



In search of relevant contemporary ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564): the case of CCAP Blantyre Synod in Malawi

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Abstract

Ecology and ecological destruction have become significant multi-sectorial subjects for worldwide conversation in recent decades (Foster, 2005:4-5). Many ecological problems stem from human activity which suggests that Christian contextual theology might also have some solutions to mitigate destructive patterns of survival. The ecological damage that is perpetrated affects not only the health of population, but also the natural species that live in particular areas (WWF Global, 2019). John Calvin (1509-1564) believed that God commissions humans to rule over the whole creation in a way that sustains, protects, and enhances His works so that all creation may fulfil the purposes of God. Human beings are responsible for taking care of the creation, and sharing all the wonders and resources to the glory of God (Forster, 2005:1). The aim of this study is to understand some aspects of ecology, causes and impacts of ecological destruction and review relevant contemporary ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564), redefine interdisciplinary ecological approaches, and to consider how to apply the interdisciplinary contemporary approaches to the ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod in Malawi and elsewhere.

Keywords: Calvinism, ecology, anthropocentrism, environment, the Blantyre Synod, reformed traditional respective.

Introduction

Nature has always had a very special place in the Reformed Protestant, or what is also often termed the Calvinist tradition (Stoll, 2015). The study will explore relevant contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564) with special reference to the case of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Blantyre Synod in Malawi. The word, "ecology" preferably means the scientific disciplines which study the functioning of various ecosystems, although the adjective "ecological" may also be used to describe the health of ecosystems (Conradie, 2006:11). The New Choice English Dictionary (Geddes & Grosset, 2020:17) defines "anthropology," as the study of human beings, their origins, distribution, physical attributes, environment, culture, practices and traditions. In this study "anthropocentrism," means human-centred attitude, belief system, religious environment, culture, and socio-economic behaviours. Gjordon (2018:301) holds that there is a consensus among authors that Calvin's reading of the Biblical texts is "anthropocentric" in the sense that he regarded humankind as the centre of creation. However, the earth and all life on it are part of God's creation and humans are called to respect and care for it under the Sovereign will of the Creator (Forster, 2005:1). Therefore, Calvin's views on ecology must be a particularly pertinent subject to explore (Foster, 2005:1). This study is located in the qualitative and interpretive methods in the Social Sciences to examine social reality. According to many



scholars, knowledge is constructed by observation and articulated by personal descriptions of participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:47ff).

The main question for this study is: to what extent and how can the contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564) be evaluated with reference to the environmental destruction in the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi and elsewhere? This study thus discusses the influence of Calvinism on the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), the extent of the problem of ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod and elsewhere, the contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564), the relevant interdisciplinary contemporary ecological perspectives to mitigate the impact of ecological destruction, evaluation and analysis of the contemporary perspectives, and how contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564) could be applied in the Blantyre Synod and elsewhere in reformed church perspective.

The influence of Calvinism on the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi

John Calvin(1509-1564) and his doctrinal writings

Calvinism was crafted explicitly by John Calvin (1536:39) in his writings, with emphasis on the Sovereignty and Holiness of God, sin, salvation, grace, predestination, atonement, the church and many more doctrines were further elaborated in latter part of the 16th Century (Ross, 2019:253). Originating in Geneva and France, Calvinism gradually spread along the Rhine Valley to Germany and Holland, along the Danube River Valley to Hungary and Transylvania and across the Alps into France, shaping and forming the Calvinistic Reformation as it took place in various countries. From France and from Holland, Calvinism soon spread to England and then to Scotland (Ross, 2019:253). Walls (in Ross, 2019:253) argues that the early Scottish engagement in overseas mission was influenced by the experience of evangelism in the Gaelic speaking Highlands in Scotland. The evangelistic Reformation was an experience pursued with energy from 1709 by the Society in Scotland for Promoting Christian Knowledge (PCK). Its strategy had a strong educational basis and it opened 229 schools in the Highlands and Islands in the course of the 18th Century. Along with this initiative went the evangelical preaching and the translation of the Bible and other key Christian texts into Gaelic language (Ross, 2019:253).

