

**VITAL FORCE AS A TRIANGULATED CONCEPT OF NATURE
AND s(S)PIRIT**

by

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Signature: 

Kuzipa M. B. Nalwamba

DEDICATION

To the children God has given me:
Ntembe, Teza, Niza, Nkoli, Kowa, Munsaka, Wila,
Kuzipa, Mubotu, Anika, Joshua, Dewel, Sianga. Luyando and Takondwa.

I dedicate this work to you all
with a hope and prayer
that you will inherit a wholesome earth from us;
that in your time you tread God's earth gently,
relate to it lovingly, reverently and with gratitude
for the gift of God it is!

ABSTRACT

The study investigates the African notion of *be-ing*¹, termed ‘vital force’. The enchanted (spiritually imbued) African understanding of reality lends the concept to appropriation as a pneumatic appropriation. That vital force is fundamentally understood as the principle of (all of) life in African thought. The ensuing nuances of *be-ing* affirm the ontological interrelatedness and interdependence that underpin community of life. The understanding that all creatures are ontologically interrelated and interdependent in the web of life through a common denominator that is mediated by the vital force, sums up the basis of African ontological thought. Such a view potentially engenders positive attitudes towards nature.

The emphasis on life (vitality), its interconnectedness and interrelatedness are fundamental aspects of the African way of thinking. Relationality is therefore at the heart of African ontology. The concept of vital force, which signifies the Creator as giver and source of life (Tempels, 1959:31) could plausibly be theologically appropriated to represent the power of God, which pervades all of life. Thus postulated, vital force as a concept of nature and spirit, challenges Christianity’s anthropocentric view of creation, which is contributory to the ecological crisis (Sindima, 1990) the world faces today.

By way of theoretical triangulation, this study takes into account Welker’s notion of ‘force field’ and the cosmic Spirit in Christian tradition. Welker has theologically appropriated Faraday’s idea of a magnetic force field, which he presents metaphorically, construing ‘spirit as field, the presence of God in creation’. In the same way, Pannenberg speaks of ‘a field of God’s spiritual presence in his creation’ (Pannenberg, 1991:47, 49). Moltmann speaks of ‘the life-giving Spirit in the faith of the heart and in the sociality of love (which) leads itself beyond the limits of the church to the rediscovery of the same Spirit in nature, in plants, in animals, and in the ecosystems of the earth’ (Moltmann, 1992:9-10). According to Welker (1994:340), ‘[I]n the Spirit and through the Spirit, the creation is also present and effective in God’s life’, understood as a cosmic spirit that pervades all reality.

¹ Ramose’s choice to hyphenate the word is to indicate that it is a verb that signifies process and in that regard captures what he terms ‘The logic of *ubuntu* (which) is distinctly rheomode in character’. Rheomodic has the Greek root ‘rheo’ which means ‘to flow’ and so captures the mode of language Ramose intends *ubu-ntu* (be-ing) to signify in that regard.

Ruach is the biblical Hebrew term for s(S)pirit. Its translations into Greek and Latin as *pneuma* and *spiritus*, respectively, set the stage for the subsequent Cartesian dualistic distinction between spirit and matter, a dualism that has endured and shaped an entire generation. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology) offers resources for a theological response to the ecocrisis the world faces. This study attempts an appropriation of the African concept of vital force to articulate an ecological pneumatology viewed through the prism of African cultural wisdom and thought that transcends a dualistic understanding of reality. Filtered through that prism, the notion of vital force, arguably, reinforces the biblical/theological understanding of the cosmic Spirit of God that is advanced as the foundation for the argument for the eco-pneumatology proposed by this study.

This concept is presented within the methodological approach of triangulation employing the strategy of convergent validity consisting of, (1) the African concept of vital force; (2) the Christian understanding of cosmic Spirit who indwells all of life and (3) the appropriated scientific notion of force field. The study attempts to make a contribution, from the standpoint of African vitalism, to ongoing discourse on Christian responses to the ecological crisis in order to understand reality.

The development of a well-rounded eco-pneumatological basis for appropriating the resources from pneumatological frameworks remains an area that requires further exploration. What this study has attempted is to put forward a tentative model without particular contours of interdisciplinary explorations that the postmodern world has made available. The dynamic interaction of the methodology applied echoes the dynamic interaction within nature itself, which affirms the transversal nature of interpretations of reality, and which need to be brought into a mutually accountable interaction without totalising views yet one that transcends foundationalist views of understanding reality.

In that regard, this study acknowledges that theological reflection happens within particularities of one's embeddedness in a particular cultural context. For me, this study therefore is an attempt to understand reality as a responsible participant in the collective human search for truth, from my specific location as an African Christian, living in an era when the ecological crisis is one of the greatest threats we face. In the course of the study, it will be proposed that our collective experiences and experiential understanding shape our epistemic values and ethics and the ways we think about God and God's action in the world.

Moreover, through critical exploration of the experiential and interpretative roots of African traditional thought, science and the Christian faith converge in a pneumatological paradigm that does not betray the biblical tradition.

Theology is a scientific discipline that indeed contributes to our understanding of reality in a critically accountable way. The cross-contextual conversation that ensues, rather than closing the argument, opens up exciting avenues for further study. The static notions of understanding are transcended and give way for an incrementally flourishing of intersections of knowledge and the possibility of an emergence of ‘distinct family resemblances; the interweaving of fibres’ (Van Huyssteen, 2003:430) that views ‘otherness’ in creation as gift rather than threat or instrumental object. The multiplicity of voices that this disposition makes possible strengthens the public voice of the Christian faith. It is for this reason that dialogue with other disciplines is important.

Contemplating creation from a pneumatological perspective gives nuances to natural theology that calls Christian theology to participate in the worldwide ecological debate and epistemic isolation that denying natural theology imposed on it. The truths we read *in* and learn *from* nature reveal the potentialities that the Spirit makes possible because the Creator is present in Creation in an intricate web of relationships in the community of life. Resituated within that realm of the Spirit, a multiplicity of voices and perspectives become part of the ongoing conversation. It is within that pluralistic open space of the ongoing conversation that this study locates the claim that the African notion of vital force is a viable concept of nature and s(S)pirit.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATR/ATRs	African Traditional Religions
CWM	Council for World Mission
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
LZNP	Lower Zambezi National Park
LZTA	Lower Zambezi Tourist Association
MEP	Mars Exploration Project
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
UCZ	United Church of Zambia
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
ZEMA	Zambia Environmental Management

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CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE STAGE

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The subject of this study brings together three interlocking issues. Firstly, it seeks to appropriate the African notion of vital force as a relational, non-reductionist ecological concept that would enrich the Christian doctrine of eco-pneuma-theology. Secondly, it proceeds in tandem with the first assertion based on the understanding relational and pneuma-theological categories are viable within the theology-science dialogue as the broader framework within which this study is conceived. Thirdly, the relationship between natural theology and revelation that factors in the ensuing discourse provides an epistemological standpoint that does not divorce Spirit and reality.

Vital force is therefore presented from an eco-hermeneutical perspective as a viable concept of nature and s(S)pirit that opens up for a triologue of African traditional thought, Christian tradition and the scientific category of force-fields. Such a conversation provides for a mutually accountable approach to reality, that tempers tendencies that absolutise transcendent revelation on the one hand and innate reality on the other. The study is, therefore, a conceptual exploration of the notion of vital force as a non-reductionist idea of nature and s(S)pirit that takes seriously and draws African cultural and intellectual resources into discussion with other ways of knowing.

The emphasis on life (vitality) and its interrelatedness are fundamental aspects of the African worldview. Hence, the study attempts a retrieval of the notion of vital force within the purview of African culture and thought. The African notion of *be-ing* as vital force is undergirded by a conception of an enchanted universe. Such an understanding of the universe has the potential to engender positive attitudes towards nature. Balcomb (2009:77) captures the essence of the idea of an enchanted universe in the following explanation:

Disenchantment was an expression coined by Max Weber to describe a process whereby the world was rid of all spiritual reality and subjected to the power of the calculating and rational human mind. An enchanted universe was one in which space was *presenced* with spiritual agency, where things were subjects, not objects, and in which an epistemology of engagement, not disengagement, operated. Disenchantment involved, amongst other things, the emptying of space, the objectification of being, and the linearizing of time. Christian theology from the

seventeenth century became associated with a disenchanted, modernizing agenda through early Christian scientists such as Bacon, Newton, and Descartes.

