Save the Planet with a Song?
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The Italian crooner Eros Ramazotti sings "se bastasse una bella canzone per convincere gli altri" (= "if only it took no more than a pretty song to convince the others"), thus raising the question whether a song is susceptible to condition human thought and action. In this paper I would like to narrow the issue down to a more specific one, namely whether environment-conscious hymns sung in Christian church services have the potential to affect the churchgoers' environmental awareness and behaviour.

The question may be answered in different ways.

1. The impact of hymns.

It might be argued that the impact of hymnology as a vector of eco-ideology is marginal at best, compared to, say, widely distributed visual media like Al Gore's film An Inconvenient Truth or Yannick Arthus-Bertrand's Home, which may, however, be intended to be awareness-raising media rather than explicit calls to action.

Admittedly, eco-hymns such as we shall be observing here are likely to reach only practising believers, and even then, only within a limited scope: the English Time for Creation services, for instance, are celebrated on just one or two consecutive autumn Sundays, and once delivered, they must still be understood and remembered by the congregations rather than just sung, presumably with mild but non-committal benevolence. If the mnemonic impact of sermons is anything to go by, Sunday homilies will be remembered one week after they were preached only if they contain a shocking idea or a striking image (Pargament & DeRosa 1985). Both sermons and hymns must convey well-informed and well-targeted messages rather than pious abstractions, and most importantly, once understood, they must be appropriated and lived up to by the audience if they are to be of any practical use.

And finally, if in addition to these limitations one regards that the decisions which most heavily affect the environment are likely to be taken in (profit-oriented) corporate boardrooms, (election-conscious) governmental assemblies and (ideologically committed) think tanks rather than in (redemption- and salvation-oriented) churches, one may fear that the impact of church hymns on eco-behaviour will be close to nil.

2. The Church and the Environment.

Which does not mean that churches remain insensitive to environmental issues. Christianity has been slow to respond, but has now joined the eco-bandwagon. The World Council of Churches declares that "considering and promoting the preservation of creation is part of church life at all levels" and Pope Francis has devoted an encyclical letter to environmental concerns, in which he issues a call for Christians to "come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us" (Laudato si’). Religion, which (in our regions at least) represents the meaning and value of human life and the awareness of good and evil in the world as dependent upon a transcendent authority, may affect people's mentalities and behaviour both within and outside the Church. Here as elsewhere, language not only expresses but also constructs meaning, i.e. conditions
people's perception, thought and action. Unfortunately religious discourse can be, and has been, misused "to shape people's perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept the existing order of things, because they are made to value it as divinely ordained and beneficial" ( Lukes 1974:24), and a lot of the potential of Christianity has in recent times been siphoned off towards electorally profitable issues like family values, sexual mores, life and death, war and peace, justice and injustice, etc. ( Sullivan 2006). When Christian discourse is usurped to suggest divine sanction of worldly enterprises, it should be deplored as manipulative ( van Noppen 2006, 2011); but it can also be used "in good faith" as a medium to serve causes perceived as authentically meaningful within the Christian paradigm.

Religion is one way among others to access personal world-views and to encourage personal decisions, notably in environmental ethics: it shapes beliefs about human nature and destiny, and can thus play a role both in curbing negative ecological behaviours and promoting positive ones, especially if the message is strengthened by an emotional appeal. Indeed, if Christianity exerted no significant leverage on public opinion and attitudes, large biotech corporations would not have tried to pressure Pope Benedict XVI into backing GM crops ( Vidal 2011). Not all Christians regard the Roman Pontiff as an authority ( not even on religion) but many do, and he does enjoy global media coverage: he may have no army, no battalions or divisions, but he has a pulpit visible to the ends of the world, he is using it, and is listened to and received "with surprising fanfare" ( Bremmer 2015): when Pope Francis or the World Council of Churches explicitly advocate respect for and protection of creation ( Freedland 2013, Gibbs 2013, Vidal 2015), they may induce people to consider their own position on the issue, and to place the matter of environmental ethics higher on their personal agenda, Even if some conservative politicians claim the right to disregard the Pope's statements "because he is not a scientist" ( Kirchgaessner 2015).

