humans.

⁶² See Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 5.

⁶³ Horton was a leading ecumenical theologian. See Horton, “Conditions and Limits of Man's Mastery over Nature”; Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 203; and Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapters 2 and 5.

⁶⁴ Niebuhr, “Man the Sinner”, 279, where he includes as “the moral consequences of sin” a wide array of things: “man's inhumanity to man, cruelty to beasts, exploitation of nature, abuse of sex, greed, commercial profanization of creation and its beauty.”

in extending the concept of neighbor to include “animal and inorganic being, all that participates in being”.⁶⁵

It has usually remained unnoticed that H. Richard’s classic work, *Christ and Culture* includes also an ecotheological dimension. H. Richard is discussing not only the relationship between Christ and culture, but also between church and world, and between humans and the rest of nature. He argues that whole creation will be saved and discusses the value of non-human creatures.⁶⁶ The Logos Christology of the Fourth Gospel is important for H. Richard and he sees the Gospel to support a view which gives value to the material reality and existence.⁶⁷ In his late work, H. Richard continued to emphasize that “whatever is, is good” and deserves ethical attention.⁶⁸

Process theologians also started to discuss ecotheological issues in the 1930s; however, the most ecotheologically active figures were Bernard E. Meland (1899–1993) and Daniel Day Williams (1910–1973), who both integrated elements from neo-orthodoxy into their thought. Meland was the more liberal of them and made his strongest ecotheological contributions in the 1930s. In his book *Modern Man’s Worship* and in an article, Meland wrote about the need for humans to connect spiritually with nature. He spoke of animals as “kinsmen of the wild” and had a strong “creation spirituality” element in his thought.⁶⁹

Meland and Williams were both professors in Chicago until Williams moved to Union Theological Seminary in the 1950s. Williams’ 1949 book *God’s Grace and Man’s Hope* was based on his Rauschenbusch Lectures and was a serious effort to integrate Reinhold Niebuhr’s “realistic theology” into Rauschenbusch’s Social Gospel. Williams emphasized the interconnection of creation and redemption and included a subchapter on ecotheology, “The Good Earth and the Good Society”.⁷⁰

Williams strongly connected social and environmental issues, which makes him a forerunner of an “eco-justice” position. His book is one of the first theological monographs to take the threat of environmental degradation seriously. Williams, who was ecumenically active, cited the Malvern Conference and early American environmental literature as support of his views. His work is noteworthy for many novel ideas, such as a discussion of the role of death in relation to (eco)theology, and for its integrated approach. Williams discussed environmental responsibility as part of a wider social theology and theology of hope. In Williams’ view, “Christian hope is sustained by, and expresses itself in, a reverent grateful love for the good earth.”⁷¹ Thus, Williams not only discusses responsibilities, but emphasizes that care for the earth is a key means to keep hope alive and manifest it. He continues by discussing “the never-ending struggle for the Good Society”, which is upheld by “faith in the kingdom of God”.⁷²

Joseph Sittler’s Work and Bridges to Later Ecotheology

Joseph Sittler studied under W. M. Horton during his pastorate years, before he moved to Chicago to teach first at a Lutheran Theological Seminary and later in the University of Chicago Divinity School. Sittler was a famous rhetorician and preacher, whose books were mostly based on his speeches. In the 1950s and 1960s, he was well known in America and in ecumenical theology, and had high positions in Lutheran circles. Nowadays he is known as a pioneer in ecotheology.⁷³

65 Niebuhr, *Purpose*, 38. See also Niebuhr, *Meaning of Revelation*, 167; Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, 126.

66 Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, esp. 143, 241.

67 *Ibid.*, 196–205.

68 See Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, esp. 52–53, 89; Niebuhr, *Responsible Self*, 125, 164–167.

69 Meland, *Modern*; Meland, “Kinsmen”. For discussion on Meland’s ecotheology, see Muray, “Meland’s Mystical Naturalism”; Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 5. For Meland’s theology as a whole, see Peden, *Life*; Inbody, *Constructive*; Dorrien, *Crisis*, 97–132.

70 Williams, *God’s Grace and Man’s Hope*, 158–177.

71 *Ibid.*, 163; see also 164–166.

72 *Ibid.*, 167–177.

73 See Peter Bakken’s fine introduction and Steven Bouma-Prediger’s postscript to a collection of Sittler’s ecotheological writings, *Evocations*; and Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, esp. 10–13, 62–67, 180–181. For the ecotheological legacy of Chicago theologians, see Engel, “Making”.

