

# Can Faith Save the Earth?

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## Introduction: faith and the environment

The link between faith and the environment is not one that automatically comes to mind. What does faith have to do with the pollution of the environment? What is the relationship between the breakdown of our natural environment and faith in God? Faith primarily involves man, his redemption and salvation. Everything else in faith is subordinate to this. Environmental pollution and destruction are not concepts that can be found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The concept nature is only mentioned in connection with the law of nature and natural science. However, the concept environment refers directly to creation. The same applies to the lemma where there is also no clear reference to the threat to the integrity of creation through the actions of man. There is one instance of a reference to man's possible destructive management of creation (Catechism of the Catholic Church 373). All sorts of social issues are discussed in the Catechism: arms trade, war and peace, poverty, famine, drugs, tax fraud, politics. Ecological problems would certainly fit into this list, but instead they are casually mentioned as moral problems. In the part that deals with creation attention is paid to the possible abuse of mineral, vegetable and animal resources. But the attitude and views that are the basis of this abuse are not discussed in any detail. On the contrary, the view on creation is in no way related to the disturbance of the environment as a result of the way in which man considers himself. When problems concerning the environment are discussed then it is as moral problems and not as a fundamental problem relating to views. It is this view with regard to nature that I wish to discuss in this contribution from catechetics. Tjeu van Knippenberg describes religious education as the form of pastoral action that is aimed at learning religious communication. He understands religious communication as 'the exchange of ultimate meanings that people give to their personal and social life, with in mind the development of an understanding within themselves as well as of one another, and within this with the cultural tradition of Christianity, which results in the involvement of sense and/or senselessness partly in relation to the Christian faith (Van Knippenberg 1987, 73). Environmental problems affect us deeply in both our personal and social lives. They confront us with the limits of our existence, and also with the limits of our abilities. The way we treat nature we live in and are, affects the foundation of our existence and is as such the basis of the meaning we give to everything, of the ultimate meaning. It is in this boundary area that the practical theologian works, reflects on the sources of giving meaning (Van Knippenberg 1989). The biblical story of Creation is such a source, because it is not a story about the creation of earth but about its existence. In his affirmation of earth as creation man gives meaning to the ground beneath his feet. In a more recent book Van Knippenberg connects the idea of Creation with man's course of life. Created reality is after all the medium of the experience and meeting with God for the faithful (Van Knippenberg 1998, 160). The concept creation arises in theology when the question as to sense and meaning is involved. And the question as to sense and meaning does indeed arise in the situation of the earth being at risk.

In this article I give an account of a quasi-experimental educational study amongst adult church members. The object of this study was to find out to what extent the participants approach environmental problems from their (Christian) religious point of view on creation, and to what extent this can be influenced educationally. I start by presenting the situation as it is now in ecological theology (1), subsequently I point out the

catechetical framework (2), following which I develop the method of questioning for the study and present the results of the empirical research (3). In the final section I discuss the answer to the question on the basis of the results (4).