3. Hymns as a Genre.

The choice of a genre may profoundly affect the perception and reception of messages. Among the various forms of discourse, anthems and hymns, with their poetic formulation, imagery and rousing music, can have a strong rallying effect, expressing but also actually achieving group cohesion: think of the socialist Internationale, the civil rights song We shall overcome, the chants like Abide with me or You'll never Walk Alone sung at football contests, or some patriotic anthems ( van Noppen 2010 [2015]). They may also become effective carriers of messages or deliberate calls to action: think of John Lennon's Give Peace a Chance ( Den Tandt 2003:17) or USA for Africa's We are the World. In the 18th-century Methodist revival, to give an older example, the hymns ( which were a striking innovation at the time) had an astonishing emotive and mnemonic effect, and disseminated the gospel message more effectively than any other medium could ever

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1 "Authentically," because directive religious speech acts may also be recycled by clergy into instruments of power unrelated to the substance of faith: does God really require an unbroken succession of bishops, recognize only baptism by immersion, disapprove of kids reading Harry Potter novels or of men wearing plaits? cf. Phillips 1952:35, Younge 2004)
2 There is some irony in this. Conservative politicians regularly cite Catholic church teachings, say on sexual preferences, family planning and abortion, whereas a similar argument, "the Pope has no experience of sex and family life" could be invoked with equal plausibility.
have done. The Wesley brothers set great store by the fact that their people should sing the same doctrine in their hymns as they heard and read in their sermons, but Charles' poetic medium of discourse prevailed over John's serious prose: far more of his hymns were sung by Christians than any of the sermons was ever heard or read (Outler 1984:95).

While the homily is mainly spoken text to which the addressee needs to do little more than listen, the hymn allows worshippers to engage with fellow participants in a collective speech act and thus achieve group membership as well as repeat and possibly adhere to the propositional content. Preaching is most often third-person prose, while hymns allow singers to identify themselves as an "I" or "we" addressing a "Thou", and thus establish a personal relationship with the divine through a variety of expressive acts: praising, praying, confessing, but also committing themselves to a number of beliefs or behaviours, provided they heed and take seriously what the lyrics say: for it is true that words may also be used as convenient substitutes for concrete action: it is easier to pray for neighbours in need than to go knock on their door and actually feed or otherwise assist them. How serious are we when we sing certain words? When on Reformation Sunday, Protestants sing Luther's lyrics "Nehmen sie den Leib / Gut, Ehr', Kind und Weib: / Lass fahren dahin / Sie haben's kein'n Gewinn"³, do they actually challenge the devils to deprive them of their life, loved ones and goods to test their faith, or do they just quote Martin Luther in the conviction that no one will take them up on their words and call their bluff? Probably. But why then should the worshippers' commitment to other causes ("Lord make me more holy", "Make me a channel of Thy peace" or "We pledge to touch all things with holy care") be taken any more literally?

4. Ecological vs. Theological Correctness.

Even when the commitment is genuinely intended, as it may well be, the question remains whether it will encourage the kind of concrete action deemed to be appropriate by the environmentalist. Whereas the eventual perlocutionary effect of the verses is not under the hymnwriters' control, the choice of language is theirs; but the demands are variable. Secular environmentalists may freely pick out those representations of the environment (narratives or imagery) which they feel will garner optimal understanding of and support for their cause. A campaign cast in religious language, by contrast, must not only induce desirable behaviour, but moreover (and above all) run the gauntlet of orthodoxy, as the represented relationship between God, Humanity, and Nature must congrue with the Church's (or each Church's) theology. And this limits the range of possibilities.

5.1 God and Creation.

The representation which upholds that "when we destroy living forms on the planet (...) we destroy modes of divine presence" (Berry 1988) may be ecologically tempting: the idea of unity between God and Creation, or even the assimilation of the two (deus sive natura) encourages respect for all forms of life; but by mainstream biblical-Christian standards it would be rated as theologically incorrect, for when the presence of God "in" creation is viewed in a pantheistic perspective (van Noppen 1981:235, Imbert 2011:96), it tends to

³ "And take they our life / goods, fame, child and wife / Let these all be gone / they yet have nothing won."
abolish the qualitative distinction between the two. God is said to "fill heaven and earth" (Jeremiah 23:24), and his "imperishable spirit is in everything" (Wisdom 12:1), but this does not mean that the two can be equated: it is the Creator, not the creature or creation, that is to be worshipped and served (Romans 1:20-25).