Sittler introduced ecotheological themes into his writings in the early 1950s, with noteworthy discussion of theology of place.⁷⁴ Fascinatingly, because of his ecumenical interest and theological connections in America, Sittler was in a position to absorb insights from practically all of the available sources in early ecotheology. However, he does not include many explicit references to others.⁷⁵ As Horton, Williams and others, Sittler sought a theological road between neo-orthodoxy and liberalism, but even more strongly than the others he argued that a “theology for nature” must be constructed.⁷⁶

His 1954 article “A Theology for Earth” is a key text in ecotheology: Sittler proceeds even further than Williams in his theological discussion of the role of nature and environmental degradation. In a relatively brief text, Sittler brought together several key ecotheological arguments and biblical texts. He included basic stewardship notions, but was exceptional in emphasizing the status of nature as “man’s sister”. In this he may well have been influenced by G. K. Chesterton’s work on St. Francis of Assisi.⁷⁷

Drawing from biblical theology, process thought and poetry, Sittler stressed the interdependence of humans and the rest of nature.⁷⁸ The value of the material world was based on both creation and Incarnation, with some discussion of the Holy Spirit. Along with other literary quotations, Sittler linked the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins to the arguments, as he would also often do in the future. The Jesuit poet saw nature as permeated by God’s presence.⁷⁹ Sittler included also rare arguments related to the dangers of the over-symbolization of nature.⁸⁰

Sittler finished his article with discussion about “ontological-revelational overtones of the Incarnation” and referred to the Christology in Ephesians, Colossians and Rom. 8.⁸¹ This is the beginning of a theme which would become the main emphasis in Sittler’s famous keynote address “Called to Unity” in the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961. Sittler proposed “an environmental ecumenism”⁸², where care of the earth was based on Christology and this was a means and a task for advancing Christian unity: “The way forward is from Christology expanded to its cosmic dimensions, made passionate by the pathos of this threatened earth”.⁸³

What resulted was a long and sometimes heated theological discussion about the relationship between creation and redemption. Sittler himself participated in this debate in the Faith and Order Commission, which eventually made statements both about anthropocentric dominion theology and more progressive ecotheology.⁸⁴ Sittler became a leading, although contested figure in ecumenical ecotheology, and his works, such as “A Theology for Earth”, influenced Christians interested in the environment. Among the most notable of these were Charles Birch, Ian Barbour, H. Paul Santmire and Jürgen Moltmann.

Charles Birch (1918–2009) was an Australian-born, world-renowned ecologist, who was keen about process theology. Drawing from Oman, Farmer, Raven and Hartshorne, Birch emphasized the significance of nature for theology and religious experience.⁸⁵ In his later work, such as the monograph *Nature and God*

⁷⁴ See especially his essays “The Promise and Hope of American Life” and “Sacraments and Mystery”; for analysis, see Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 6.

⁷⁵ Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 6. Sittler knew Meland well and they were colleagues for years. For Meland’s views on Sittler’s theology, see Meland, “Grace”; Meland, “New Perspectives”.

⁷⁶ Sittler, “Theology for Earth”, 24, 30; Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 6.

⁷⁷ Sittler, “Theology for Earth”, 25, 29; Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 6.

⁷⁸ Sittler writes of “this mighty structure of process and vitality, this complex of given creatureliness” and of “the Creator-Word” which “drives, loves, and suffers his world toward restoration” (Sittler, “Theology for Earth”, 28–29). See also 30: “God – man – nature! These three are meant for each other, and restlessness will stalk our hearts and ambiguity our world until their cleavage is redeemed.”

⁷⁹ Sittler, “Theology for Earth”, 24–25, 30–31. For Hopkins and Sittler, see Scott, “Poetry”; Heggen, *Theology*; McGrath, *Open Secret*, 133–139.

⁸⁰ Sittler, “Theology for Earth”, 27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

⁸² The term was coined by Robert C. Saler, “Theological”.

⁸³ Sittler, “Called to Unity”, 48. An important inspiration for Sittler was Scottish theologian Allan Galloway’s 1951 book *The Cosmic Christ*, which had strong similarities with Charles Raven’s theology.

⁸⁴ See esp. the document “God in Nature and in History”.

⁸⁵ Birch, “Interpreting”, esp. 406–407.

(1965) and his landmark speech at the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC, Birch cited Sittler.⁸⁶ Birch became one of the key persons in shaping the ecumenical movement's ecotheological discussions and statements. John Cobb, with whom Birch collaborated, eventually became much better known.⁸⁷ They both built upon Alfred North Whitehead's and Hartshorne's thought, which was a major influence also for Ian Barbour (1923–2013), a key developer of discussion on religion and science.