His subsequent words contextualise this study aptly when he asserts the retrieval of theological resources that re-enchant the universe and the tendency in current research to go beyond the Western theological tradition into which Christianity was co-opted. Balcomb (2009:77) observes that:

While modernity has brought unprecedented levels of supremacy over nature, the association of Christian theology with the modern agenda of disenchantment has been questioned in the postmodern context. Theologies of place and space are now being sought that take seriously an agenda that places God and spirituality back in the world and not beyond the world, that emphasizes an organic and not a mechanistic universe, and that resuscitates the notion of agency in the world.

The African concept of vital force is not a postmodern construct; rather it is a pre-modern construct. Nevertheless, the point about the limitations of a disenchanted universe is clear in Balcomb's assertion. For the purposes of this study vital force is therefore understood as a non-reductionist notion, a concept of nature-s(S)pirit, conceived of in terms of a 'continuity and omnipresence of the life force' (Jones, 2010:156) within African vitalism. It is understood as a relational ontology, held in contrast to the linear and dialectical schemes that have historically been assimilated into Western Christian theology (Jones, 2010).

The idea of a life-force is not unique to African thought. Vitalism is based on the notion that living organisms are essentially unlike non-living things because they have some non-physical characteristic or are governed by different codes from non-living things (Bechtel & Robert, 1998). Many other cultures that regard the universe as an enchanted realm rather than a mechanistic one also have such ideas that are akin to the idea of vital force. The Chinese notion of *chi*, the Egyptian concept of *maat*, the Japanese notion of *ki* and the Hindu idea of *prana* are some examples among others (Kim, 2007; Leeming, 2005; Thele, 2005).

Vital force derives from the African tradition in which God, ancestral spirits, and human beings, plants, including non-animate things like minerals, are understood as proceeding from a life force or vital energy (Tempels, 1959:31). Whether the vital force is understood ontologically, metaphorically or as reality begs the epistemological question of how Christian

revelation is brought to bear upon such a conception. How is the Creator related to the creation? Does God speak through (or in) nature too? Is there a place for natural theology in Christian theology? Chapter 3 picks up this discussion within the broader context of the whole study and further delimits the specific usage of vital force in this study.

The degree to which Christianity is responsible for the ecocrisis has remained a matter of debate. The debate, sparked by Lynn White's 1967 article in the journal *Science*, is discussed in the literature review below, and in chapter two, under the subheading, 'The Ecological Crisis'. Some theologians are of the view that Christianity's instrumentality to ecological destruction is overstated. Nevertheless, Christianity's collusion by giving theological and/or religious sanction to the exploitation of creation for human benefit because of its anthropocentrism, is well rehearsed. Christianity has thus been reckoned as contributing to the ecological crisis for its anthropocentric view at the expense of the rest of creation (Sindima, 1990).

1.2 HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of this study is that the concept of vital force has theological and ecological significance. In that regard, vital force is postulated to serve as a vehicle for the articulation of an eco-pneuma-theological model undergirded by the biblical/theological insight that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of creation (Job 12:10; Psalm 104:30), understood as the Cosmic Spirit who indwells everything.

The exploration of vital force in this study proceeds within theoretical triangulation. Vital force as a concept of nature and S(spirit) is thus explored in a *trialectic*, examined with reference to the Cosmic Spirit within Christian tradition and Welker's idea of 'force fields' that has been theologically appropriated from Michael Faraday's electromagnetic fields. Within that frame, vital force is presented as a metaphor of the Cosmic Spirit premised on the understanding that God's life pervades all reality.

Metaphorically, therefore, we may speak of vital force as God's s(S)pirit. In African conception, as in Christian tradition, as well as in the scientifically-derived 'force fields', there is an understood relational dynamic nexus within nature which the study recognises as continuities (while recognising inherent discontinuities) in scientific, biblical and African tradition that hold potential for aspects of learning about the Spirit. The interdisciplinary

range, within which this study is conceived, is a source of deeper insights about s(S)pirit, which need not be relegated to any particular sphere of knowledge. The integrity of each sphere, however, must be preserved and clearly nuanced in an interdisciplinary dialogue.

The exploration presupposes S(s)pirit to be that which pervades all reality, the very principle of life and the basis for the (inter)relationship and interdependent existence of all things – communion. Interdependency and interrelationship within creation is the communion of all creation, construed here to take place in the realm of the vital force for she² is the nexus of life. She at once brings life into being, animates it and enables communion within its interwoven, interdependent web.

1.3 *RUACH* OVER THE PRIMEVAL WATERS

‘Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters’ (Genesis 1:2). The word translated as Spirit derives from the Hebrew word *ruach*, which denotes wind or breath. Schloss (2012:27) amplifies it to signify ‘the dynamically creative and life-giving energy of spirit (that) is associated with the purposeful ordering of word and wisdom’. According to recent studies in Syrian, Punic, Akkadian, Samaritan, Ugaritic and Hebrew, in fact, the verbal root of *ruach* is *rwh*, which denotes the atmospheric expanse between heaven and earth that can be calm or turbulent. By derivation, therefore, *ruach* denotes the ‘unfolding and spreading’ that Boff calls the *pneumatosphere*, an inclusive domain (1997:159).

God’s *ruach* in Genesis 1:2, described as moving over the formless waters, is subsequently (in the rest of Genesis 1 extending to chapter 2) ordered and blessed into being by God’s word. Other parts of the Bible go on to affirm creation by the one God through word and wisdom. In Psalm 33:6 we read: ‘By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry

² Vital force is accorded a gender designation in order to circumvent the *neutrum* and any possible animistic associations. The use of a personal metaphor is consistent with the Judeo-Christian tradition, which imagines a God-world relationship understood within an organic, unified relatedness. Yet it does not limit God to that realm. Instead, it opens up avenues that illumine some aspects of the fathomless and complex mystery of God as active, saving *presence* among us. Chokma (Wisdom) in the Scriptures is a female too (cf. Proverbs 8). The female gender is also borrowed from feminist theology’s imagination that depicts a relational God whose relationship to the world is understood through feminine metaphors. Feminist imagination prefers a ‘nonhierarchical vision of fulfilment for all creation’ which ‘conceives of the world as God’s body to which God is related as mother, lover and friend of the last and least in all creation’ (McFague, 1987:78). It has been eloquently argued that women’s self-understanding accentuates relationality because of their historical experience of being sidelined. Additionally, the very quest of feminist theology for women to be accepted in the Christian community as a community of equals echoes the sidelining of the flourishing of the rest of creation.

host by the breath (*ruach*) of his mouth; in John 1:3 is the affirmation about the Word that ‘All things were created through Him’; in Proverbs 8 creation is attributed to wisdom. From a Trinitarian perspective, what is attributed to the Word is attributable to the Spirit too. So we may speak of all things (living and non-living things) having originated from spirit. All creation, therefore, inhabits *ruach* from God and is invited into the community of life that gives praise to God (Ps. 150:6). God brings life into being, nurtures it and provides for the flourishing of each kind.

According to the biblical account, therefore, creation is understood as issuing from God’s breath and God’s Word. God communicates to the world as it were through breath and word. Marshall (2008:42) aptly describes *ruach* ‘primarily (as) a word naming God’s presence and power as Spirit, (which) also conveys insight into human and natural entities’. In other words, God’s Spirit, understood in the Hebrew Scriptures’ sense, is a cosmic spirit that pervades all reality. It translates into Greek and Latin as *pneuma* and *spiritus*, which allows for a dualistic distinction between spirit and matter not present in its Hebrew rendering. Moltmann (1992:42) defines it as the creative power of God which

is communicated to the beings he (*sic*) has created in such a way that in talking about *ruach* we are talking about the energy of their life too. It is not wrong to talk about the Spirit as the ‘drive’ and ‘instinct’ awakened by God.

Departing from such pneumatic understandings of creation, conservative Christianity has historically placed emphasis on the origins of creation based on the Genesis 1 creation account as the epilogue of the biblical (hi)story, and the issue has historically been debated endlessly. Creation by the one God has thus been a contested field, particularly when it comes to discerning what intersections there are between scientific understanding and Christian theology. The safer option for those who would rather not dialogue with science has been to isolate Christian theological positions about creation from any such dialogue by taking a credo approach to the creation account.

Karl Barth is an example of such thinking about creation. His approach was to insulate epistemologically the Christian understanding of creation by framing it within an exclusive Christological frame, thereby removing it from any possible associations with cosmological and contingency theories derived from science. Presented as redemptive narrative, in

Barthian reckoning, Christian reckoning about the [hi]story of creation may then avoid being co-opted by natural sciences and philosophy. In Karl Barth's own words:

The doctrine of creation, no less than the whole remaining content of Christian confession, is an article of faith, i.e. the rendering of a knowledge which no man has procured for himself or ever will; which is neither native to him nor accessible to him by way of observation and logical thinking; for which he has no organ and no ability; which he can in fact achieve only in faith but which is actually consummated in faith, i.e. in the reception and response to the divine witness.