5.2 Man and Creation.

According to the Biblical narratives, the Creator has entrusted creation to humanity in terms which on a first-sight basis allow humans to dispose of the Earth's resources as they deem fit. The divine decree in Genesis 1:28-31 and 9:2-3 ("replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth [...] to you it shall be for meat") may well be quoted tongue-in-cheek as an a posteriori justification for exploitation of the planet's resources, but there is little reason to believe that human mismanagement of natural resources is rooted in obedience to God's words. Biblical theology has rather carefully pointed out that the verbs used in the divine directives issued to Adam and Noah should not be taken to warrant unbridled domination, but be read to entail an attitude of respect and responsibility towards the rest of creation (e.g. Baudin 2010 : 27-43).

5.3. The underlying world-view.

The ideological roots of the problem may run deeper, and have to be sought in the Weltanschauung underlying the Man / Earth relationship. But the existence of different theologies makes it difficult to delineate "a", and a fortiori "the" Christian representation of the universe.

A reproach that has been levelled at Christianity in recent times is that it operates with a dualistic image of the relationship between Humanity and Creation (Man, created in God's image, as the dominant subject vs. Creation as the subordinated object), whereas other religions posit a monistic "unity" between the two (Bellarsi 2003:156); and that the idea of a transcendent, otherworldly God has fostered a view in which Creation has lost its sacred character, particularly in a western perspective, where the development of technological agriculture has contributed to thinking of nature as an independent, neutral repository of resources for human consumption (White 1967). But there is no general agreement on this idea of a primeval unity between God, Humanity, and Creation that might have become disrupted through the Fall. The story of Adam, Eve and the forbidden fruit relates a breach in the unity between God and Man, which in a Christian perspective can be restored only in Christ, the New Adam. But this process of atonement (at-one-ment) between God and Man does not entail a corresponding unification between Man and Creation.

If the Christian world-view viewed in this perspective could be said to bear at least part of the burden of guilt for human attitudes towards the environment, one should not rule out without further ado the competition of another much-worshipped idol, namely Mammon: the secular deity of wealth and money has given rise to a cult of efficiency where productivity and growth are raised to the status of fundamental values, at the expense of reasonable and sustainable management of resources and exchanges.
5.4. Eco-Sin?

Humanity's selfish contempt for nature may be represented (to Christian believers at least) as a form of "sin", disobedience calling for divine punishment: the decalogue's warning that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the subsequent generations (Exodus 20:5) suggests a perspective in which the effects of sin can linger long after the perpetrators have left the scene (Anderson 2009:3), and this viewpoint congreses well with the eventual results of environmental misbehaviour: just as every puff that one takes on one's cigarette or every cloud spewed from one's spray can, car exhaust or factory pollutes the air that everyone else breathes, or as even the breast milk of mothers "carries the burden of the mistakes we have made in our stewardship of the planet" (Williams 2012), every sin that is committed can be said to reverberate throughout the world. We reap what we have sown, whether in terms of responsible deeds or irresponsible ones.

According to the apostle Paul, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but in Pope John Paul II's reading of Christian ecology, it is the Earth which comes to bear the brunt of humanity's attempt to usurp divine power:

In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error [...] Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which he tyrannizes instead of governing it. (Centesimus Annus 1991, § 37)

In the same vein, Pope Francis denounces humanity's usurpation of divine power as sinful behaviour:

To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God (...) If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations. (...) A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality. (Laudato si' 2015, § 8, 62, 75).