John Calvin (1509-1564) and his insights on ecology

Foster (2005) states that:

According to Calvin, appreciating and celebrating the beauty of creation is completely consistent with the Christian religion. It is also consistent with Christianity to be concerned about public policies and practices that inflict undue harm upon the creation and threaten to diminish the beauty and vitality of nature for subsequent generations. A careless attitude toward the environment is not consistent with Calvin's theology.

Calvin's view on the natural world is theocentric where nature serves as "a theatre" of the glory of God (Conradie & Field, 2016:27-28). Silva (2016:36) holds that Calvin offers three important points to consider in order practicing theology of nature. First, God reveals Himself in the works of His hands, and all creation reflects His wisdom, power, and goodness. God also implanted in human hearts and minds the awareness of divinity, elevating their senses in order for humans to recognize God and to lead humans to the true knowledge of God in worship and gratitude (Silva, 2016:36ff). Second, the fall of Genesis 3 and the entrance of sin into the world have darkened human minds, obscuring our senses (Silva, 2016:36ff). Humans have failed to pursue the true knowledge of God with natural reason alone. Although humans



can grasp some notion of God through creation, this notion is often mixed with confusion and error because of our sinful natures (Silva, 2016:36ff). Consequently, natural theology has suffered the effects of sin. The results of natural theology are limited because human reason is limited by sin. Calvin believed that it is impossible for humans to know God truly without better assistance; this assistance is provided by God's revelation in Scripture (Silva, 2016:49). For Calvin, natural theology needs to consider not only general revelation, but also special revelation. Divine revelation is necessary to take natural knowledge back to its original purpose, which is to lead people to true knowledge of God (Silva, 2016:49).

Therefore, Calvin's insights on ecology are concerned with the question of God's status on creation, man's status on nature and the role of nature as it relates to mankind (Foster, 2005:4-5). God commissions humans to rule over the whole creation in a way that sustains, protects, and enhances His works so that all creation may fulfil the purposes of God. Human beings are responsible for taking care of the health of ecosystems, creation and sharing all the wonders and resources to the glory of God. The earth and all life on it are part of God's creation and humans are called to respect and care for it under the Sovereign will of the Creator (Forster, 2005:1).

The Blantyre Synod and Calvinism

The Blantyre Mission was built on 23rd October 1876 from the solid roots of the Calvinistic influences and the Reformation by the Scottish Missionaries in Malawi (Mapala, 2016:62). Calvinism is a major branch of Protestantism that follows the theological tradition and forms of Christian practice set down by John Calvin (1509-1564) and other Reformation-era theologians. It emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Bible. The majority of the churches that trace their history back to Calvin include Presbyterians, Congregationalists and many other Reformed Churches (Holder, 2004; Muller, 2004). The history of Christianity in Africa more especially in Malawi can best be perceived by examining her ideological faithfulness to the missionary vision, methodology and entire evangelistic enterprise. One of the major ideologies that provoked Dr. David Livingstone to think of mission work in Africa was to evangelize new peoples with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the interior of Africa, to introduce Christianity and abolish slavery and its evils (Gama, 2010:49). Livingstone faced a plethora of difficulties on his mission to stop tribalism, conflict and slave trade without giving the people an alternative economic enterprise. He pleaded to Christian Mission agencies in Europe to send missionary enterprises comprising of different professionals to Africa to engage African natives in "Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation," (popularly known as three CCC), the "Gospel and Modern Culture" which would also have deep respect for African culture (Gama, 2010:49, Phiri, 2004:134).

The ecological understanding at the Blantyre Mission Stations

History records that soon after the establishment of the Blantyre Mission, Rev Henry Henderson and some missionaries armed with Calvinistic insights on the doctrine of ecology, undertook the human responsibility of planting, nurturing, and caring for the health of ecosystems and the natural environment along the Nasolo River and the surrounding areas (Selfridge, 1976:32f).

In 1888, the St. Michaels and All Angels church was built near the ecologically beautiful Nasolo River under the leadership of Rev. David Scott and with the cooperation of African workers within three years. On 10 May 1891, the church building was officially inaugurated by Scot himself (Phiri, 2004:136f). It stands to this day as the inspiring architecture combining Western and Eastern traditions in a beautiful style of its own, "not Scottish, nor English, but African" (Laws, 1934:8). Some key mission stations that were opened along rivers and mountains in Southern part of Malawi in his tenure included Cape Maclear, Domasi, Zomba, Ntcheu, Chiradzulu, Likhubula, and Mulanje (Ross, 1996:82).