(CD III/I: 3)

Moreover, in making the epistemological point he avers that:

The unity of God with man effected in Jesus Christ, the first truth we learn is the simple one that God is not alone. He does not live His divine life in His own space. There is a world-space in which He is the Lord of a being distinct from himself, i.e. of man (sic), this giving proof of its reality.

(CD III/I: 25)

It follows then that Barth would arrive at an eschatological grounding of creation in Christology as evidenced by the words of his article on Christ:

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son our Lord, in order to perceive and to understand that God the Almighty, the Father, is the Creator of heaven and earth. If I do not believe the former, I could not understand the latter.

(CD III/I: 29)

Weber observes that Barth's strategy is an attempt to maximise on the connection of the doctrine of creation with other Christian doctrines from which it may not be extricated easily. Barth, according to Weber, does this 'ensuring that (the doctrine of creation) is not left isolated, an erratic block of dogmatic material ripe for annexation by natural science or philosophy' (Weber, 2000:98). Without confuting Barth's position entirely, I elect to depart from his approach. It seems to me that the issue can best be addressed as a systematic, rather than a confessional or a creedal one. Thus, this study focuses on the third person of the Trinity as a pneuma-theological and Trinitarian consideration, based on the Cappadocian concept of *perichoresis*.

In Genesis 1:2, God's *ruach* is given to all creatures – including human beings – as the power of life (Yong, 2002). Therefore, because God spoke all of creation into being, everything in it

is, ‘en-spirited by God’, as McDaniel (1990) rhetorically responds in an article titled, “‘Where is the Holy Spirit anyway?’ Response to a sceptic environmentalist’. Such a view of God (the divine) in nature is solid theological grounding for the sacramentality and kinship of all of creation, related within the *perichoretic* Trinitarian relationship.

Perichoresis is a relationship predisposed towards life, extensiveness and parity. When the relationship of *perichoresis* is conveyed externally, Trinitarian values are seen to be dispensed upon the whole of creation and become the basis for according intrinsic value to all creation. Sacramentality affirms, from that perspective, therefore, that ‘creation is suffused with life, love, inclusiveness and equality’ (Cho, 2004:168) as an extension of the being en-spirited by God’s divine *ruach*.

The Genesis account’s allusion to the interaction and synergy between the divine Creator to the extent that creation itself has agency (explored further under 4.3) and even takes initiative in the act of creation (Welker, 1999), ensues from that *perichoretic* relationship. The Genesis account of creation depicts a more participatory creation process that includes reproduction but is not restricted to it. Welker’s view is that, in contrast, a hierarchical relationship ‘establishes forms of domination that must seek to suppress and to erode alternatives to itself.’ But

[b]y contrast the Spirit of God places people in the community of conscious solidarity, the community of responsibility and love ... who can live with a clear consciousness of perishability to their relative world and reality because they know they are ordained to participate in the divine glory and its extension.

(Welker, 1994:280)

Trinitarian process thinkers and theologians contend that ‘being’ – in a fixed sense – can no longer be our premise in understanding creation. Dingemans (2003:3) avers that ‘becoming’, ‘happening’ and ‘movement’ are the key words in a reality that ‘consists in events, growth and energy’. Hence, God as creator may no longer be understood

as Absolute, Immobile Being or the Ground of Being, but rather as Mighty Movement, Inspiring Power, Energy that suffuses our world. Or, in biblical terms: about God the Spirit which, at the time of creation, moved over the face of the waters and, in the course of history, attached itself to humans in a special way yet never merging with them altogether. Because of this process, theologians speak about panentheism ... God’s presence in our world

(understood) as immanent transcendence: ... present among us as an indwelling, inspiring Spirit, but without identifying with our words and deeds. He surpasses and transcends our world. He is present but, at the same time, holy!

(Dingemans, 2003:3)

I pick up some of the threads of this argument in subsequent sections and more substantively in chapter 4, which focuses on pneuma-theology. This section merely moots the subject as a vital strand of the study.

1.4 TESTIMONY/HERMENEUTICAL VIEWPOINT

I am an African (Zambian) woman, university educated, socially (but not economically) middle class, of Reformed/Evangelical Christian upbringing and one whose propaedeutic theological education was acquired in Asia (Singapore). All of these factors shape my perception of reality. I have the challenge of living within those different social locations at once, as well as being a part of different interpretive communities and all the fragmentation and contested identities that this entails.

Additionally, according to hermeneutic philosophy, such broader categories as the historical epoch (the historical turn), the particular pre-understanding (the hermeneutic turn), language (the linguistic turn) and social influence (the cultural turn), and of course, the Scriptures, constitute ways in which we access God's revelation. These all point to the 'natural' ways in which revelation is mediated. As such, no one can claim to have access to the 'pure' revelation from God. Revelation is necessarily *naturally* mediated manifestation. In Moltmann's words, this is the 'active presupposition' that is true of all Christian theology (Moltmann, 2000:68). By that he affirms that 'all theology is natural theology' (Conradie, 2011:58) because of the inevitability of a hermeneutic.

The motivation for attempting this subject at a personal level is grounded in my own existential experience. I was raised in a rural area of Zambia at a time when much of the natural environment bore very little, if any, human footprint. Throughout my years at primary and secondary school, I belonged to the *Chongololo Club*³, a national programme for nature

³ Chongololo is the name of the millipede in at least three Zambian languages. Millipedes were (are they still?) very commonplace during rainy seasons in Zambia and they tended to be trampled without regard for their role in the ecosystem. The name Chongololo club was perhaps intentional in that regard. It made us children stop and really look at the millipede and appreciate its beauty and role in the rhythm of life around it.

conservation tailored for children. I learnt from the club, among other things, that most animals were not out to attack humans but that they often only became aggressive when threatened or provoked. That fact alone imprinted on my young mind the awareness that animals and other living things, organic and inorganic, deserve their own ‘space’.

At a more conscious level, and in later life, my earth-care ‘credentials’ have been enhanced largely due to the ever-present (and ever-increasing) evidence of environmental degradation in my environs. In 2012, I returned to Mbala, a small town in northern Zambia from where my parents originate. I had last been there last in 1982. I remembered it as a scenic pristine little town, perched among undulating lush green hills with many crystal-clear streams and rivers cascading down the hills. Those rivers and streams are now either choked with plastic and other kinds of garbage, or are dried up and mud-choked because of deforestation and overgrazing.

Between 2010 and 2013, I lived in Kitwe, hub of the Copperbelt province, which is the mineral extraction and refining region of Zambia. As such I have personally witnessed and experienced the effects of air and water pollution resulting from mining activities (see Appendices I, II and III). Chibuye’s 2015 PhD thesis offers an eco-theological assessment of the Copperbelt province. His thesis is to rediscover human responsibility with regard to creation, both from the point of view of humans degrading the environment and the role that humans need to play in building an environmental ethic. The goal of his study is to mitigate degradation from the point of view of scripture and church practice.

The topic of this study is, therefore, close to the heart of that powerfully existential position. At an experiential level, it has become evident that human attitudes and actions regarding creation can and do result in environmental degradation. It is the case that we humans give ourselves more ‘space’ at the expense of other living things, to the detriment of all, since earth is our shared home in which we co-exist with the rest of the community of creatures.

The values of nature conservation that I learnt in my formative years and my recent experiences in adulthood are catalytic to my pursuit of the subject of this study. They continue to inform my hermeneutic and shape my environmental ethic. Be that as it may, I do not undertake this study as an activist who seeks to advocate a particular ‘approach’ but as a learner and a Christian in pursuit of a theologically grounded understanding of ecological

issues and environmental responsibility. My intent is not to formulate a matter-of-fact, pragmatic quick-fix approach to human intentions and actions towards nature. I rather seek to propose a theologically plausible alternative that contributes to the quest to set human attitudes towards creation on a new trajectory, shaped by ongoing theological discourse, of which this study is only a part. I am of the opinion that thinking differently will lead to acting differently too.

Ethics is consequently applied dogmatics (read: systematic theology). Buitendag (2004:402) expresses the same point when he argues that ‘morality is intrinsically connected to reality.’ In his article in *Verbum et Ecclesia* titled ‘Anders dink anders doen: Op soek na ‘n eko-teologiese perspektief op cloning’ he puts across the view that there is a need to take creation as a whole seriously. He concludes that it is not possible to clone a human being for the precise reason of the human’s connectedness with the environment. Consequently, human beings cannot be understood in isolation from their organic and cultural environments, which are an integral part of human identity which itself cannot be replicated. In that view, even an embryo fertilised in a test tube is not merely a biological blob growing without interaction with its environment.