5.5. Gaia.

Does the answer, then, reside in a "monistic, holistic" paradigm, in which Humanity and Creation form one whole? In James Lovelock's Gaia model (1972), the planet is viewed as one interactive and self-regulating system in which life interacts with the environment to maintain the conditions favourable to its survival. The positive contribution of this model is that it underscores the consubstantiality of all forms of life, and therefore human co-responsibility for the survival of life on the planet. The idea of self-regulation, however, may
be misread as a suggestion that the planet will take care of itself, and that if the environment is geared towards the preservation of life, it will defend human life as a priority. Lovelock has responded to this optimistic, anthropocentric view in an amendment (2006) which suggests that the illness of the planet is called "humanity", and that in order to recover her health, Gaia may well wind up eliminating humankind to ensure the survival of life: in fact, he expects 80% of the human race to be wiped out by 2100 (Aitkenhead, 2010).

Understandably, this doomsday scenario is not popular, and has met with widespread denial (Beattie 2010:6-7). The reason why it does not resonate with the theologians either is that not only does the name "Gaia" suggest idolatric sacralization of a Mother-God earth, a cult that reeks of New Age syncretism, but moreover the model reduces humanity to one species among others with no particular privilege (Baudin 2007:21, 56), a marginal status incompatible with the Christian representation according to which humankind, created in God's image and chosen as the locus of incarnation, is the crowning achievement of creation, and has been granted the rest of creation for its nurture (Imbert 2011:100).

5.6. Saint Francis.

Does there exist an alternative to the conception of Humanity created as a subject ruling over Creation as a subordinate object, a transitivity which manifests itself even in our grammatical habits? Perhaps: Saint Francis of Assisi, in the Canticle of the Sun, wrote:

"All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our Mother, who feeds us and produces various fruits, with coloured flowers and herbs [...] Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks, and serve him with great humility."

The metaphor of the Earth as Sister / Mother conjures up a number of positive features: the Earth is no longer reified into an "it", but projected as a "thou", as Martin Buber (1937) put it, a living person as it were, with whom one may enjoy a family relationship of love and respect. The idea of the nurturing, life-giving Mother reverses the transitive relationship. The U.S. bishops in Renewing the Earth (1992) hailed this representation as a welcome one:

"Francis was ahead of his time. He saw himself, like today's environmentalists, as part of the ecosystem, not as a proud master over and above it. [...] Safeguarding creation requires us to live responsibly in it, rather than managing creation as though we are outside it. We should see ourselves as stewards within creation, not as separated from it."

but here as before, mainstream-biblical criticism will point out the risk of a drift towards a form of Mother-Earth paganism, as well as an assimilation between Man and the rest of Creation, in which the particular God-given status of humanity is played down. It has also been pointed out (by Belgian primate André Léonard, cf. Rogeau 2014:51) that Francis' celebration of the beauty of creation partakes of an optimistic bias which ignores the more cruel and hostile aspects of nature, say, crocodiles, poison snakes, tsunamis and viruses.
5.7. **Stewardship.**

The metaphor of *stewardship*, however, seems promising: John Wesley (1760), notably, already stressed that creation is not our property: it has been entrusted to us to manage, not as owners but as stewards. If the planet is viewed as a gift, a "grace" with which humanity has been temporarily endowed, humans are not free to dispose of it as they will, but must eventually give account of their management. If the Fall marks a break between Humanity and the Other, the original unity between God, Creature and Creation broken by sin can and must be restored, and this is very much part of the Christian *Heilsgeschichte*, one of the major themes underpinning the scriptural narratives. Salvation is dependent upon divine initiative, but requires a meaningful human response (Wesley 1768, 1782): humanity cannot pull itself out of its sinful state by its own shoe-strings, nor *a fortiori* recover the prelapsarian unity through its own efforts (Baudin 2010:43); but it must seek to participate in and contribute to the movement towards a more harmonious relationship between Creator, Creature and Creation through a responsible, caring attitude. There remains a risk, however: if "wise stewardship" is understood in the terms suggested by a materialistic, not a spiritual reading of the Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Servants (Matthew 25:14-30, where the "talents" stand for spiritual gifts), i.e. that the capital received on loan must grow and throw off maximal dividends, it may still lead to the pursuit of gain rather than an ethic of respect and sustainability.