Daniel Day Williams introduced process thought to Barbour, with wide-ranging results. They both participated in ecotheological activities. Barbour led a discussion group which dwelt also on environmental themes, while Williams took part in the Faith-Man-Nature -group, a pioneering venture in Christian environmentalism.⁸⁸ The secretary of the group was H. Paul Santmire, who was to become one of the major ecotheologians of the next decades. Santmire and Sittler worked together on a pioneering church statement on ecotheology, *The Human Crisis in Ecology* (1972), and Santmire has often adapted Sittler's theology in his own constructive work.⁸⁹

In ecumenical theology, environmental issues were increasingly debated since the last years of the 1960s. In a crucial role was the study project "The Future of Man and Society in a World of Science-Based Technology", where representatives of a more conservative dominion ecotheology clashed with the progressive proposals of process theologians and Eastern Orthodox theologian Paul Verghese (later Paulos Mar Gregorios).⁹⁰ Sittler's middleway proposal remained somewhat in the shade in the 1970s, even while he published his main written work *Essays on Nature and Grace* in 1972.⁹¹ Later, Jürgen Moltmann picked up Sittler's proposals and developed them further.⁹² Through the work of ecotheologians such as Santmire and James A. Nash, and Sittler scholars Peter Bakken and Steven Bouma-Prediger, Sittler's thought gained further attention.⁹³

Legacy of Early Ecotheology

The early ecotheologians were part of general early environmentalism, in which the role of Christianity was not as strongly contested as it would be later on.⁹⁴ Early ecotheologians provided their own reflections and in addition disseminated the ideas of other early environmentalists in their respective home contexts: theological schools, congregations and church-level statements. Their methods of environmental education were mostly rhetorical, but also included activities related to worship life, group discussions and special theme days.

Pioneering thinkers and activists probably had a far greater impact than the written records show: the first proponents of any given idea have a special role. At the same time, the societies around them were not as sensitive to environmental issues as societies are today. The result was that, while these thinkers stood out from the crowd, many of their contemporaries were not willing to listen to them. However, some people

⁸⁶ Birch, *Nature*, 77–90, 123; Birch, "Creation", 76, 79 n35.

⁸⁷ Cobb has been one of the most wide-ranging and significant ecotheologians from the 1970s to the 2010s. When Cobb wrote *A Christian Natural Theology* in 1965, he was not writing at all about the actual environment. It was only in the late 1960s that he went through an ecotheological awakening, thanks to the work of his son, Clifford Cobb. Cobb has remarked that he noted the ecotheological significance of Hartshorne's and Sittler's theologies only after his conversion (Cobb, "Making"). His first influential ecotheological writing was *Is it Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills: Bruce, 1972), which was followed by numerous publications. For an introduction to Cobb's work, see Dorrien, *Crisis*, 208–231; for his historical role in ecotheology, see Nash, *Rights*, 107–108, 242.

⁸⁸ For Barbour on Sittler, see his *Issues*, 453–454; for Faith-Man-Nature -group, see Joranson, "Faith".

⁸⁹ The best overview on Santmire's work is his *Theological Autobiography*, "Ecology". For Santmire's work on Sittler, see "American Lutherans"; "Toward a Cosmic Christology"; "A Reformation"; "Toward a Christology of Nature".

⁹⁰ See Lindqvist, *Economic Growth*.

⁹¹ Another of Sittler's later key texts in ecotheology is "Ecological Commitment".

⁹² Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 276–278.

⁹³ Nash, *Loving Nature*; Bakken, *Ecology of Grace*; Bouma-Prediger, *Greening of Theology*; see also Hall, *Imaging God*. Systematic theologian Philip Hefner was inspired by Meland and Sittler: see his *Human Factor*, v; and "Beyond Exploitation", 132–134.

⁹⁴ The following section draws on Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 7.

were already concerned about the state of the environment and about the general lack of nature-oriented elements in Christianity, and the early ecotheologians provided support for them.