The facts of the environmental degradation that confront us daily are real and in many cases call for urgent action. A Christian response ought to be theologically grounded and both life-centred and God-centred (Ayre, 2013:4). The retrieval and appropriation of the concept of vital force is presented in this study for such a theological exploration.

The emphatic verdict that human attitudes towards the rest of creation lie at the centre of the ecocrisis, is clearly unanimous. Human attitudes towards the rest of creation are believed to be generally shaped by what we believe about creation and our place within it in relation to the rest of created order. Christian anthropology has been shaped largely by a dualistic, hierarchical view of creation, with human beings regarded as the epitome of creation. That dualistic, hierarchical mind-set is deemed to have given rise to the anthropocentric human self-understanding domination by humans of the rest of creation. By exploring the theological potential of vital force as a non-reductive concept, this study seeks to contribute to the reformation of Christian tradition in view of such ecological critique.

In recent times, insights have emerged from different disciplines and indigenous wisdom to provide fresh perspectives on our understanding of the place of human beings within the earth community. They counter traditional dualistic, hierarchical and mechanistic conceptions of creation that have historically shaped Christian views of creation and conditioned biblical interpretation.

Such insights point us to a renewed theological grounding for an earth-keeping ethos that could be based on the notion of human solidarity⁴ with the whole earth. It allows all of creation to flourish rather than a domination principle that looks to human interests alone and sees the rest of creation as existing solely for the benefit or service of humanity.

1.5 RESEARCH PROBLEM/QUESTIONS

1.5.1 Problem statement

The present-day ecological crisis prompts this exploration of the African concept of vital force as a relational, anti-reductionist concept. Vital force, which reinforces the understanding of creation in relational terms, provides ground for its appropriation as an adequate pneuma-theological resource with potential to inform and contribute to global ecological discourse from the standpoint of the Bantu⁵ (African) holistic view of life.

⁴ Solidarity is used here in a decisional sense. If human actions are at the heart of the ecological crisis the world faces today, it follows that intentional human activity in the reverse is required to halt and/or at least temper the destructive ecological trends. Solidarity is also understood here in the sense of human beings existing in a continuum with the rest of creation (this view risks testing the elasticity of the concept of solidarity to its limits!).

⁵ The term Bantu is laden with connotations accrued during the segregation policies of apartheid in the South African context. The term as it is employed in this study, denotes a group of African peoples that have been classified for the common root, *ntu*, in their languages from which the term Bantu derives. *Bantu* as a classification, for the purpose of the discussion in this study, is less problematic than *African*. Africa itself is a contested colonial construct with multivalent referents and is laden with its own connotative baggage. Ali Mazrui outlines five phases of the history of the conceptualisation of Africa as follows: 'The first phase regarded North Africa as an extension of Europe, while the rest of Africa was regarded as an empire of barbarism and darkness... The second phase of the historic conceptualization of Africa concerned the interaction with the Semitic peoples and with classical Greece and Rome... The third phase of the historic conceptualization of Africa involved the birth of Islam on the Arabian Peninsula and its expansion on the African continent... This third phase of the historical conceptualization of Africa initiated the continentilisation of Africa--an expansion that was later consolidated by the impact of Europe... The fourth historic phase of the conceptualization of Africa is the recognition that Africa is a product of a dialogue of three civilizations--Africanity, Islam, and the impact of the West... The fifth phase of the historic conceptualization of Africa is the realization that the continent is the ancestry of the human species. Africa thus becomes the Garden of Eden and a major stream in world civilization. A transition occurs from Africa's triple heritage to the paradigm of Afrocentricity--and from the Dark Continent to the Garden of Eden. This final paradigm globalizes Africa itself' (Mazrui, 2005:70-71). For that reason when Africa/African is used it denotes Bantu transcending such historical geographical and/or political referents.

1.5.2 Research questions

In order to undertake the inquiry into the stated research problem and subsequently to construct the proposed eco-pneumatological model, I will consider the following questions in the course of the study:

- 1.5.2.1 Background to the study: (a) rationale and basis for the study; (b) personal hermeneutical viewpoint;
- 1.5.2.2 Extent of the ecological crisis the world faces today: (a) What impetus does its assessment give to this research? What uniquely Christian resources are potentially available to address the destruction caused by the ecological crisis?
- 1.5.2.3 What epistemological and methodological insights support the understanding of the relationship between nature and revelation?
- 1.5.2.4 Foundations of the African concept of vital force: (a) What is the origin and basis of vital force? (b) How is it exploited in this study to construct an eco-pneumatology? (c) What is its analogical relationship to the biblical/theological notion of the cosmic breadth of the Spirit who sustains and indwells all of life, if any?
- 1.5.2.5 The understanding of Spirit: (a) Is the Spirit to be understood only in Christological terms and therefore mostly applicable to soteriology? (b) What are the implications of understanding the Spirit as the Creator Spirit by means of *perichoresis* and thus intra-connectedness with the Father and Son within a Trinitarian? How specifically does that speak to the *filioque* issue of *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*?
- 1.5.2.6 Welker's appropriation of Faraday's force field (with reference to Pannenberg and Moltmann): (a) Is it analogous, metaphorical or real? (b) What are its implications for revelation? (c) Does God speak through nature too? (d) What is the place of natural theology?
- 1.5.2.7 Triangulation: (a) What aspects of the force field and the understanding of Creator Spirit by means of *perichoresis* converge with, and provide validation for, the notion of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit for an eco-pneumatology? (b) Is it epistemologically adequate within the broader framework of revelation and pneumatology?
- 1.5.2.8 Is vital force an adequate concept of nature and Spirit? What conclusions and recommendations for further research emerge from this study?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1.6.1 Provide background, justification for the significance and context of this research;

- 1.6.2 Critically analyse the ecological crisis, taking into account anthropocentrism in Christian tradition, ecological resources imbedded in the biblical/theological (e.g. Accra Confession) tradition and the ensuing ethics of responsibility;
- 1.6.2.1 Attempt to re-mark the boundaries of knowledge enough to point to the (inter)relationship in creation while not claiming to definitively characterise each; Juxtaposition of the three perspectives using the methodological strategy of triangulation that acknowledges the space between them while acknowledging their interrelationship and mutual accountability in the quest to apprehend nature;
- 1.6.3 Probe the conceptual framework of vital force in African cultural and philosophical thought and assess the adequacy of the concept as a concept of nature and spirit that could inform an eco-pneumatology, accounting for it within the broader frame of inquiry of the relationship between theology and science;
- 1.6.4 Attempt to articulate a pneumatology based on the understanding of the Creator Spirit by means of the *perichoretic* intra-connectedness within the Trinity and how that speaks to the *filioque* issue of *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, and bring the ensuing critique into dialogue with the notion of vital force;
- 1.6.5 Examine Welker's appropriation (with reference to Pannenberg and Moltmann) of Faraday's notion of the magnetic field force and bring it into dialogue with the concept of vital force;
- 1.6.6 Triangulate the notion of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit; describe the scientifically derived force field and the Christian understanding of Creator Spirit by means of *perichoresis*; and propose vital force as an adequate eco-pneumatological concept; conclude and offer recommendations.

1.7 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is relevant, firstly, because it underscores the importance and centrality of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by offering a theologically adequate response to the ecological crisis.

Secondly, by arguing for the appropriation of the African notion of vital force within an eco-pneumatology, this study explores a largely neglected subject area in African theology. Pneumatology in much of African Christian theology is confined to what Rosato terms 'a fundamentally domestic rather than cosmic role' (Rosato, 1981:160). The Spirit is understood to be at work mainly in instrumental functions such as church existence, healing, prosperity

and personal salvation. That is, the understanding of the Spirit as power mainly has a soteriological emphasis (Ngong, 2010) often overemphasised to the exclusion of cosmic relevance. This perhaps is the result of the insertion of the *filioque* principle.

Thirdly, this study is relevant because it runs against the cult of difference that presents some Africa-related themes as stemming from too primitive a way of thinking (or too ‘esoteric’) to engage rigorously with other discourses. By taking into account the African philosophical and cultural infrastructure from which vital force derives, this study contributes to Christian discourse on that basis, in response to the ecological crisis. The dialogical method employed here which brings, firstly, an African concept of nature and spirit, secondly, pneumatology and thirdly, Welker’s theological appropriation of the scientifically derived concept of force field, signifies critical engagement of one with the other and casts the discourse against the broader backdrop of the theology-science dialogue.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The pneumatological entry point to the exploration of vital force as a concept of nature and Spirit opens up a participatory and relational epistemology, which transcends dualistic and binary ways of perceiving reality. The participatory epistemology goes beyond the subject and object mode of knowing by providing for relational and pneumatological categories. This study brings together Christianity, science and African thought, into a participatory dialogue that does not seek to conflate or enmesh them.