The Missionaries planted botanical gardens, and they reared animals such as cattle, goats and sheep around the Blantyre Mission Stations. Henderson personally opened “Khola” kraal for breeding animals near Chief Somba behind Soche Mountain (Chipatala, 2021). Consequently, the Blantyre Mission stations were envied for their serious caring of the beautiful environment, gardens and nature. Therefore, at all Mission Stations, the botanic gardens grew various fruit trees, blue gums, acacia, and numerous flowers around the historic graveyards, farming gardens, manses, church buildings, Presbytery offices in all areas of the mission stations (Chipatala, 2021). Rev. David Scott had a gift of encouraging his African co-workers to care for ecology and the environment. Rev. Scott also promoted training for the local people in many areas, some of whom were sent to Scotland, and one of them was Mungo Chisuse who was sent to Scotland to study printing (Phiri, 2004:137).

The Blantyre Synod demographically has a record of 800 congregations and prayer houses, 220 ordained ministers, 25 Women workers, and over a hundred support staff in the 18 Presbyteries with 1.8 million members across its catchment area from Ntcheu District in Central to Nsanje in the Southern Regions of Malawi (Gama, 2022). Additionally, Blantyre Synod owns farms suitable for preservation of ecology, ecosystems and health ecosystems at Naming’azi, Bangula, and Tsangano (Gama, 2022). Consequently, Blantyre City has rapidly grown around the Blantyre Mission station and today it is a city of 2.5 million residents. It still proudly bears the name of “Blantyre City” in memory of the birth place of Dr. David Livingstone in South of Glasgow in Scotland (Selfridge, 1976:31-32).

The extent of ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian(CCAP) in Malawi

The extent of ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod in the Southern Region in Malawi at the moment is indeed problematic and concerning. The ecological problems in most areas in the Blantyre Synod and its establishments occur due to various factors including for example, lack knowledge on ecology, carelessness, overpopulation, urbanization, poverty and acts done to survive economically (Chipatala, 2021). Consequently, the ecological destruction affects not only the health of the population, but also the state of the natural species that exist or live in the area, while also contributing to countrywide issues of charcoal burning, deforestation, leading to soil erosion, flooding, destruction of life and property, climate change and global warming (WWF Global, 2019).

The extent of ecological destruction in most communities in Malawi

The extent of ecological destruction in most communities is ominous or dire in Malawi. Wherever, one travels to interact and interview a few people in areas of the Blantyre Synod from Nsanje to Ntcheu, Mangochi to Mwanza, one may empirically observe the extent of how the environment, ecology and ecosystems have been destroyed by bush fires, careless cutting down of trees for firewood, charcoal burning for small scale sales in townships, thereby promoting desertification. Conradie and Field (2016:37-38) argue generally, that people living in urban townships are often the victims of environmental destruction caused elsewhere, for example by nearby industries. People use “mixed” household garbage, toxic industrial waste and nuclear waste, millions of tons of waste, and millions of tons of recycled materials are disposed of or deposited in townships in South Africa (Conradie & Field, 2016:37-38). Consequently, there is also a disproportionate impact of the environmental crisis on vulnerable groups, including women, children and people with disabilities even though these groups are often not recognised as such in Southern Africa (Conradie & Field, 2016:37-38).

The state of ecological problems in the Southern Africa



The state of ecological problems is ominously dangerous in Southern Africa. Conradie and Field (2016:27-28) hold that there are two opposing ways of understanding the state of the environment destruction in Southern Africa. Some people suggest focusing on problems like the birth rates of people in developing countries; they feel that overpopulation leads to an over-exploitation of the land, deforestation, soil erosion, and the depletion of wildlife stocks (Conradie & Field, 2016:27-28). Most of them are worried about the government's administrative effectiveness to care for the natural environment. Others feel that environmental problems are primarily caused by industrialisation and modernisation and therefore by the affluent themselves. They point at the overconsumption leading to a range of environmental problems that include industrial pollution, garbage piles, toxic and nuclear waste, global warming (Conradie & Field, 2016:27-28).