6. **English Eco-Hymns.**

A few years ago we undertook a study (never appeared in print) of a score of English eco-hymns⁴, among which several written for use in harvest and *Time for Creation* services; six entries from a competition for environmental hymns, intended to be published in a hymnal called *Environment Praise*; a few more chosen or distributed by the *Christian Ecology Link* (CEL); and a handful of hymns written or adapted for use in specific celebrations: at the *World Council of Churches* (WCC) in Porto Alegre 2006, at the *Stop Climate Chaos* Demonstrations in 2006, at the *Copenhagen Earth Summit* 2009, and the multi-faith celebrations accompanying the *COP17 Climate Conference* in Durban, RSA, 2011. The themes in these hymns may be categorised as follows:

6.1. **Delight, praise and thanks for the beauty of Creation.**

The key words in this series speak of Creation as a beautiful but neutral space in which humans "live and move" but of which they are not actually a part. The Earth is perceived passively through the senses. This leads to delightful and thankful praise to the Creator for His gracious gifts, but there is no suggestion of accountability or responsible management of the resources received.

*O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder*

*Consider all The world Thy Hand hath made (…)*

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,*

*How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

(Stuart K. Hine, 1949. © Hope Publishing Co)<br>

*Throughout this world, in which we live and move,*

*All that we sense below, around, above,*

*Displays the imprint of your longing love.*

(© Pat Bennett, 2001)

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⁴ The full collection can be viewed online at [http://homepages.ulb.ac.be/~jpvannop/ECOHYMNS.pdf](http://homepages.ulb.ac.be/~jpvannop/ECOHYMNS.pdf)
6.2. Gratefulness and thanks for Creation as a source of nourishment and other resources.

The nouns and adjectives in this section speak of "ownership": the planet is here described metaphorically as God's property, which is given to humans on loan and whose produce they may collect and consume, but for the use of which they will eventually have to answer. In this respect, the final couplet (Redmond 2000) seems strange: energy may be viewed as a "blessing" granting strength and growth, but one may wonder whether sources of pollution like "fuel" and "technology" are part of God's gifts for which we should give thanks? By the same token, "exotic food" can reach us only via costly (air) transport or be grown in heated greenhouses, both of which leave a heavy carbon footprint.

God in such love for us lent us this planet,
Gave it a purpose in time and in space.
(Frederick Pratt Green, 2005, © Hope Publ. C")

The earth is the Lord's, unite in awesome praise
To God whose truth by his gift to us displays.
(© Gerald H. Gardiner, 2001)

Creator God, your children's voices rise,
Fed by your earth, uplifted by your skies,
Thankful for all its beauty and surprise.
(© Jenny Baines 2002)

We have flowers and exotic food
From countries far away
We have fuel and technology
To help us day by day.
(Sheila Redmond, 2000)

6.3. Awareness of problems in the environment

A remarkable feature in this section is that most verbs (especially in the Bennett 2001 hymn) referring to what "we" do to the earth are used in the passive voice, without explicit reference to a human agent, as if the destruction of the environment were a given fact, in which human agency and responsibility (e.g. desertification through deforestation) are obscured. The nominalization "transformation" is here used as a pretty euphemism for "destruction" through lack of respect for creation.

God's beautiful creation
is fast becoming spoiled,
and deserts overrun the ground
where once the farmers toiled.
(© Alison Blenkinsop, 2000)

Beasts, fishes, birds are one with us:
In hurting one we hurt all life.
(© Jean MacDonald)

Terror and tears, wounds without healing,
Hearts without feeling mirror our fears:
Life without trust, greed and high prices,
Conflict and crises grind us to dust.
(© Shirley Erena Murray, 2006)

But yet the earth is fractured, frayed and torn,
Poisoned, polluted, ravaged, scarred and worn
Its treasures plundered and its beauties scorned,
Our transformation - Of God's creation.
(© Pat Bennett, 2001)

6.4. Recognition of guilt for problems in the environment

These verses denounce human mismanagement: not only the damage done to Creation, but also the greed giving rise to it. The poets make it clear that this causes suffering not only to the planet, but to humans as well. The culprits are "they" and "we", but one may
wonder about the extent to which the singer/believer feels included in this "slippery" (inclusive as well as exclusive) personal pronoun: is the guilt individual or collective? The plural potentially covers all of humanity, easily deviating responsibility towards "others" like the "big" polluters (industries, nuclear plants, wars), a caricature which conveniently plays down the role (and potential) of the individual or the family. Confessing one's own guilt through the use of "I" is, of course, more difficult. In this respect, the mention of smaller, daily deeds like "wasting what others have need of" (Pratt Green 2005) and their consequences may be useful as a model with which the individual may identify more easily.