The science and religion dialogue has opened up exciting new avenues for approaching the revelation-nature relationship that explore the relationship between understanding and relationship and perception and cognition. It takes seriously the mutual impact between observer and observed, as well as the ability of human beings to discern between revelation and the mundane experiences of the natural world.

The exploration of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit and its application to the proposed eco-pneumatological model is undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm. The study proceeds from the standpoint of the ‘ontological integrity of creation’ (Buitendag, 2005:768). The perception of reality as multi-layered rather than a dualism (Murphy & Ellis, 1996:86) is presented as a milieu for the apprehension of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit. The ‘and’ between nature and spirit seems to betray a binary conception of the two. On the contrary, that word in this instance serves only as a conjunction and is used in the

same way in the title. It is not intended to portray a sequential interpretation of nature and spirit, but rather a simultaneous one. Nature is understood as organic, material and spiritual, all at once.

Nature (organic, material and spiritual) is applied to the concept of vital force as it pertains to the understanding of it as the artefact of the African conception of reality, which proceeds from a prior ontology. In this study, that prior ontology is understood as manifested in a *perichoretic* (relational) foundation as a prerequisite for an understanding of reality. As a methodological strategy, triangulation is applied. It brings into dialogue a tria, as follows: (i) a vital force as grounding for relationality within African culture and thought; (ii) a Trinitarian *perichoretic* relationship, a derivative of the Christian biblical/theological tradition, dealing with the Spirit as proceeding from the Father (and from the Son too); and, (iii) a force field, a derivative of scientific theory that echoes the acknowledgement of relational categories. I propose to triangulate these three strands as a way of validating the claim that vital force is a viable concept of nature and spirit.

Relationality is at the heart of African ontology. Vital force, therefore, could plausibly be advanced as a concept that underlines the understanding of God as the giver and source of all of life (Tempels, 1959:31). It follows then that theologically, vital force could be conceived as representative of the power of God that is present in all of creation, and which pervades all of life. Metaphorically then, vital force could be construed as the Spirit of God; the principle of life and the one who enables communion within creation and with God. That (inter)connection provides the basis for affirming the relevance of vital force as that which enables life in its interdependent, interrelated (co)existence.

Triangulation is also employed in this study to lend some complexity, richness and breadth to the inquiry about a pneumatological application of the notion of vital force. In that regard, the study references Welker's theological appropriation of Faraday's magnetic force field into the notion of 'force field' with reference to Pannenberg and Moltmann as Welker's predecessors. All three propose an understanding of 'spirit as field, the presence of God in creation ... (and as) a field of God's spiritual presence in his creation' (Pannenberg, 1991:47, 49). Their proposition to understand life as communal and interrelated (Moltmann, 1990:2-3; Pannenberg, 1991:39; Welker, 1994:282; 1999:viii) is based on the appropriation of Faraday's electromagnetic force field.

Welker (as well as Pannenberg and Moltmann) also critiques conventional guiding notions of creation which are hierarchical and which uphold the mandate of human dominion over the rest of creation. The study also attempts a retrieval of biblical and theological sources that are relevant to an eco-pneumatology and offer both convergence and critique to the thesis. Given that this is a study in Christian theology, albeit informed by African ecological thought, it follows that Christianity is granted epistemological preference and provides orientation for the study.

The overarching methodological strategy of this study is triangulation as alluded to above. Triangulation as an approach investigates a research question by employing various approaches within a strategy of convergent validity. In trigonometry and geometry based on the Pythagoras theorem, triangulation is used to determine the location of a third convergent point by measuring angles to it from two known points that are located on a fixed baseline. The internalised observation that is inherent within triangulation entails that that which is interpreted (*interpretandum*) and the interpreter (*intepretans*) are intricately bound together. By extension, we may infer that the presence of God is in the same way bound up with creation in that immanence and transcendence are entailed in each other.

In Faraday's field theory, in electromagnetic radiation, the reality is not in the elements or the atoms, but in the force fields that exude energy that brings about their interaction and organises them into an interrelated field. In the African concept of vital force, the energy of life that animates and imbues all of life, reality is conceived of as being inherently interrelated. In the biblical notion of *ruach* the cosmic Spirit, the power of life is given to all of creation and that makes it flourish and ultimately connects everything to God and to every other being. Triangulation provides the language for the mutually accountable dialogue among the three 'points' of reference.

Similarly, a triangulated study presupposes a convergent point and for our purposes that convergent point is the (inter)relationality of the divine with and within creation itself. Triangulation (also referred to as disambiguation) in the social sciences denotes the use of more than one method in order to ascertain the validity of the results of the same subject. In survey and navigation, triangulation determines a point in space where there is convergence with measurements from two other points. The credibility of a result is heightened by cross-verification and convergence of results using different methods. It helps to overcome inherent

biases within a particular field of study. In that respect, triangulation is at once relational, trialectic (rather than dialectic) and dynamic. It is for those qualities that it is applied in this study.

There is some criticism against triangulation as a research methodology. Among other things, it is accused of adopting a naïve Realism by construing that triangulation can lead to findings that offer a definitive social reality. However, this Realist critique is tempered by a constructionist view. In the words of Bryman (n.d:4):

Writers working within a constructionist framework do not deny the potential of triangulation; instead, they depict its utility in terms of adding a sense of richness and complexity to an inquiry. As such, triangulation becomes a device for enhancing the credibility and persuasiveness of a research account.

For the purposes of this study, I accept the constructionist view for the reason offered by Bryman but also because later in this discussion, I concur with constructive methodology as upheld by process thinkers and theologians (see chapter 3).

It is in that spirit that this study explores vital force as a concept of nature and spirit founded on the interrelatedness of all creation in the African world-view. That view is cross-checked with biblical/theological data and Welker's appropriation of the scientifically derived force field, which speak to the same issue of relationality and interrelatedness from those sources. The validation provided by the convergence ensuing from vital force being triangulated with data from Christian tradition on the one hand, and scientific data on the other, in the ensuing discussion, lends complexity and enhances the credibility of the claim that it is a viable concept of nature and spirit.

In terms of structure, this study begins with the introductory section in chapter 1, which lays out the proposal in terms of background, epistemological and methodological approach for the research while locating it within the broader frame of a literature review. Chapter 2 is a discussion of the ecological crisis and location of this research within that broader discussion. The exploration of epistemological and methodological contours serves to frame the study and locate it in terms of re-marking the boundaries between the perspectives that are being triangulated. I explore the idea that the nature of the crisis is such that the call to retrieve

ecological wisdom from the Christian tradition means looking to radically different views of human beings' relationship with nature.

Chapter 3 presents a retrieval of the notion of vital force as an anti-reductionist view of nature and spirit, presented with a view to rethinking our guiding axioms in order to relocate humans as an integral part of the 'community of life' (Sindima, 1990), rather than as removed and/or above the rest of creation. That assertion is made while acknowledging the value-seeking attribute of human beings that accords them moral and ethical responsibility as well as accountability towards the rest of creation.

Chapter 4 is an exploration of pneumatology in relation to the retrieval of vital force, building up on the discussion begun in chapter 2. The overriding question raised is how we can appropriate the African concept of vital force without surrendering the fundamental Christian theological contours. In this chapter, I present pneumatology in cosmic view as the background against which vital force is appropriated as an eco-pneumatological concept of S(s)pirit. I draw upon Christian theology by inserting the *filioque* issue of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* controversy and the creator *Spiritus Sanctus* into the discussion. I also introduce Michael Welker's view of a cosmic pneumatology.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of Faraday's force field as an example of a theological appropriation. Welker (1992, 1993, 1999) and Moltmann (1994, 1999, 2006) are presented as following after Pannenberg's (1991, 1993, 2001) work of theological appropriation of Faraday's scientific concept of force field within a pneumatological framework. This concept is upheld as a model for interdisciplinary research and the relational model for the study.

Chapter 6 sums up the study through triangulation, providing a conceptual connection between Spirit (upper case) and spirit (lower case), conceived of within the strategy of convergent validity. It offers final concluding thoughts and ensuing recommendations of possible areas for further research and/or application of the subject of this thesis to extend the discourse.