Mvula (2015:38) asserts that God will punish us for not obeying His commands to tend and care for nature which has resulted and continues to result in the destruction of nature which is His beautiful creation. We shall suffer and perish if we do not care for creation properly, since in one way or another, our existence depends upon it. If we keep the world, it will keep us; if we mess up with it, it will mess us up. Supernaturally, in this world there is some connection among creatures, visible and invisible, animate and inanimate. Harm to one sphere of it gradually results in harm to almost the whole system (Mvula, 2015:38). In the public arena, the environment receives increasing mention as one of the issues requiring attention. It is important among such matters as maintaining economic vitality, creating jobs, overcoming hunger, providing housing and health care, curbing corruption and many more which plague society (Mvula, 2015:37).

The relevant interdisciplinary contemporary ecology justice approaches

There is a great environmental crisis concern by government requiring immediate solutions. The State of Environment Report for Malawi (1998) on Environmental Management framework in Malawi holds that the deterioration of the country's natural resources and the environment is a great concern for the government and all the sectors of the Malawi nation because of various economic losses and social impacts that result from environmental degradation (SERM, 1998). The National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP, 1994) described three main failures in the system to be contributing to degradation. These are (1) Weaknesses in legislation, (2) Lack of proper coordination among sector agencies responsible for enforcement and policing of legislation and (3) Absence of a coherent and comprehensive enforcement mechanism. For example, the discounted economic cost of soil erosion, deforestation, water resources degradation, and fisheries depletion, amounted to over 10 per cent of the GDP by 1994 and it represented a substantial income loss to the country (NEAP, 1994).

However, Conradie and Field (2016:55-56) hold that conservation policies and practices were intimately bound up with the colonial and apartheid policies. In many cases the concerns and interests of communities living in and around game park areas were not kept in mind, as people were forcibly removed from their land, some were denied access to resources their communities had used for generations (Conradie & Field, 2016:55-56). Conradie and Field (2016:55-56) continue to argue that the protection of endangered animal and plant species in Southern Africa in the past has enjoyed a good reputation for the conservation of endangered species in its numerous game parks. Therefore, there is a great environmental crisis concern expressed by government requiring immediate solutions to the problem in Malawi. The church must seek to help reconstruct interdisciplinary contemporary ecological perspectives to mitigate the impact of ecological destruction. The church and state must provide funding for ecological justice restoration programmes at all levels of church, school, college and entire society.

The ecological Biblical hermeneutical perspectives



Conradie and Field (2016:67f) hold that Biblical scholars have offered a broad overview of Old Testament and New Testament perspectives on the environment. Typically, such overviews focus on a few favourite texts such as Genesis 1-3, the Creation account, the theme of the Covenant (Genesis 6-9), the Sabbatical laws (Leviticus 25), Job 37-39, some of the Psalms speak about creation, nature, the ecosystem, the revelation of God through the environment and manifestation of His glory and worship (Psalms 8, 19, 24, 98, 104), some prophetic texts such as Isaiah 9-11, 40f, 65, Ezekiel 36, Joel, Amos, some of the sayings of Jesus (Matthew 6:28-30, 10:29-31, Matthew 25), Romans 8:18-23, 31-39, God inhabits creation with His glory, Colossians 1 and Revelation 21-22 speak of the culmination of creation, the new creation, new earth and new heaven (Conradie & Field, 2016:67f). The selection of these texts is quite understandable since they deal explicitly with nature or with a theology of creation, ecosystems, health of ecosystems and the natural environment (Conradie & Field, 2016:67f).