From blight and guilt, we cannot walk away
Our will and actions shape the world today
And ours the greed, insisting on its way,
Whose depredations - Despoil creation.
(© Pat Bennett, 2001)

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
Long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
Long have we wasted what others have need of,
Poisoned the fountain of life at its source.
(Frederick Pratt Green, 2005. © Hope Publ. C*)

To greenhouse emissions we make our additions
And by them we foster some possible gloom.
(© George Stuart)

Their goods, unfairly traded,
make losses for our gain,
as most of all the profits
in wealthy hands remain.
(© Alison Blenkinsop, 2000)

We know the inspiration of your beauty,
we mine the riches of your million years,
we have explored, but failed in our duty
to care for you, your other children and our peers.
(© Audrey Theodosia Bryant, 2009)

Much we have done, gross human error,
Misuse of power darkens the sun.
(© Shirley Erena Murray, 2006)

6.5. Prayers for forgiveness

Prayers for forgiveness implicitly acknowledge the pray-ers' responsibility and guilt for the present state of the planet: we "spoil" the planet, "create" hunger and "foster" poisonous clouds, as if they were deliberate actions, and not the collateral damage of selfish, greedy or indifferent habits. Two of the hymns voice a plea for a "second chance" to change the situation (hoping that it is not too late) by setting ourselves new goals ("protect, preserve and cherish"). The possibility of a new start with a clean slate ("a new birth") is a basically evangelical idea, cf. John 3:7, 8:11, more than an ecological one; there are voices, however, suggesting that it is still time to slow down global warming and act towards renewal, cf. Grunwald 2014:16.

But in these hymns, the instruments for improvement are not ours: the power to "forestall" disaster remains in God's hands, while humanity keeps passively hoping for forgiveness and praying for God to "show" them the solution.

Forgive us this pollution
of much that you have made,
and show us the solution
for fair and equal trade.
(© Alison Blenkinsop, 2000)

We who endanger, who create hunger,
Agents of death for all creatures that live
We who would foster clouds of disaster,
God of our planet, forestall and forgive!
(© Shirley Erena Murray 2001)

So Father please forgive us for spoiling Planet Earth
Give us a chance to change it, to instigate new birth
Let's care for your creation, in details and in whole.
Protect, preserve and cherish; may this be our new goal.
(© Denzil Walton, 2007)
6.6. Need for action: divine initiative and responsibility

The need for action is here recognized, but in the final lines of the Pratt Green hymn, the responsibility for change seems to be left to a *deus ex machina* who must "deliver us" even from damage ("pollution, misuse and destruction") that humans themselves have wrought and could have avoided. While Pratt Green recognizes that it is our duty to "farm and defend" the earth as God's "stewards", U.S. climate sceptics leave the future of the planet entirely in God's hands, basing themselves on Genesis 8:22 to deny any human co-responsibility, whether for causing climate change or for fighting it. One of their most vocal advocates, Oklahoma Senator Inhofe, rejects as "human arrogance" the thought that human beings might be able "to change what God is doing in the climate".

*Earth is the Lord's: it is ours to enjoy it,*  
*Ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.*  
*From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,*  
*Good Lord deliver us, world without end!*  
(Frederick Pratt Green, 2005. © Hope Publishing C°)

In the other hymns, God is asked to act, rather, as the Source of inspiration thanks to whom Humanity will be encouraged to choose patterns of thought and behaviour more favourable to the environment. Even "respect for creation and humanity" must "come to be", somewhat surprisingly, thanks to an appeal to an impersonal "world order", as if humans were unable to summon up this respect in themselves. The key-words here are the noun and verb "care", in the sense both of "care about/for" (= feel concern) and "take care of" (= minister to, protect), a sensitive term (Stubbs 1996:184) suggesting that humanity may, besides praying for divine intervention, come to formulate a common answer in terms of responsible stewardship.