1.9 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vital force has been affirmed as representative of African ontology and cosmology. This notion has been theologically appropriated and apprehended on African terms by the likes of Kaoma (2013), Sakupapa (2012), Magesa (1997, 2004), Nkemnkia (1999), Nkrunziza (1989),

Nyamiti (1976), and Kagame (1956) and applied to a variety of themes in theology. Hitherto, no study has attempted to explore and articulate the notion of African vital force as an eco-pneumatological concept in reference to nature and spirit with an underlying emphasis on the interrelatedness of the divine and creation and of creation within itself. Therein lies the study gap this study attempts to address and offer some grounds for extending the discourse.

Kaoma (2013:70-71) has attempted an exploration of the concept of vital force from an eco-hermeneutical perspective. His reference is, however, limited to three paragraphs in a section titled 'Vital force: The Spirit that holds the universe together' in his book *God's Family, God's Earth: Christian Ecological Ethics of Ubuntu*. He relies on Nkemnkia's (1999) *African Vitality* whose view is that the vital force constitutes not only human but non-human life too. It is in itself a promising lead, albeit within the boundaries of a study whose focus is not on the concept itself. Aside from Nkemnkia and Kaoma, Sakupapa (2012) in his article titled 'Spirit and ecology in the context of African theology' published in the journal *Scriptura*, suggests a trajectory for the eco-pneumatological potential of vital force and explores various dimensions it could potentially address within African theology and as a contribution to Christian ecological discourse.

This study therefore picks up from allusions of Kaoma and Sakupapa to the eco-pneumatological potential of the concept of vital force. Sakupapa's conclusion is an appropriate point of departure for this study. He ends by asserting and recommending that:

African theology has the potential to contribute to the discourse on Christian responses to the ecological crisis if it can articulate a pneumatology that takes into account the African intellectual and cultural infrastructure in its theologising. The articulation of how such an ecological pneumatology would look is a task for further research.

(Sakupapa, 2012:429)

In his article titled 'Half a century of African Christian theologies: Elements of the emerging agenda for the twenty-first century' in the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Maluleke (1997) identifies themes and subthemes that occupied African theology in the twentieth century. He then sketches an outline of what themes he supposes would emerge in the twenty-first century. Under the theme of enculturation, he makes the observation that African culture and African traditional religions (ATR) have 'long been acknowledged as the womb out of which African Christian theologies must be born ... (in order) that the church of Africa

and its theology bear an African stamp' (1997:10). He goes on to criticise the rigidity that seems to characterise the attempt to juxtapose Christianisation and Africanisation.

Maluleke concludes with a critical observation that '[T]o posit the Africanisation of Christianity as the new task of theology may not, in reality, be as ground-breaking as it appears' (1991:13). In his view, the two processes – Christianisation and Africanisation – should not be artificially separated. I heed that apt methodological advice by not presuming Africanisation and Christianisation to be two rigidly separate tasks. To appropriate vital force as a concept of nature and spirit, I inevitably employ a particular hermeneutic of a natural theology by presuming that God's revelation has an earthly character, which is a basic assumption of natural theology as such. Moltmann's notion and justification of it, is that 'natural theology (is) the forecourt of the temple which would not exist without the temple itself ... For an active presupposition of this kind it is essential for revealed theology, if it is to be theo-logy, and hence to present its historical modality as universal' (2000:68).

Maluleke (1997) outlines what he proposes to be the African theological agenda of the twentieth century, which at once Christianises and Africanises. He outlines five areas, namely (i) theologies of African independent churches, (ii) African charismatic/evangelical theology, (iii) translation theologies, (iv) African/womanist theologies, and (v) theologies of reconstruction. Without offering any critique of Maluleke's choice of themes, I simply note that none of them relates to, or specifically mentions, eco-theology as a part of the agenda of the twentieth century in African theology. The reason may be one of breadth, to which the author gave a disclaimer that the title claimed more than he could deliver in a short article. One may further argue that eco-theology could be subsumed under theologies of reconstruction.

The corrective of any such perceived deficiency is found in the Accra Declaration, which unequivocally placed eco-theological concerns on the theological agenda.

The General Assembly of the then-World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) in Accra 2004, held under the theme 'Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth', is instructive in singling out and elevating the importance of ecological theology and earth-care. The call that came from churches of the global South sought to unify the Reformed family against consumerist tendencies that excluded the vulnerable, poor and Creation from their

God-given fullness of life. The Accra Confession, therefore, places eco-theology among the critical themes that would shape the African theological landscape, if not of the twentieth century, certainly of the twenty-first.

There is an attempt among eco-theologians (and in this study too) to go back to sources and to reclaim (and reconstruct) ecological wisdom imbedded within the Christian biblical/theological tradition. Secondly, the non-mention of eco-theology, specifically in Maluleke's work, may just indicate how much more needs to be done in this area of theology from an African perspective. This latter reason reaffirms my earlier claim that there is a gap and thus this study locates itself within that space and seeks to contribute to that effect.

The retrieval of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit is pursued against the background of the ecological crisis that the world faces today. In his pivotal 1967 article, 'The historical roots of our ecological crisis', Lynn White contended that Western Christianity (and Judaism) is the most anthropocentric religion. He thus traced the bias in Western theology towards the transcendence of God rather than the immanence of God to the anthropocentrism imbedded within Christian theology. He traced the dualistic portrayal of *man* and nature back to the second century as the source of such an anthropocentric focus. According to him, the alienation of the rest of creation and preferential focus on human beings to the exclusion of the rest of creation, cultivated indifference towards nature and tacitly, if not explicitly, gave religious sanction for the exploitation of nature.

That view notwithstanding, White himself recognised some glimmers of hope in the Western theological tradition. He identified as an example, the teachings of St. Francis about nature. Despite recognising these glimmers of hope, White's overall assessment was damning of Christianity. His indictment was that 'the present increasing disruption of the global environment ... a product of technology and science ... cannot be understood historically apart from the distinctive attitudes which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma' (White, 1967:93).

I have picked up three of these strands of arguments from White that inform this study. Firstly, White (1976:84) makes the observation about the importance of religion in the quest for ecological health when he noted that

(w)hat people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is religion.

This argument informs my study by affirming an aspect of African culture that plays a part in the recovery of the origins of vital force as a concept. It is rooted in African traditional life, which is invariably religious. African rootedness in nature is conditioned by beliefs about nature and destiny. Chapter 3 explores that concept further.

Secondly, I pick up from White's disavowal of the view that nature exists solely to serve the needs of humans. He suggests where Western Christianity went wrong when he states that 'By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects' (White, 1967:86) and that 'What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship' (White, 1967:91). By reclaiming the African ecological wisdom imbedded in the idea of vital force, we revisit the world of the African past (which is still present in some places) where the whole of nature imbued by the vital force of the creator was considered to have its revered place in the community of life. As McDaniel (2007:22) affirms, 'Agricultural peoples (as Africans tended to be) typically had a sense of the web of life, because their lives depended on being integrated into its rhythms.'

The third idea that I pick up from White (1967:87) is his assertion that 'Christianity is a complex faith and its consequences differ in differing contexts.' This statement at once affirms the diversity of Christian expressions but also seems to endorse that the development of Christianity does not have to proceed according to the Western model, and particularly not in its apprehension of creation and human-nature relationships. There is room to correct, reclaim and reconstruct Christian dogma. Chapter 4, which focuses on pneumatology and revisits the *filioque* issue and also attempts to reclaim the Creator *Spiritus Sanctus* dogma, is informed by that view.

Apart from White, other subsequent assessments of the Western theological tradition maintain that it is generally ecologically bankrupt. Despite that critique, the Christian faith has resources within it, which, if harnessed, could provide an adequate theological response to the ecological crisis. Since the publication of White's article, theologians have stood on

both sides of his argument vis-à-vis the indictment of Christianity as contributory to the ecological crisis. In response to White's assertion that the Christian faith is ecologically bankrupt (Santimire, 1985), in recent times, some theologians have underscored the potential of the Christian faith to contribute towards an ecological ethos and commitment. Some of those responses present the doctrine of God as a theme in Christian theology that would theologially undergird Christian responses to the ecological crisis (Edwards, 2006). Pneumatology has also emerged as one such site for eco-theological reflection (Bergman, 2005; Moltmann, 1992; Muller-Fahrenholz, 1995; Wallace, 2000; Welker, 1991, 1999, 2012; Yong 2011, 2012).

Paul Santimire's aptly titled book, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, captures the polarised views of critical ecological wisdom about the anthropocentric nature of Christian theology. He asserts that the allegation that Western Christian theological tradition is ecologically bankrupt is a 'largely unexamined position espoused by scores of ecologists, historians, philosophers, poets, nature writers, political activities and even some theologians who have identified themselves with the ecological movement' (Santimire, 1985:1). He notes the preoccupation of emerging ecological critical thought to borrow metaphysical resources from traditions that are not anthropocentric (as this study does) in order 'to view humanity as part of nature, not as a species above or against nature, to understand God as immanent in the vast expanses and diversities of cosmic history' (Santimire, 1985:1).