The reformed traditional ecological perspectives

There is limited number of materials on contemporary ecological perspectives in the Blantyre Synod in Malawi. During one of the class discussion sessions on the subject “the church and ecology” at the University of Blantyre Synod (UBS) in 2018-2021, the researcher discovered that there are a limited number of ecological materials in reformed tradition perspective in Blantyre Synod in Malawi. Contemporary Scholars on contextual theology in Malawi have not engaged more contemporary perspectives from John Calvin (1509-1564)’s ecological insights to mitigate environmental destruction. Some Scholars who mentioned ecology on various perspectives of orientation include: Mvula, H. Y. 2015. Back to the Basics: Caring for Nature is Caring for Ourselves. Religion & Culture: *A Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies*. Mzuzu University; Phiri, I. A. 1996. African traditional women and ecofeminism: The role of women at Chisumphu cult in preserving the environment. Religion in Malawi 6, 14-19; Phiri, I. A. 1996. The Chisumphu cult. The role of women in preserving the environment, Ruether, RR (ed) 1996. Women healing earth. Third world women on ecology, feminism and religion, 161-171. Maryknoll: Orbis Books; Moyo, F. & Ott, M. (eds) 2002. Christianity and the environment. Kachere Test No. 13. Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi; Moyo, F.L. 2002. The sovereign God as possessor of creation: Psalm 24:1-10; Moyo, F. & Ott, M (eds) 2002. Christianity and the environment. Kachere Test No. 13. Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi; Moyo, S. & Katerere, Y. 1995. Land and natural resources, MacGarry, B (ed) 1995. Waste or want? “Environment and poverty” Seminar Papers, 9-24. Gweru: Mambo Press. Harare: Silveira House; Sindima, H. 1990. Community Life: Ecological, Theology in African perspective, Birch, BC, Eakin, W & Mc Daniel, JB (eds); and Sindima H. 1990. Liberating Life: Contemporary approaches to ecological theology 137-148. Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, and a few others.

Evaluation and analysis of Blantyre Synod and ecological dimensions

In light of the discussion above, the study will now evaluate the extent of the issue and how the contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564) can possibly be analysed with reference to the case of the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi. The study will also engage other interdisciplinary scientific disciplines on various ecological ecosystems, as well as health ecosystems and approaches for environmental preservation (Conradie, 2006:11). The following are some of the findings for reflection:

The great extent of ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod



The study discovered that the extent of ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod is indeed devastating in the Southern Region in Malawi. In March 2023, Cyclone 'Freddy' and rains hit many areas of Blantyre Synod leaving over 700 people dead, 800,000 people displaced, thousands of livestock and crop fields swept away leaving over 2 million people without food in Southern Region (18-19, March 2023: 20.00 MBC News Reports on Weather focus). The ecological problems in most areas in the Blantyre Synod and its establishments occurred inter alia due to issues raised earlier (Chipatala, 2021). Consequently, the ecological destruction affects not only the health of the population, but also impacts negatively on the natural species that live in the area, while also contributing to countrywide issues of charcoal burning and deforestation, leading to soil erosion, flooding, destruction of life and property, climate change and global warming (WWF Global, 2019). Therefore, the church and state must make efforts to reformulate relevant policies, and legislation to protect endangered animal and plant species in Malawi for the conservation of endangered species in its numerous game parks (Conradie & Field, 2016:55-56).

The environmental destruction concern requiring interdisciplinary solutions

The study established that there is a huge environmental destruction requiring immediate interdisciplinary solutions in Malawi. Some interdisciplinary solutions to mitigate the impact of environmental crisis include (1) Drafting strong legislation, 2. Proper coordination among sector agencies responsible for enforcement and policing of legislation and (3) The need for a coherent and comprehensive enforcement mechanism (NEAP, 1994). Following the March 2023 Cyclone 'Freddy' and floods hitting many areas of Blantyre Synod, over 500 were left people dead. Sadly 800,000 people were displaced, thousands of livestock and crop fields swept away and over 1 million people were left without food in the Southern Region (18-19, March 2023: 19.00 News Reports on MBC). Subsequently, the Malawi Government declared Southern Region to be the most the most hit of ten districts that were disaster areas and appealed for the short and long-term Global donor support (18-19, March 2023: 20.00 News Reports on MBC).

Mvula (2015:37) holds that one of the reasons for the concept of mitigating the impact of ecological and environmental destruction on the care for creation is that we cannot do justice in this world without first doing justice to the world in which we live in. Gibson (1989:2) argues that justice to human beings is inseparable from a right relationship with and within the natural order. Eco-justice includes social and economic justice and, by combining it with ecological awareness and appreciation, it profoundly affects the way it is to be achieved. Eco-justice means justice to all of God's creation (Gibson, 1989:2). Global Ecological activists call for environmental justice, climate change justice, and economic justice approaches for the restoration of ecology. Therefore, the church should seek to as far as reasonably possible reconstruct interdisciplinary contemporary perspectives to mitigate the impact of ecological destruction. Therefore, the church and state must strive to reformulate relevant policies, and legislation to protect endangered animal and plant species in Malawi for the conservation of endangered species in its numerous game parks (Conradie & Field, 2016:55-56).