## **1. Ecological theology**

In the seventies and eighties of the previous century ecology was an important subject in theology. In the nineties attention waned. It was a subject that was discussed within ethics in particular (Altner 1974; 1989; Amery 1972; Auer 1984; Drewermann 1982; Hermans 1986; Manenschijn 1988; Moltmann 1985). The discussion itself was set off by a paper written by Lynn White that was published in 1967, and that later became famous: The historical roots of our ecological crisis (White 1967). In the paper White suggests that the Christian faith and the belief in the story of Creation especially is a factor in the development of environmental problems. This publication initiated a discussion on the contribution of Jewish-Christian theology to the alliance between science and technology, between studying and interfering with the natural environment (Amery 1972; Barbour 1973; Derr 1975; Drewermann 1986; Roscam Abbing 1976; White 1973). After all, this theology rejected pagan animism in which each tree, hill or spring was considered to house a spirit, so it was approached with respect. The Jewish-Christian view is characterized by the secularization of the world, that is to say that none of reality is divine. God created the world, after which he withdrew from it by giving it to man to manage. Man is the guardian of the world and may use the world as he sees fit. Moreover, Jewish-Christian views are characterized by a linear view of time: history is connected to the future, time leads to the coming of the Kingdom of God. According to White both characteristics of this view provided room for a view of progress: the world is developing in the direction of more, bigger and better. Connected to the opinion of Creation whereby man is presented as an image of God, this has provided room for man's unbridled rule of all nature, whereby nature exists for the development of man without it being respected. In the course of history this has taken place in the form of the exploitation, pollution and exhaustion of nature. White argues for the reconsideration of the relation of man and nature based on Franciscan ideas. The key to understanding Franciscus is his belief in the virtue of modesty, not only that of the individual but of the modesty of man as a species. For him man is not the crown of God's creation and ruler over all living beings, not even a democratic ruler. The industrious ant is not an example to the lazy, and fire is not a sign of the union of the human soul with God: no, they are Brother Ant and Sister Fire, praising their creator in their own way, just as Brother man does (White 1967, 155). Franciscus preached to the animals and called on them to praise God. This fundamental equality of all creatures with regard to their mutual creator is, according to White, the spiritual foundation for a changed way of treating nature.

White's opinions have evoked many reactions, in an affirmative as well as a negative sense (Groot Wassink 1980). According to Ton Lemaire a society that wishes seriously to deal with environmental problems can no longer continue in the Jewish-Christian tradition (Crijnen 1989). After all, the faithful and the church discover themselves to be part of the problem and not only in the wonderful and gratifying role as a factor in the solution to the problem (Van Iersel 1989). In the following section I indicate that Christian ideas do hold possibilities for a different approach to environmental problems.

### **1.1 Two ecological value orientations**

The interpretation presented by White of the biblical task of Creation is merely one of the possible interpretations. It is an anthropocentric view of this task. There is, however, also an ecocentric approach in interpretation history. In the following section I wish to explain these two approaches to the task of Creation in more detail. Anthropocentrism and ecocentrism are two fundamental ways of viewing reality. This view is related to man, to nature and to the norm with regard to dealing with nature that is connected to it.

### *1.1.1. Anthropocentrism*

In anthropocentrism man is considered as being of central importance in reality. Man is the centre of that reality. Everything in reality apart from him is subordinate to him, the value of everything else is determined by the value it has for man. This value can be seen in terms of use, aesthetic pleasure and essential living condition. Nature within and outside man has no value of its own in the anthropocentric view, its value is determined by its value for man. Its value is that of a condition of existence: after all, nature makes it possible for man to live, man is man on the basis of his corporality. Nature also provides food for man and is for man a source of aesthetic pleasure; he finds beauty, peace and even religious experiences in nature. The norm for the way nature is treated is that of instrumentalism. Nature deserves protection that is equal to the practical value it has for man.

The anthropocentric view is a reaction to the cosmocentric view of the Greeks, that for a long time was typical of the West European view. In the cosmocentric way of thought reality is considered as a unity, as a structured, harmonious, beautiful and even sacral whole (Verstappen 2000). This unity is a part of the objective manifestation of reality itself, of which everything within that reality is a part. Or as Metz puts it: the archetype of understanding the conditions of being is mundane objectivity, the primary spatial availability, a condition (Metz 1964, 54-55). Nothing in reality derives its value from something else in that reality. Reality, nature, man and gods - are as a whole sacral and deserve respect. In the Christian view an initial reaction to this cosmocentric view can be seen. Man and nature are much more clearly distinguished from one another. Nature is distinguished from man, but is admired as a work of God and considered as a reference to God. However, only man is created in the image and likeness of God, which as such gives him precedence. Metz points out that the swing towards the anthropocentric way of thinking takes place in Thomas Aquinas's view (1225-1274). The primal condition of being is, according to Thomas, the typical human way of being, subjectivity. All other ways of being are interpreted from this subjectivity (Metz 1964, 56).