*Pray the world order that may come to be*  
**Respect** for creation and humanity.  
(© Gerald H. Gardiner)

*O God, our care revive! (…)*  
*we ask you, Lord, to help us strive*  
*for justice everywhere.*  
(© Alison Blenkinsop, 2000)

*Give us a chance to change it;*  
*to instigate new birth,*  
*Let's care for your creation,*  
*in details and in whole.*  
*Protect, preserve and cherish;*  
*may this be our new goal.*  
(© Denzil Walton, 2007)

*Come Holy Spirit, challenge mind and heart!*  
**Inspire** our living so that we will start  
*To make those choices which may yet impart*  
*Love's liberation - To your creation.*  
(© Pat Bennett, 2001)

6.7. Empowerment: human initiative and collaboration

The most promising hymns in the series are those which voice an empowering Christian ethic, tracing the paths of stewardship to be followed not only in terms of "care" and "change" (abstract commitments still to be translated into concrete action) but also of "fair" and "share", on the basis, notably, of the biblical story of the miraculous feeding (John 6:1-
13) where a small boy accepts to share his lunch, five barley loaves and two fish, to feed thousands. It will be noticed that in these verses, just and responsible management of resources translates into care for both the natural and the social environment, but it must also be pointed out that while social and environmental justice are both desirable objectives, they are different problems calling for different responses, which therefore should not be indiscriminately thrown into the same bag.

In the question "What can we do to stop pollution?", the nominalization (= representing a dynamic process as a static thing, leaving out any suggestion of agency) obscures the fact that "our" human habits lie at its source. A verbal representation like "let us stop polluting" would have given a clearer picture of each individual's power to act.

What can we do to turn the tide?
To help create a fairer world?
To stop pollution and abuse?
To sow the seeds of life not death?
We make a difference when we say
"Here, take and share my gifts today" (…)
And play our part, however small.
(© Jean MacDonald)

We can learn to be fair in trade
And pay what goods are worth.
Show we care for the next generation,
Live more lightly on the earth.
(© Jessica, Emily and Sam Crawshaw)

7. Eco-Hymns in a recent Dutch hymnal

It would be interesting to observe the extent to which hymns like the limited initiatives above find their way into material to be used in actual worship. The volume Environment Praise, for which some of the hymns above were written, was never to see the light, though the songs were made public on the Christian Ecology website. Our attention was drawn, however, to a new hymnal published for use in Dutch protestant churches, in which a number of hymns were gathered under the heading Creation (pp. 1515-1528).

In 2013 the Dutch Interdenominational Foundation for Church Hymns published a new Liedboek: Zingen en bidden in huis en kerk ("Songbook: Singing and Praying at Home and in Church") a major compilation comprising over a thousand hymns, canticles and other songs. Conceived for the 21st century, the volume is bound to be a reflection of its place and time of origin, not only in terms of church practices, but also of characteristic societal and cultural concerns. Besides Psalms and other hymns for use in the different liturgical seasons (including Harvest), it contains a number of thematic sections devoted to issues like Church, Creation, Justice or Peace. The Dutch approach to environmental issues in these hymns can be usefully contrasted with the English ones described above.

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5 www.christian-ecology.org.uk. A list of environmental hymns in the hymnals of various denominations can be found on http://www.letallcreationpraise.org/liturgy/hymns.
6 For reasons of space, the Dutch lyrics and other quotes have been directly translated into English. Individual hymns are identified by their number in the hymnal.
The hymns and songs in the section *Creation* all belong to what we have called "Praise and thanks for the beauty of Creation as a source of nourishment and other resources" in paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 above: "Source of all being, great Thou art" (987). We can recognise the same attitude in the hymns for harvest time and -services: we "praise God for the fruits of the earth and the mines", which "God provides because He loves us" (719). Only in hymns 716 and 718 do we find an appeal to share this wealth of gifts with the less fortunate: "Thank the Almighty by sharing with each other". We find a similar encouragement under the heading Justice (989-1007), to "break and share, as we have been shown." In the same section we find a call to "do God's will and care for all that lives" (992), for we "serve many lords at the earth's expense" (994); but in contrast to what can be found in the English hymns, there is no further question here of human responsibility for the present or future state of the planet, as God Himself "cares for his creation" (982), "maintains and supports all that lives" as He "keeps us going" (984) and we "eat out of His hand" (979). In this climate of confidence in divine providence, there seems to be no need for human collaboration with God's plan and purpose (1Corinthians 3:9); nor does it reflect any awareness of guilt for human (individual or collective) mismanagement of the resources received, and consequently, there seems to be little need to pray for pardon.