The great ecological problems in Southern Africa

The study discovered that the state of ecological problems is ominously dangerous in Southern Africa. There are two opposing ways of understanding the state of the environment destruction in Southern Africa. Some people focus on problems like the birth rates of people in developing countries; they feel that overpopulation leads to an over-exploitation of the land, deforestation, soil erosion, and the depletion of wildlife stocks (Conradie & Field, 2016:27-28). Most of them are worried about the government's administrative effectiveness to care for the natural environment. Others feel that environmental problems are primarily caused by industrialisation and modernisation and therefore by the affluent themselves. They point at the overconsumption of scarce resources by some leading to a range of environmental



problems such as industrial pollution, mountains of garbage, toxic and nuclear waste, global warming (Conradie & Field, 2016:27-28). Therefore, the Global Ecological activists call for new interdisciplinary approaches on environmental justice, climate change justice, and economic justice approaches for the restoration of ecosystems, health of ecosystems and ecology. The church and state must strive to provide adequate funds for ecological justice restoration programmes at all levels of the church, school, college in society in general.

The anthropocentric ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564)

The study established that there is a consensus among authors that Calvin's reading of the Biblical texts is "anthropocentric" in the sense that he regarded humankind as the centre of creation (Gjordon, 2018:301). However, the earth and all life on it are part of God's creation and humans are called to respect and care for it under the Sovereign will of the Creator (Forster, 2005:1). Gjordon, 2018:297-298) argues that it is almost a truism to also say that the ecological crisis is a bitter fruit of the Industrial Revolution, which, in turn is a phenomenon tightly connected with the modern world.

Conradie (2006:59f) holds that compared to the emphasis on the sacredness of nature in most other religions, the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation has led to a "disenchantment of nature." Lynn White (in Conradie, 2006:59f) maintains that exploitative attitudes toward nature surfaced widely during the medieval period (400 CE – 300 CE) and that this was encouraged by the anthropocentrism of the dominant theology of the time. Christianity has given religious support to the notion that the world has been created primarily for the benefit of human beings. Modern science is an extrapolation of medieval natural theology while technology constitutes a realisation of the Christian notion of human mastery of nature," (Conradie, 2006:59f). Consequently, White argues that "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" and on ecological destruction, he concludes that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" (Conradie, 2006:59f). Gjordon (2018:299-300) holds that inspired by White's arguments, some deep ecologists came to the conclusion that Christianity "is totally anti-ecological and need to be discarded in order to create an alternative ecological spirituality".

The relevant stewardship ecological perspectives

The study established that there is a great need for stewardship ecological approaches in the Blantyre Synod in Malawi and elsewhere. The fact that there is an extensive ecological destruction at the Botanic Gardens, the historical Mission graves, on the lands of the Blantyre Mission, Presbyteries and congregations of the Blantyre Synod, this study shows a lack of awareness on relevant stewardship ecological perspectives and Calvinistic ecological insights on all structural levels complicating the problem under review in Malawi (Foster, 2005:1). Human stewardship policies and legislation must be reformulated to protect endangered animal and plant species in Malawi for the conservation of endangered species in its numerous game parks (Conradie & Field, 2016:55-56).

The best asset stewardship offers are the moral and responsible frameworks by which practitioners must abide (Mvula, 2015:36). Generally, many moral and responsible stewardship principles polemically condemn the destruction tendency of nature as a result of lawlessness leading to destruction. Religious, moral, responsible stewardship concepts advocates for greater human care of God's creation. This concept of caring for God's creation is not only a human and scientific idea. From the beginning to the end, caring for the creation is God's idea (Mvula, 2015:36). God, right after finishing His creation activities, mandated humans to care for what He created (Genesis 1:26-28). Caring for creation is one of the issues that people in the world have struggled to master for centuries (Mvula, 2015:35). The theological implication is that humans are crowned with authority to guard, guide, preserve, and tend to the whole creation, animate and inanimate in the air, water, and on land (Mvula, 2015:36).