Anthropocentrism has since Descartes become a scientific way of thinking. According to Descartes nature has become the object and creation of human thought. After all man can question everything that exists. The only certainty that remains then is thought itself. That thinking and everything that is thought up in that thinking is subsequently the only thing that exists. Thus nature only exists in man's thoughts. This provided the opportunity for the experimental study of reality, first of nature, and then of man himself. Nature within and outside man is taken to be mechanical (Dijksterhuis 1951; Berger 1998). It is manipulated, changed, applied as an object of human actions for the fulfillment of human need. Nature becomes an instrument in the hands of man, it is approached instrumentally. The value of nature is defined by its value for man. According to White this anthropocentric way of thinking is the basis of the Christian roots of present environmental problems. After all, the instrumental approach to nature has led to its exploitation, an unscrupulous exploitation that results in destruction, pollution and exhaustion. White points out that this started to happen from the moment that man began to employ nature on a large scale for his own food supply: first in agriculture, through large scale mechanical tilling of land and changes in the structure of the soil, later in stock breeding through the mass production of meat and milk. This can be characterized as the swing in the way in which nature was treated: first people lived off what nature has to offer; later nature is adjusted to suit the necessities of life for man. Industrialization has only strengthened this process of damage to nature through exploitation.

There has, however, been a reaction to this exploitative way of treating nature in the anthropocentric way of thinking. In order to prevent pollution, destruction and exhaustion nature is approached in a more prudential instrumental way. Damage to nature is avoided as much as possible or unavoidable damage is repaired with the use of new technology. The anthropocentric way of thinking remains the same, nature continues to be of value to the extent that it is of use to man, damage is avoided where man is affected. Much of the immediate damage is moved to the future or elsewhere, for example the third world or the oceans. Old wildlife areas are made into

residential areas for man, new wildlife areas are created elsewhere. In this anthropocentric approach the view on man and nature remains caught in a dualism of man and nature. Man and nature are each other's opposition, belong to different realities.

The anthropocentric way of thinking can also be found in the theological opinion on creationism. In number 343 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church the anthropocentric interpretation is expressed as follows: 'man is the highlight of the work of creation'. This is obvious in the order of the days of creation that go from the less to the more perfect. Although God loves all his creatures the Scriptures say: 'you are worth more than any number of sparrows' (Luke 12, 6-7). All other creatures are naturally destined for the communal well being of man. God created everything for man, the use of which is bound to moral laws, whereby the ultimate normative criterion is care for the quality of life of fellow man, including future generations (CCC 2415). At the same time it is stated that that which belongs to man may not belong to any other creature; one may not waste affection on animals (CCC 2418).

The anthropocentrism of the interpretation of creation of the Catechism also emerges in Christian doctrine that the definitive object of Creation is the salvation of man through Christ. 'God had the glory of the new creation in Christ in mind from the beginning' (CCC 280). Creation involves the salvation of man, his redemption and glory at the end of time. Characteristics of anthropocentrism can be found in the Catechism: emphasis on the main value of man, the derivative value of the rest of creation and the instrumental contact with creatures.

#### 1.1.2. *Ecocentrism*

As a reaction to this and under the influence of the considerable ecological problems that we have been confronted with in the past fifty years, philosophy and theology have developed a completely different view, a view in which the position of man in reality is no longer considered as opposition to non-human reality. Nature and man are considered together, as belonging to the same one and undivided reality: the ecocentric view. The development of modern physics is what initiated this view. Natural reality cannot be reduced to elementary particles that exist unrelated but is in itself a dynamic process of interrelated particles that in precisely these relations gain meaning. In this system-ecological view of the world spirit and matter, nature and man cannot be separated from one another. Here nature gains the meaning of the Greek phusis: the whole of reality as a unity as opposed to metaphysics (Van der Tuin 1999).