It must be pointed out that most theologians of the time were not concerned with the environment. Yet at the same time, it must be emphasized that the early ecotheologians were not marginal curiosities either. Many of them were world-famous, especially Tillich, and others were nationally well known, such as Liberty Hyde Bailey, Charles Raven, H. Richard Niebuhr and Joseph Sittler. And there are evidently more of them: I do not presume to have found all early ecotheologians in my studies.⁹⁵

When the reasons for the environmental awakening of the early ecotheologians are probed, it is found that many were shaped especially by childhood and youthful experiences in nature, but for others, such as Sittler, the arts had a strong role in generating environmental awareness. Early environmental literature, such as the works of William Vogt, Fairfield Osborn, Jr., and Rachel Carson's sea trilogy, shaped the thought of many. The early ecotheologians made use of various streams of thought, such as the British theology of nature, German Romantic philosophy and American Transcendentalism, and transmitted these insights in a form of their own to the following generations. The influence of Martin Buber's (1878–1965) thought was strong for many of these theologians, although they generally gave more prominence to nature than Buber did.⁹⁶

When the ecotheological positions of these thinkers are analyzed, it comes as no surprise that stewardship theology is the most common line of thought. They argue that humans should be responsible caretakers of nature, as numerous churches and theologies have argued later. However, the early ecotheologians use other arguments also. Bailey includes some arguments related to intrinsic value of nature, while Tillich and Sittler are even clearer on this point. To use terminology developed by Willis Jenkins,⁹⁷ several of these thinkers emphasize "ecological subjectivity" and interconnectedness, most clearly Meland, Sittler and Tillich. Sittler's "A Theology for Earth", published in 1954, is a cornerstone in the development of ecotheology and includes all three types of arguments discussed here.

Using H. Paul Santmire's typology of ecotheologies,⁹⁸ Walter M. Horton was an "apologist" with his dominion ecotheology; Bailey and Meland were more radical reconstructionists; and Sittler and H. Richard Niebuhr were revisionists. Several linked concern for human justice to environmental concerns, most extensively Daniel Day Williams. There can be discerned an "eco-justice" position developing from Walter Rauschenbusch to Williams and then to H. Richard Niebuhr and Sittler and beyond.⁹⁹

Numerous themes in ecotheology find their early expression in these writings. Proposals to integrate creation and redemption, or nature and grace, were issued already since the 1940s. Logos theology and ecotheology based on Incarnation was developed particularly by Raven, H. Richard Niebuhr and Sittler. These proposals often included discussion on "sacramental ecotheology", but especially Tillich probed that option.

Bailey, Meland and Tillich gave most emphasis on spiritual experiences in nature, which, together with their stress on ecological subjectivity, makes them forerunners of creation spirituality -type ecotheology. However, Tillich stressed the transcendence of God much more than the other two. Charles Raven's theology has strong similarities with this approach and it is a natural development that he was later very

⁹⁵ A first step in further studies would be to start by researching countries where there was general early environmentalism. In Germany, for example, there was environmentalism in the 1930s. An early German environmental advocate, Wilhelm Lienenkämper (1899–1965), has been mentioned to have promoted ecotheology (Radkau, *Age of Ecology*, 186), but there must have been also others. In Finland, the Lutheran bishop Eino Sormunen (1893–1972) promoted care for the environment, including respect for animals, already in the first half of the twentieth century (Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 7). Further research will reveal more. For discussion about the Presbyterian roots of numerous early environmentalists in North America, see Stoll, *Inherit*.

⁹⁶ For Buber, religion and nature, see Light, "Buber".

⁹⁷ Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*.

⁹⁸ Santmire, *Nature Reborn*.

⁹⁹ For overviews of eco-justice theology, see Hessel, "Eco-justice Ethics"; Gibson, *Eco-justice*. Sittler's influence has been mentioned by such leading proponents of eco-justice as Roger Shinn ("Eco-justice") and J. Ronald Engel ("Making"). Shinn was an inspiration to Larry Rasmussen (*Earth Community*, xvi), another eco-justice leader.

fond of Teilhard de Chardin's (1881–1955) thought.¹⁰⁰ When naturalistic process theology in the vein of Charles Birch and John Cobb rose into prominence, there were many powerful streams of thought in the international discussion which promoted a general process-type understanding. The eastern Orthodox ecotheology of Paulos Mar Gregorios was conjoined into this discussion. Later, cosmic Christology in the vein of Sittler's more neo-orthodox-influenced proposals was left in the shade of more liberal cosmic Christologies of Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry, although H. Paul Santmire and Jürgen Moltmann upheld the more theistic alternative.¹⁰¹