The distinctive trend in the Reformed and Evangelical traditions

Conradie (2006:88-89) asserts that the dominant trend in the reformed and evangelical traditions of Christianity holds on human salvation, although the need for a sanctification of life is also emphasised (Conradie, 2006:88-89). Conradie (2006:88-89) holds that other contributions to ecological theology from contemporary reformed and evangelical scholars also include Steven Bouma-Prediger, Martien Brinkmann, Ernst Conradie, Calvin DeWitt, David Field, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Colin Gunton, James Gustafson, Douglas John Hall, Sallie McFague, Jürgen Moltmann and Michael Welker. Other activists inhibit a contemplative appreciation of God's creation such as Field (1996), Field in Taylor (2005:344-348), Schreiner (1991) and Santmire (1985:122f). Ecological Wisdom in Christianity. Conradie (2006:89) concludes that these theological emphases are reflected in the confessional documents of the reformed tradition and remain present in the work of classic reformed scholars such as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Abraham Kuyper (1837- 1920), Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) and Karl Barth (1986-1968).

Application of the relevant contemporary approaches in the Reformed traditional perspective

The point of departure for the application of contemporary perspectives must be the church to regularly rethink the Calvinist theology on the Sovereignty and Holiness of God, sin, salvation, grace, predestination, atonement, the church and many more doctrines in relation to ecosystems, health of ecosystems and natural preservation in order to make them more relevant to the current situation in the 21st Century (Silva, 2016:36). Calvinism must thus be revisited to make it more contextual and relevant. The relevant contemporary approaches to ecosystems, health of ecosystem and ecological preservation must be applied according to context of each situation. The church must reconsider its theological position to re-engage the contextual theology of ecology and nature (Silva, 2016:36). The church must additionally acknowledge that the relevance of a contextual theology of caring for ecology and the environment is pertinent to the present generation. God has revealed Himself in the works of His hands, and the beautiful creation reflects His wisdom, power, and goodness (Silva, 2016:36ff).

Summary and conclusion

This study explored the influence of Calvinism on the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), the extent of the problem of ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod and elsewhere, the contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564), the relevant interdisciplinary contemporary ecological perspectives to mitigate the impact of ecological destruction, evaluation and analysis of the contemporary perspectives. The study established that the ecological problems in most areas in the Blantyre Synod and its establishments occur due to factors such as a lack of understanding on ecology, carelessness, overpopulation, urbanization and acts done to survive economically (Chipatala, 2021). Gjordon (2018:301) holds that there is a consensus among authors that Calvin's reading of the Biblical texts is "anthropocentric" in the sense that he regarded humankind as the centre of creation. However, the earth and all life on it are part of God's creation and humans are called to respect and care for it under the Sovereign will of the Creator (Forster, 2005:1).

This study established that ecological destruction in the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) in Malawi according to wrong ecological perspectives from John Calvin (1509-1564) are based on a distorted view of ecology which should be rectified by sound application of contemporary ecological perspectives in Reformed perspective. Calvinism must be contextual and relevant to the present situation in the 21st



Century. The church must reconsider its theological position to re-engage the contextual theology of ecology and nature (Silva, 2016:36). The church must acknowledge that the relevance of contextual theology of caring for ecology and environment is pertinent to the present generation. God has revealed Himself in the works of His hands, and the beautiful creation reflects His wisdom, power, and goodness (Silva, 2016:36ff). Caring for creation is one of the issues that people in the world have struggled to master for centuries (Mvula, 2015:35). The theological implication is that humans are crowned with authority to guard, guide, preserve, and tend the whole creation, animate and inanimate in the air, water, and on land (Mvula, 2015:36f). The state must provide funding for ecological justice programs at all levels of church and society. Therefore, all people have the divine responsibility to care for the ecosystems, ecology, nature, sustaining life and the beautiful planet earth. This is how the contemporary perspectives on ecological insights from John Calvin (1509-1564) could be applied with reference to the case of the Blantyre Synod in Malawi and elsewhere in Reformed traditional perspective.

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