But then again, this feeling partakes of a more general attitude: throughout the hymnal, sin and guilt receive scant attention. The community of believers is confidently represented as a people redeemed by Christ's sacrifice: "He, the sinless, remits our sins" (564b, 574), which dispenses with the whole "conversionist" scenario (Towler 1984:38-9) leading from conviction of sin to repentance, confession, and acceptance of grace and thence to eventual justification and new birth. Admittedly, the section Liturgy leaves some room for a number of Agnus Dei ("Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", 299e), and Kyrie Eleison ("Lord have mercy"), but when the Greek is translated into Dutch, it appears that this prayer does not entreat God to have mercy on sinners condemned to death, but rather to preserve believers from all kinds of misfortune that may befall them in the present life and world ("murder, mutilation, war, homelessness, aimlessness, anxiety, pain and worry", 300b). We do find a prayer for forgiveness here and there ("forgive me my wrongdoings," 381), but the hymnal (and the liturgy?) clearly make no use of sinister feelings of guilt to shame, scare or otherwise blackmail people into conversion. This projects the positive image of a religion free of fear and wrath\(^7\), and full of confident happiness, which one may rejoice about. But the awareness of human responsibility for the state of creation (whether viewed as "sin" or not) seems to be lost in the process, and if we are to judge by the new *Liedboek*, a new, environment-conscious attitude towards creation is not to be sought, found or, for that matter, sung in churches.

And that is a pity. For even though the impact of church hymnology on environmental awareness is likely to remain limited, there does exist an important area of overlap between ecology and religion, both of which are concerned with and shaped by beliefs about humanity's present existence and future fate.

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\(^7\) A word-count shows that the whole hymnal contains only seven occurrences of the word "hell". The Dutch term for *Wrath* ("boorn") occurs 45 times in the translations of the Psalms, but outside these, only in contexts where it is negated ("thou hast freed us from wrath", 302)
8. Conclusion.

George Marshall (2014) feels that environmental communication (notably with regard to climate change) would do well to follow the model of U.S. mega-churches: not to become a religion themselves, but to induce the public via a similar schema of thought and communication (including attractive music) to transform the negative feelings of guilt and fear which often lead to denial of environmental problems, into a more positive, productive stance. Christianity works with an idiom of grace and forgiveness which after the confession of guilt offers the chance to "be born again" and start a "new life". According to Marshall this language can be usefully transposed into environmentalist discourse and behaviour: through the communal voicing not only of guilt and fear but also of a common faith in "sacred values" (protection of our natural environment and our children's future: "The earth belongs to our children, it's not ours to destroy / do we take the daily bread from the children of the poor?") people are given the opportunity to seek forgiveness and to commit themselves, that is, develop sufficient self-confidence to realise their own potential ("Show we care for the next generation, live more lightly on the earth") and support each other, thus to follow the path of renewal ("bring a new life to birth") as an alternative to apocalyptic pessimism. Reportedly, there are hopeful signs that that a climate catastrophe can still be avoided if humans understand that it is not too late to keep working towards a better future for the planet and its inhabitants, and start acting accordingly, cf. Grunwald 2014:16.

We shall leave it up to Marshall to work out how the transposition from the religious to the ecological paradigm can be implemented in practical terms. In the meantime, there already exists in our churches a communication structure through which a message like "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19) can be conveyed to the public. Within this structure, hymns which combine a relevant message with good music, rhyme and rhythm can play a great mnemonic role and, as potential expressions of group solidarity, fulfil a phatic, bonding function which should not be ignored. If the songs cannot save the planet, they can at least help make a difference for the better.
9. References

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