Each part of reality gets its position and meaning from the whole of reality, and therefore has its own individual meaning and value, an intrinsic value. This is not dependant on a particular centre, but on a position within the whole. It is a value that is not dependent upon attribution, but that exists from being. Each part of reality has its own unique position in that reality, is an irreplaceable part of it. It is in this relation in particular that it has its own value, which cannot be replaced. The unique significance of man is therefore also taken from man's position within the whole. This means that the actual position of man as a subject, providing active meaning in unity with the whole of reality is maintained. But man has no greater value than the rest of reality. Man is not of any greater value simply because of his intellectual qualities (Manenschijn 1988; Rodman 1977).

This intrinsic value of nature requires that it be treated with respect and attention (Blans 1991). This means that nature is maintained, and protected for the sake of itself, and not merely as an instrument in the hands of man. Respect means actions that are aimed at retaining integrity, stability and beauty. Respect implies showing justice and love with regard to the whole of nature (Schenderling 1999). In the stories of Creation in Genesis there are elements that support an ecocentric interpretation of Creation. Again I will discuss this on the basis of the Catechism text. In the Catechism the whole of Creation is considered as a manifestation of God's glory (CCC 319). This means that each creature has its own goodness and perfection (CCC 339), has intrinsic value because God says of each of his acts of creation 'that it was good'. For man this means that he should respect the individual goodness of each creature (CCC 339). Everything exists in mutual dependence upon each other, each creature needs

other creatures (CCC 340), there is solidarity amongst creatures on the basis of the fact that they all have the same Creator (CCC 344).

The characteristics of ecocentrism described earlier can be recognized in all of the above: reality as relation, the intrinsic value of each creature and the respectful treatment of each creature. Both these theological orientations on the view on Creation form the content of a catechetical treatment. In the following section the aim of this catechism is developed and justified.

## **2. Religious education for adults**

Religious education is one of the ways in which the church gives form in its pastoral actions to its task of mediation in salvation. Therefore the general aim of religious education is on the one hand closely connected to this task of mediation in salvation, and on the other to the aim of pastoral actions. The aim of pastoral actions was described earlier in the introduction using Van Knippenberg's work, as the encouragement of religious communication (Van Knippenberg 1987). Catechetically this encouragement takes place in the form of learning religious communication.

It is the church's task to encourage salvation in the name of God (Rahner 1969). Pastoral action, in this case catechetical action is aimed at this task. Religious communication thus has the function of (ecological) action as fulfillment of the task of the encouragement of salvation by the faithful. In other words religious communication on salvation forms the spiritual orientation for (ecological) actions. Concentrating on the Church's task with regard to the environment, - to promote the wholeness of the earth, -learning religious communication in religious education is aimed at this ecological assignment. The object of learning religious communication is that it encourages this conduct by creating a spiritual foundation for it. Religious education is therefore: learning religious communication with the development and/or the strengthening of the spiritual foundation for (ecological) conduct in mind.

For the formulation of the objective of environmental catechesis I will now discuss in succession learning communication, the content of communication and actions based on this communication.

### *2.1. Learning to communicate*

The formulation of educational aims in communicative terms is quite recent. This communicative turn in religious pedagogy is according to Feifel, characterized by the unity of understanding, attributing meaning and actions (Feifel 1987, 30-32).

In the first place communication involves understanding. I take understanding to mean the cognitive skills necessary in order to deal with content. These form the conditions for communication as the exchange of meanings. More specifically communication involves activities such as: learning to understand others and making oneself understandable for others; explaining what one means and learning to interpret what others mean; being able to ask for and give responsibility (De Jong 1990, 140). These activities imply cognitive skills: from the reproductive knowledge of and insight in the concepts that form the content of communication, to the skill to evaluate the consistency of concepts employed internally and externally (Bloom 1964).

Learning religious communication cannot, however, secondly, be reduced to learning these cognitive skills, as if it concerned cognitive skills with regard to concepts that are separated from some affective giving of meaning and sense. Understanding religious concepts means aiding in the execution of the experience of meaning that is expressed in these concepts. So here communication means connecting the experience of meaning that is expressed in religious concepts with one's own way of dealing with the question of meaning concerned.