Santimire (1985:2) also notes the emphasis on (human) history to the exclusion of nature in the Greek Church and argues that 'when nature ceases to be an object of contemplation and admiration, it can be nothing more than material for action that aims at transforming it.' This author adds that 'these tendencies ... are triumphing ... to the detriment of Christianity itself, by an inevitable turn of events.' He notes the polarisation between those who declare Christianity devoid of an ecological dimension who seek to borrow from other bio-centric traditions and those who view natural theology as a contradiction in terms for Christian theology. His assessment of the normative Western theological tradition in ecological terms is thus ambivalent, oscillating between the view that it is completely bankrupt and (or because) it is totally anthropocentric.

Santimire's point of departure is a historical examination of the biblical-classical tradition and he states it as follows:

The recognition is that both the critics and protagonists of Christian thought about nature need a much more adequate account of biblical and classical Christian thought about nature than is currently at their disposal.

(Santimire, 1985:1)

Santimire proceeds to carry out that assessment and, among other things, points out the need for a critical appropriation of Christian tradition as well as an exploration for possible new ways of valuing nature.

The African concept of being, *vital force*, that this study explores, was brought into African theological purview by Placides Tempels, a Belgian Franciscan missionary in his book *Bantu Philosophy* (1959), originally written in Flemish. His aim was to devise a conceptual framework for purposes of evangelisation of the Luba of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). To Tempels, vital force was a unifying idea that underlay African cosmology. The terminology and how it gained currency in African theology, are both strongly contested. The discussion that follows seeks to locate this study as standing outside that debate while retrieving the concept as viable for an eco-pneumatology proposed in this study.

According to Tempels, 'Force, the potent life, vital energy is the object of prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead as all that is usually called magic, sorcery or magical remedies' (Tempels, 1959:31). Tempels' broad thesis has been reaffirmed by African thinkers, theologians and philosophers, such as Mulago (1969), Okafor (1982:89), Mbiti (1990) and Nkemnkia (1999), as being methodologically sound as a basis for the unveiling of the inner structure of African cosmology. According to these authors, vital force is conceptually adequate to describe how Africans interpret reality. It has thus been affirmed as conceptually representative of African ontology and cosmology. And on that basis, the notion of vital force has been theologically appropriated and apprehended on African terms by such thinkers and theologians as Nkrunziza (1989), Magesa (1997, 2004), Nkemnkia (1999), Nyamiti (1976) and Kagame (1956), but not much work has emerged about it in ecological terms.

African theology has appeared in five main areas over time, namely inculturation, liberation, black, African women's theology (spearheaded by the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians of 'The Circle') and reconstruction theologies. These theological trends have done considerable work in themes around the Bible, ATRs, inculturation, liberation, Christology, ethics, ecumenism, justice and human rights, reconciliation and health (particularly in the wake of HIV and AIDS). However, the subject of pneumatology is largely absent.

Broadly speaking, African theology inherited the predominant missionary approach of 'assigning of the Spirit as primarily an instrumental function in faith and in ecclesial existence, and thus confining the Spirit to a fundamentally domestic rather than cosmic role' (Rosato, 1981). In the African Initiated Churches (AICs) the Spirit is central to their belief, with a strong emphasis on power and to that extent some scholars have come to associate AICs with Pentecostalism. Nigerian theologian, Ogbu Kalu (2002:136), is of the view that 'Pentecostalism is a form of African Christianity rooted in African primal religiosity.' He credits this African Pentecostalism with bringing about 'a culture of continuity by mining the primal, reproducing an identifiable character, and regaining a pneumatic and charismatic religiosity that existed in traditional society' (Kalu, 2008:186).

The focus of this reclaimed pneumatic emphasis is on power to relieve people of their existential problems. This understanding of the Holy Spirit is appropriated within an ATR salvific discourse that attracts many people (Kalu, 2008) and for varied reasons. In an enchanted African universe where evil and benevolent spirits are understood to pervade reality and every aspect of the life cycle is explained in terms of spiritual influence, birth, health, fertility (of humans and livestock), harvest, accidents and other aspects of life are understood as decisive acts of forces in the spiritual realm.

The ensuing perception of salvation is couched in terms of material interventions that are necessarily power-focused, to counter vile spiritual influences and to attract benevolent ones. In this scenario, (human-directed) material prosperity becomes interchangeable with fullness of life. As a result, what ensues is a pneumatology that is narrowly soteriological rather than a life-centred one construed as life-in-relationship (Nkurunziza, 1989:126).

The notion of vital force and being in African thought is understood in terms of the relatedness of life, and in an enchanted universe, that relatedness is not confined to human life. The relatedness of life lies at the very heart of African ontology. Magesa (1997:x) has emphatically affirmed that ‘Black Africa is intimately linked in the ethos of culture, religion and morality’, thereby affirming that the underlying structure of the African is the promotion of life in its fullness. In essence, the criterion for morality is guided by the ‘life principle’ or vital force (Magesa, 1997). It is that very principle that is applied in this study as the guide to critique the destruction of the environment as anti-life.

Hountondji takes a critical view of Tempels’ philosophical grounding of his work in general, but not the validity of the concept of vital force specifically. In his view, Tempels took the African to be an ‘unwitting philosopher’ (Hountondji, 1979:57). Hountondji also questions the genealogy of the concept Bantu philosophy by noting the political use to which it has been put. In his own words, the

ethnological division of labour (a sort of scientific equivalent of the military scramble for the Third World by the great powers), Tempels can pass for the great specialist in the Bantu area, and if, too, his reconstruction of African philosophy is the more sensational because of his one-to-one contrasts between this Africa pseudo-philosophy and an equally imaginary European philosophy.

(Hountondji, 1979:58).

He points to similar attempts made by other European authors in other regions of Africa and names a number of those authors. For example, Marcel Griaule studied the Dogons of Mali, Dominique Zahan researched the Bambara of Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal, while Louis-Vincent Thomas studied the Diola of Senegal. He notes that these European examples have been followed by African thinkers, philosophers and theologians, at times correcting, but often without questioning, the underlying assumptions. He cites the examples of Alexis Kagame of Rwanda, Makarakiza (of Burundi), Antoine Mabona of South Africa, Father A. Rahajarizafy of Madagascar, Francois-Marie Lufuluabo of Belgian Congo (present-day Congo DR), Vincent Mulago, also of Congo DR, Jean-Calvin Balhoken of Cameroon and John Mbiti of Kenya (Hountondji, 1979:58-59).

Pannenberg, Moltmann and Welker present ‘spirit as field, the presence of God in creation’ and ‘of a field of God’s spiritual presence in his creation’ (Pannenberg, 1991:47, 49).

Pannenberg holds that the ‘biblical concept of God as creative and empowering Spirit’ (Buller, 1996:56) is firstly expressed ‘in the act of creation’ (Pannenberg, 1991:13). In other words, God pervades all reality.

Welker (1994:340) in turn argues that ‘In the Spirit and through the Spirit, the creation is also present and effective in God’s life.’ Hence ‘[T]hrough the resurrection of the flesh and through participation in eternal life, creation that has been rescued from corruption receives an importance of the highest order ... an impeachable dignity and validity.’ And this, according to Welker (1994:341), is achieved as the Spirit of God ‘awakens enjoyment of the force fields of faith, hope and love...’ which ‘reveals the interconnection between free self-withdrawal for the benefit of other creatures and the reflection of God’s glory.’

Moltmann (1992:9-10) hints at a link between the Spirit, as understood in New Testament ecclesiological terms, and the cosmic Spirit. This is how he describes it: ‘the life-giving Spirit in the faith of the heart and in the sociality of love (that) leads itself beyond the limits of the church to the rediscovery of the same Spirit in nature, in plants, in animals, and in the ecosystems of the earth.’ That relationship cannot be taken for granted in Christian confessional traditions that make a distinction theologically between the Spirit of redemption and the Spirit in creation.

The Christian Protestant tradition has a lot to gain from a cosmic view of reality that transcends its traditional dichotomies. A recent book, *The Church in God's Household: Protestant Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ecology*, edited by Clive Ayre and Ernst Conradie and authored by more than ten people representing different geographical locations, examines ecological critique on ecclesiology. The aim of this volume of essays on ecclesiology and ecology contributes to the ecological reformation of Christianity that began to gather momentum in the last few decades. The prophetic impulse that is so deeply imbedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition is awakened. Given the scale of the ecological destruction, ecological sensitivity may be the prophetic impulse of our time. It has led many Christians to rediscover a cosmic ecological ethic, directed towards the well-being and sustainability of all of creation that is deeply imbedded in the Christian faith.

