



Forthcoming 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference

*International Reformed Theological Institute*

## **Theology Facing Climate Change**

Hosted at Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta

June 23-26, 2022

Climate change is not only one of the most urgent themes on the political agenda but also increasingly a highly debated theme in theology. The awareness of environmental crisis asks for fundamental theological reflection on the human relationship with the earth. The impetus for theological reflection on ecology is that science and education are not enough to understand our situation and to inspire our action. The environmental crisis affects our way of life as a whole, including our deepest beliefs and convictions. Living in, what has been deemed, the Anthropocene, the human being is more than ever in the power of managing nature and more than ever responsible for its preservation. At the same time the ecological crisis is so all-encompassing that it seems to reach beyond what is manageable. The worldwide outbreak of Covid-19 makes us realize the increasingly visible connections between the wellbeing of humans, other living creatures, and entire ecosystems. Is it humanity's destruction of biodiversity that creates the conditions for new viruses and infectious diseases, such as SARS, MERS, Avian flu, Ebola, Zika, and the coronavirus disease? The far-reaching character of what is at stake makes climate change and ecological sustainability a deeply religious issue asking for adequate theological reflection.

### *Religion, nature, justice*

The impacts of climate change affect every country on every continent, but for the people living under poverty and oppression, the effects of climate change are worst. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events and prolonged drought force millions of people to lose or move away from their homes every year in search of food, water, shelter or jobs. All of these effects increase the risk of conflict, hunger and poverty. Eight of the ten countries most affected by extreme weather events — such as hurricanes and monsoon rains — between 1998 and 2017, were developing nations with low or lower-middle income. As the Human Rights Council's "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights" (2019) states: "Climate change threatens the future of human rights and risks undoing the last fifty years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction."

The adverse and disproportionate effects of the climate crisis urge theologians to address the question of environmental justice in search of the fullness of life for all, which the gospel proclaims. Increasingly, this question is a concern for theology as a whole, as the rise of

'green theology' and 'ecotheology' indicates, to develop forms of constructive theology that focus on the interrelationships of religion, nature, and justice in the light of environmental crisis. Complex relationships exist between religious and non-religious worldviews and the degradation and/or restoration of the more-than-human nature.

Understood in this way, theology has the double task of self-criticism of its own tradition and theological concepts, as well as constructive retrieval from tradition with the aim to develop new constructive understandings and proposals. This means that, on the one hand, it should be recognized that Christian anthropocentrism and the emphasis on human dominion over nature has played a part in environmental devastation. On the other hand, voices from Scripture and tradition may point to another account of the relationships between God, human being and the more-than-human nature. Today, responses from other parts of the world bring cultural, racial and gender diversity to the conversation on Christian theology and climate change.

#### *Reformed tradition as resource?*

For several reasons, this all is a challenging theme for the Reformed tradition and its theology in particular. The Reformed tradition has played a role in our current ecological situation, through emphases that include human stewardship and responsibility *coram Deo*, openness to scientific research made possible by a transcendent understanding of the divine, contribution to the technical-industrial development of the world, and openness to exploration and colonization of the earth and its people. On the other hand, its broad understanding of theology, not limiting it to the spiritual realm, includes a valuation of the natural as creation, as a good that God has tasked humanity to care for and protect. Its understanding of salvation and restoration as extending to the whole of creation and as already given in Christ for this life may open up a broad perspective of hope and responsibility.

Traditionally, theological reflection on nature started from the doctrine of creation. The focus has often been on human stewardship and responsibility. The question is whether this still suffices, since from this view nature can equally be taken as an end in itself or as just a tool for human use. Deeper theological reflection on divine transcendence and immanence is required, which concerns also the doctrines of the trinity, incarnation and pneumatology. The paradoxical situation that the human being is more than ever responsible for what is at stake on the planet and, at the same time, is faced with the unmanageability of environmental crisis could be illuminated from the perspective of sin, salvation, and restoration. In short, the urgent challenges of climate change and environmental crisis may be addressed promisingly from the broad variety of all the classical dogmatic *loci*.

#### *Classical loci as possible lenses*

Therefore, the 14<sup>th</sup> biennial IRTI conference will take the various loci as starting point for theological and (inter)contextual reflection on the urgent theme of climate change. This does not mean that contributions are limited to systematic theology and dogmatics. On the contrary, the various loci will be taken as thematic theological fields that are also at stake in practical theology, ethics, church history, missiology and biblical theology. Furthermore, the loci are not taken as pre-given fundamentals of faith, but rather as lenses through which or perspectives from which theological questions and contributions can be articulated. Finally, these questions, perspectives and contributions are always contextual, depending on the particular contexts and situations, socio-political conditions and positions.

### *Keynote Speakers*

Hilda P. Koster, PhD, Associate Professor of Theology, Environmental and Sustainability Studies, Concordia College, Moorhead MN, USA

Ernst Conradie, PhD, Senior Professor in the Department of Religion and Theology, University of the Western Cape, South-Africa

Sri Tantri Arundhati, PhD, Director of Climate Change Adaptation, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia

Emanuel Gerrit Singgih, PhD, Professor of Biblical Hermeneutics and Indonesian Contextual Theologies, Duta Wacana Christian University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Tamás Kodácsy, PhD, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Church and Society, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary

### *Call for Papers*

We invite theologians from all disciplines interested in the theme of 'Theology Facing Climate Change' to submit their proposals for a paper presentation at the 14<sup>th</sup> international IRTI Conference in Yogyakarta. You can send your abstract of no more than 250 words to the secretary Albert Nijboer: [a.s.nijboer@irti.nl](mailto:a.s.nijboer@irti.nl).

Deadline for submitting your proposal is **February 1, 2022**.

The IRTI Management Team

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