Thirdly, religious communication refers to actions. Understanding and the attribution of meaning opens up new play areas for the imagination, in which at the very least a partly successful life based on faith is referred to. It is in exemplary conduct that understanding and the attribution of meaning reach completion. In other words: because religious communication involves the religious giving of meaning, taken from

tradition as well as one's own view, learning it implies that the following are inextricably bound to one another: cognitive understanding, personal interpretation and actions. After all faith makes people think, initiates conversion and has to be done.

The catechetical task of learning religious communication concerning ultimate meaning involves the following:

- understanding, that is to say the acquirement of knowledge concerning ultimate meaning;
  - the cognitive skills needed to be able to deal with that knowledge;
  - the skill to relate that knowledge with one's own attribution of meaning concerning questions of life;
  - the skill to view one's own actions on the basis of these meanings.
- Thus religious education creates the conditions for the faithful that enable him/her to learn to participate in social communication concerning questions of meaning. This is not the immediate aim of catechesis but a transcendental aim. The interactive and social aspect of this communication is employed as a method in catechesis.

## *2.2. Content of communication*

The content of communication is the ultimate attribution of meaning to one's personal and social life. This attribution of meaning is related to the man's fundamental existential questions. These so-called questions on life can be somewhat systematized as concerning the following areas of existence: the individual; the other and others; nature; space and time; suffering and death; good and evil. According to Schillebeeckx these areas constitute the co-ordination system of human existence: religion is about these questions (Schillebeeckx 1977, 674 et seq.). This religious communication makes use of central symbols and images of the various philosophical traditions. Hermans mentions the following with regard to Christian philosophy: God as Father; Creation; Sin; Mercy; Resurrection; God's Kingdom and Justice (Hermans 1993, 88 et seq.). The existential question that constitutes the content of communication in environmental catechesis is formed by the question as to the meaning of and treatment of earth.

In section one I discussed in detail the way in which this question is answered in modern views. In doing so I distinguished two orientations. The Christian symbol, in which the ultimate attribution of meaning is expressed, is the concept creation. This symbol is central in the content of communication in the framework of environmental catechesis. Thus in the first place learning concerns the various interpretations of this symbol, as expressed in the tradition of the Christian faith, in confrontation with the personal religious views of the students. Next learning concerns the attribution of meaning to nature that occurs on the basis of this confrontation, and finally it concerns the behavioral consequences this has for the way nature is treated. Religious communication concerning the religious symbol of Creation thus implies: the acquirement of knowledge about the various Christian interpretations of the symbol that have been handed down and the skill in dealing with these; the exploration and explicit forming of one's own (religious) view; the formation of a relation between interpretations that have been handed down and one's own view, in order to reach the attribution of meaning; finally the skill to draw and think about the consequences for behavior on the basis of this attribution of meaning.

## *2.3. Acting with the wholeness of Creation in mind*

Learning religious education should provide actions with orientation. Based on the church's assignment it is the task of religious pastoral not only to encourage religious communication but also to encourage actions with the wholeness of Creation in mind, on the basis of an ecological orientation of this assignment. Thus I have made a strong connection between communication and conduct. Communication is thus deprived of its noncommittal character, as has already been mentioned earlier on in this section, because the content of this communication involves the appeal to actually act. Giving meaning on the basis of Christian interpretations of the concept creation means that the

Christian actually testifies to the hope that Creation means. Learning religious communication in terms of cognitive and affective development provides actions with orientation in the sense of healing actions. This means that education aims at an intense affective involvement. Involvement that implies that students are prepared to make the value orientations that constitute the content of catechesis orientation for their own actions. Following these reflections I reach the formulation of the general aim of environmental religious education: to teach students to participate in communication concerning the religious attribution of meaning to nature with cognitive and affective development in mind, in order to use this as orientation for their conduct with regard to nature. In other words: they acquire and strengthen their spiritual basis, formed by the religious attribution of meaning to nature, as orientation for the way they treat nature. A catechetical treatment had been designed on the basis of this general formulation of an aim. The following section discusses this.