In the discussions by the early ecotheologians about the role of humans as regards nature, it is noteworthy that the first chapters of Genesis are not in a key role for them. There was not a wide public discourse around “anthropocentrism” and dominion/stewardship before the Lynn White debate started in the late 1960s.¹⁰² There are references to the creation stories, but mostly the early ecotheologians refer to other Biblical texts. The wide majority of those biblical texts that would later become key texts for ecotheology are discussed at least by some of the early ecotheologians. Many Psalms are among the most cited texts, as well as Jesus' teachings about nature (especially birds and flowers) and the passage about liberation of creation in Rom. 8. Various texts from the prophets are also cited. Curiously, the passage on Noah and the flood is not yet used in ecotheology. Later, it would feature prominently in ecotheologies structured around the concept of Covenant.¹⁰³

The book of Revelation and eschatology are discussed by several early ecotheologians. Three themes, which are partly interconnected, may be discerned: (a) interpretations of the relation of this-worldly and otherworldly aspects in the lives of the believers, (b) the fate of the created world in the final consummation and (c) the possible role of humans in causing ultimate doom through their destructive technological powers. Practically all early ecotheologians criticized the over-emphasis on otherworldly salvation in the dominant forms of Christianity. However, they differed in their actual beliefs about the afterlife; the most liberal of them, especially Bailey, abandoned almost any discussion of the hereafter, while most others included a critique of purely this-worldly interpretations of Christianity. Salvation of all creation was also championed by nearly all of the early ecotheologians. They often took care to state specifically that other creatures were included in salvation, instead of talking merely about the general salvation of all creation; in this, Farmer, Raven, Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr and Sittler are the most explicit.

Early ecotheologians did not focus much on animal theology, thus participating in the divide that has long continued between these areas of theology.¹⁰⁴ Rauschenbusch discussed animals in his famous prayer (later attributed to St. Basil) and Meland spoke in the 1930s of animals as “kinsmen of the wild”. H. Richard Niebuhr constructed the most expansive ethical system, where non-human creatures were included as neighbors. He knew Albert Schweitzer's work, but in general the early ecotheologians referred surprisingly little to Schweitzer.

Several of the early ecotheologians included reflections on the significance of land and place. Especially agrarians were strong in this area. Even when agrarianism was increasingly in a crisis since World War II, it built foundations for later theology and environmental philosophy. In recent decades, there has been a renewal of interest in themes related to farming, food, land and place. The role of some early ecotheologians, especially Liberty Hyde Bailey, in this regard has been recognized.¹⁰⁵

100 Raven wrote a book on Teilhard, *Scientist and Seer*. For analysis of creation spirituality, see Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology*, 37–43.

101 For Cosmic Christology and Teilhard, see Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology*, 99–113; Santmire, “Toward a Cosmic Christology”. My current research project focuses on history of ecumenical ecotheology from 1948 to 1975.

102 For the debate, see Whitney, “The Lynn White Thesis”; Jenkins, “After Lynn White”.

103 Pihkala, *Joseph Sittler*, Chapter 7.

104 See Linzey, “So Near and Yet So Far”.

105 Norman Wirzba, a leading writer in theology of food, has written about Bailey's influence. See Wirzba, “Introduction”; *Food and Faith*; and his overview “North American Agrarian Theology”. See also Pihkala, “Ecotheology and Theology of Eating”. For theology of place, see Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*; Bergmann, *Religion, Space, Environment*.

Conclusion

To close, I argue that these early ecotheologians are significant for several reasons. I shall discuss four main points.

First, these writings support the view that there are significant roots of environmentalism in the late 19th and early 20th Century. The theologians associated with the Theological Discussion Group and “Realist theology” were in a key role in developing ecotheology further. Second, these texts reveal important information about the relation of Christian and other environmentalism. The findings show that ecotheology was not as emphatically separate from other kinds of environmentalism as it was after the end of the 1960s and the Lynn White debate. Early ecotheologians contributed to the general development of environmental thought and action.

Third, early ecotheologians contributed to discussion about themes which would later form distinctive environmental disciplines, such as environmental aesthetics, education, ethics, history and philosophy. Their thoughts offer interesting reflection points to these fields.

Fourth, the contributions by the early ecotheologians are not only historically interesting, but they have relevance for the current discussion. These theologians were in a special position to notice the major changes brought by technological development in the twentieth century and they provided important critical reflections about these issues, often in great rhetorical style. Because they developed their thought independently, they display creative thinking, although often in an unfinished manner. They were forerunners of religious environmentalism, but in many other ways they were children of their times. They did not deal much at all with feminist, racial or other contextual questions, and they did not write much about dialogue between different religions. Nevertheless, their collective thought offers interesting reflection entry-points for current scholars interested in religion and ecology.

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