### 3. The quasi experimental study

#### 3.1. The treatment

The above theological theory has been put into operation in an adult education program. The following concepts were used:

##### Anthropocentrism

###### *a1 portrayal of man:*

philosophical: man central, as distinct from the rest of nature

theological: man is the image of God

###### *a2 nature view:*

philosophical: derived from man, nature is owned by man, he rules over it

theological: monotheistic view of God as Creator. He is all powerful and absolute

transcendent

*a.3 actions:* rational instrumentalism (steward)

##### Ecocentrism

###### *b1 portrayal of man:*

philosophical: unity of all life, man does not hold a special position

theological: Creation as a manifestation of God

###### *b2 nature view:*

philosophical: intrinsic value of nature

theological: tritheistic view of God Creator who was permanently bound to his Creation from the beginning. He maintains it

*b3 actions:* respect (mandataris)

The cognitive aim of educational treatment is to encourage views concerning the connection of the belief in Creation and the way nature is treated. The affective aim is the increase of the affective openness for both theological ways of thinking (Bloom 1956). The aim to act lies in the perspective and concerns the strengthening of the

relation between faith and conduct.

The aim to act requires further explanation. The way people act is influenced by various factors. I mention three of these: a means-aim factor, a socio-normative factor, a philosophical factor. The means-aim factor and the socio-normative factor are taken from Ajzen and Fishbein's attitude-behavior model (Ajzen 1987; 1988; 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). The means-aim factor, called the cognitive factor, implies that behavior is motivated by the aim one wishes to achieve with that behavior, and the supposition of the expected effect that one will achieve with the behavior. The socio-normative factor is related to the behavior expected by the social environment and the importance one attaches to that social environment. The third factor, the philosophical, that is not included in Ajzen and Fishbein's model, is related to the values one applies related to the behavior that best befits these values. The affective object of educational treatment is aimed at strengthening of this relation. In theological terms this concerns the development of a spiritual foundation for actions, in this case ecological actions. This foundation is developed intrinsically by both the orientations on the view of creation that were explained in the first section of this contribution. The aim is not the strengthening of one of either orientations, anthropocentrism or ecocentrism, as a motivation for actions but the strengthening of the philosophical orientation that is the foundation of both these ways of thinking as such as a motivation for actions. In other words the aim is to strengthen the bond between religion as a source of inspiration and participation in religious activities. A bond that other authors already suspected existed on the basis of survey research; this research, however, only covered church involvement and social activism that actually occur together (Hermans 2001, 91). A study on an intrinsic connection has not yet taken place. The other aims of treatment are formulated in cognitive and affective development with regard to the concepts that have been elaborated. The curriculum developed for the treatment includes materials and work forms like the instrumentation of set aims.

Subsequently the question to be studied is: what is the effect of a catechetic curriculum on two philosophically based ecological ways of thinking in terms of the cognitive and affective development, and the development of the spiritual motivation to act? The treatment took place amongst hundred adults. The control group, that did not receive treatment, was made up of thirty adults. Participants were presented with an extensive preliminary measurement, in which background variables were measured, and a numeration with the affective and cognitive variables, and environmental behavior. Both groups included Roman Catholic and protestant adults who were involved in the church and had a secondary education, were from the social middle class and aged between twenty-five and seventy-five. The random sample is representative of those involved in the church in the Netherlands.

### *3.2. The results*

The effect for the cognitive aim is .23. That is to say that the number of good scores in the re-measurement has increased by 23%. This percentage was reached by correcting the number of good scores of the experimental group before the number of good scores of the control group. The affective measurement showed that the total relation to thought orientations has only increased by .07 on a scale of 1-5. When split into the separate orientations this means that there has been a decrease for anthropocentrism of .14 and an increase of .07 for ecocentrism. These changes are minimal, but can be attributed to the so-called 'ceiling effect'. There was a great amount of involvement at the beginning of the experiment. This clearly involved people who took part in the treatment as a result of their deep personal feelings for the environment. Therefore a big change could not be expected. The effect of the third aim was researched on the basis of Ajzen and Fishbein's model of 'reasoned behavior' mentioned earlier. This involves measuring the philosophical orientation as an aspect of attitude and via an aim-means factor. The change in the model is too great to be able to incorporate a third separate factor, for this reason the philosophical factor was incorporated in the assessment of an aim that can be reached with certain behavior. Thus the effect of the curriculum can be viewed especially in the strengthening of the

relation between attitude, intended behavior and conduct. Before the curriculum this relation was .48 and .30 respectively, afterwards a correlation of .73 and of .57 was measured. Quite an increase. In the preliminary measuring as well as the re-measuring this effect can be attributed to the attitude of ecocentrism in particular.

The result of the treatment in cognitive and affective terms is not particularly large, the effect is most obvious for the strengthening of the relation between philosophical views and conduct and this was the ultimate aim of the treatment. The treatment can therefore be considered as being successful in this respect.

#### **4. Discussion**

The aim of the quasi experiment was to investigate to what extent students can let themselves be guided in their actions with regard to the environment by their own religious spiritual background, and to what extent this can be influenced educationally. The experiment shows that religious education considerably strengthens the bond between the religious views and actual conduct of the students. Their behavior does not change, but they are more inspired in their conduct by their religious views, they become more aware of their own religious background. Their knowledge of the view on creation also increases considerably, even though this was already strongly present.

From the beginning the participants in the experiment were deeply involved in the problems of nature, although these were certainly not the most important problems for their existence. The way they treat nature is extremely conscious and friendly. Their religious views could be characterized as being ecocentric rather than anthropocentric. This does not change much as a result of the educational treatment, although there is an obvious shift in their views. The greatest effect can be seen in the increase in the connection between religious views and conduct. A second remark is related to the views themselves. It was supposed that both religious views could lead to environmentally friendly behavior. This supposition has not been proved. In the preliminary and re-measuring the anthropocentric way of thinking is barely connected to (nature friendly) conduct of the participants. In the re-measuring this connection further decreases. Participants are inspired in their environmentally friendly conduct in particular by an ecocentric view of creation.

This leads to a third remark. Christian theology as a reflection of people's faith is considered as anthropocentric, and sometimes as androcentric theology. A theology in which (the man) man is the centre and the highlight of creation. This supposition is in any case not confirmed in this study. The participants show a clear ecocentric, and thereby also feministic view of creation and the position of man in creation. This environmentally friendly view connected to environmentally friendly conduct, and this brings me to the fourth remark, provides no extra information for Lynn White's thesis, that puts the blame on the Christian view for laying the foundation for the ecological crisis that is threatening the existence of the world. This study shows that conduct that destroys the environment and the Christian faith are not inextricably bound, but that in the Christian view there are tendencies that reveal a different attitude with regard to nature and man's position in it. This study hereby confirms the conclusions that Ester and Seuren made earlier on the basis of empirical material, whereby the Lynn White thesis, put into operation as the relation between orthodox faith and environmentally friendly conduct, was falsified (Ester and Seuren 1992). The catechetical experiment proves that environmental problems form an important issue for this group of practicing religious and that they consider communication on this subject to be important. Not only are they prepared to communicate with others in the treatment about it, they are also prepared and able to take in new information and to connect this with their existing views. Catechesis contributes thus to the individual meanings people give to their existence and to the social relevance of these meanings because they make a closer connection between their social conduct and their faith. The observations already made by others are supported on this point in particular (Hermans 2001; Van Iersel and Spanjersberg 1993; Jeurissen 1993). However, further research is desirable, because the study only involved a reasonably small group. The

title of this contribution is: Can faith save the earth? This question has not come up as such in this contribution; also it cannot be directly researched and answered. However, the question has been approached indirectly. A strong bond between people's conduct with regard to their natural environment and their views on the foundation of their existence is indeed a contribution to the preservation of the earth. In other words: creation and environment belong together in people's faith and in the proclamation of the church to gather together. Only in this way can faith save the earth.

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