The portrait of the church that emerges from the volume shows how theological reflection could begin a movement that could shift pertinent ecological issues to the very centre of the

Christian faith. The book offers a dialogical (each chapter is co-authored) reflection in six areas of ecclesiology, namely, on *diakonia* (service); *kerygma* (proclamation); *koinonia* (fellowship); *leitourgia* (worship and liturgy); *marturia* (witness); and, *ecclesia* (church). While offering an ecological critique of the church in respect of the six areas, the volume also offers a reflective account of the ecological reformation of Christianity that is taking place. It also exemplifies the extent to which the sphere of influence of Christianity may be projected into society (mission) with a cosmic vision. To that extent, one may speak of an ecological reformation of the church that is two-sided. It offers an ecological critique of Christianity – demonstrating that an ecological reformation is essential while equally demonstrating the distinctive Christian response to ecological destruction, thereby signifying the possibility of such an ecological reformation.

In that way we not only speak of the Christian contribution to healing the earth but we acknowledge that ecological awareness dares Christianity's very self-understanding and thereby provides an opportunity for the church to self-examine and to radically consider the very roots of the Christian faith from that perspective. The ensuing reformation and renewal could only benefit the church.

In this study, I elect to consider the question of such potential reformation and renewal pneumatologically. The starting point for a pneumatological understanding must necessarily be Trinitarian; suffice to state that much here. Chapter 4, which explores pneumatology, delves more deeply into the subject and further explores the work of Welker (with reference to Pannenberg and Moltmann as Welker's predecessors in the appropriation of Faraday's force field).

Pneumatology, as understood in the Trinitarian view, is undergirded by the generally accepted notion of the relational nature of all being. Dennis Edwards, drawing insights from cosmology, palaeontology and the biological sciences, heightens this view when he contends that human beings 'are intimately linked to life-forms of our planet and to the atmosphere, the soil, and the oceans. Our existence is encompassed by the mystery of God revealed in all the variety of creatures that surround us. We are part of them and they are part of us' (Edwards, 2006:12).

The ecological consciousness that has emerged over the past decades has also led to affirmations of the interrelatedness of all life. We as human beings belong to the community of life, which includes all species. Apart from sharing the earth as our home together with other species, the sciences have further postulated the genetic interrelatedness of all species. Studies in cosmology link with evolutionary biology, molecular biology, and ecology in their affirmation that everything is interdependent. In that case, humans are placed within an on-going community of life; there is a kinship among all creatures that have lived and are living presently – including creatures that will live in future.

Astrophysics has revealed that human beings and other creatures descend from a common legacy, constituted by physical elements. The chemical elements that constitute the human being were formed in the ancient stars. In the end the entire cosmos is one interrelated entity, multi-layered; each new higher level is indebted to lower levels from the ancient evolutionary past. As highly evolved and as advanced as humanity is construed to be, human beings form an integral part of the wider development that has taken place in time and space (Barbour, 2013).

This understanding of the place of humans in the broader scheme of cosmic process, ‘frees’ us from dualistic views of being that are based on a body-soul dichotomy and a deterministic, hierarchical principle. The realisation that we are ontologically interconnected with the larger whole, or ecosystem, which is the web of life, can be affirmed by the understanding that as human beings, our self-understanding needs to be construed in terms of what Buitendag terms an *eco-sociological niche*. That niche takes into account ‘the human being’s environment sociologically as well as ecologically’ yielding to ‘an eco-sociological understanding of *homo religious*’ (Buitendag 2012:1).

Such a view presumes life in its primary existence to be interrelated, which is that the nature of things is that they are fundamentally related. Such an insight makes it possible to understand human beings and creation outside the entrenched Western hierarchy of beings (Murphy in Brown & Murphy, 1998:127-28). The matter of human uniqueness and its accompanying notion of dominion over the rest of creation in the name of difference or uniqueness are also thereby critiqued.

In his book, *Alone in the World?*, Van Huyssteen (2006) puts human uniqueness in perspective when he proposes that scientific concepts of human uniqueness could ground theological ideas of human distinctiveness in concrete experience and also protect theological reflection from mere abstractions as it grapples with the notion the *imago Dei* as a basis for arguments about human uniqueness. Science, whether it is ecology, cosmology, palaeontology or physics, deals in the empirical sphere.

Van Huyssteen's own study probes the interdisciplinary problematic of human origins and distinctiveness. He studied Western European prehistoric cave paintings and used them as an access point to the origin of the extraordinary human mind, further exploring their theological significance and deeper religious implications (Van Huyssteen, 2006). He does not simply propose that science has something to offer theology but also suggests that theology has something to offer science. Even though theology does not focus on concrete empirical study, he is of the view that 'theology might suggest to science the interdisciplinary relevance of those elusive but distinctly human characteristics that do not fossilize but are crucial for deepening the human condition' (Van Huyssteen, 2006:xv). He disavows the idea that religious and scientific modes of thought are based on rival ideas of rationality that are at odds with one another. Instead, he demonstrates that in fact there are intersections between scientific and religious thought that provide scope for interdisciplinary dialogue (Van Huyssteen, 2006).

That kind of critique and recommendation opens up the reinterpretation of the biblical accounts of creation and appropriation of alternative ways of understanding humans in relation to the rest of creation in the tension-ridden space that interdisciplinary dialogue provides.

Throughout its history, Christian theology has been transformed and shaped by sources within and outside of the Christian faith itself. Its openness to insights, wisdom and perspectives from various traditions and sources is an essential part of its development and transformation. As stated in the hypothesis, I premise the exploration of vital force as an eco-pneumatological concept based upon the African ontology in this study, utilising the methodological strategy of convergent validity provided by the scientifically derived notion of force field, as well as the insights and frame of reference provided by pneumatology.

With relationality at the heart of African ontology, the concept of vital force could therefore be plausibly appropriated for the understanding of God as the giver and source⁶ of all life (Tempels, 1959:31). Theologically, we could then further plausibly argue for vital force as pneumatic representative of the power of God present in all of creation, and which pervades all of life. Metaphorically then, vital force could be interpreted as the Spirit of God, the principle of life that enables communion within creation and with (perhaps more accurately, ‘within’) God. That idea brings to the fore the pneumatological relevance of vital force from African spirituality as being (or more accurately analogically expressed) that which enables life in its interdependent and interrelated existence.

Amos Yong’s book, *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Triologue* (2013), provides a comparable orientation of the tria proposed for this study. His study, situated in the theology-science dialogue, also appropriates field theory and brings a non-Christian belief system into the dialogue. In that respect, his work provides insights for this study, albeit emerging from and located in different contexts, Asian and African. He helpfully demonstrates within his triologue where the intersections between Christianity, Buddhism and science may be. His opening statement is helpfully illuminating for this study. He notes that ‘the Christian doctrine of the Spirit (pneumatology) may point a way forward that takes seriously both the deliverances of modern science and the voices of ... other faiths’. He notes that the twenty-first century’s pluralistic context has made possible ‘certain developments in the science and philosophy of nature, including anthropology’ and thereby the introduction of ‘pneumatological categories into the discussions’ (Yong, 2013:1).

This literature review is far from exhaustive. It is a representative sketch of the key sources employed in this research. These sources are arranged here thematically to reflect the logical flow of the argument.

1.10 ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTION

Scholarship in the field of Christianity and ecology has, for the four decades since the seminal article by Lynn White, been led by voices from North America (US and Canada), or from non-Americans who, nevertheless, have lived in America for significant periods of their

⁶ The idea of God as Renewer of life/the earth is important in this study to emphasise and underline the pneumatological focus. The notion of God as renewal is the pivot for the redemptive aspect of pneumatology within the Christian faith.

lives. America's contribution to environmental degradation makes eco-theology a kind of contextual theology for them. Other significant voices have emerged from Australia, Germany, India, Holland, the Philippines, South Africa and the UK.

Even though there are some contributions from Africa, there is a long-standing dearth of contributions to Christian ecological discourse. That fact is attested to by the observation that there is 'unpublished, unwritten and sometimes unarticulated ecological wisdom from ... Africa'⁷ (Conradie, 2000:23). This study is a written African contribution that responds directly to that identified gap. It taps into ecological wisdom that resides in African thought and through the appropriation of the notion of vital force as a concept of nature and s(S)pirit; therein lies its contribution.

That the study is located within the realm of pneumatology in Christian discourse is another facet of the academic contribution attempted by this study. Although pneumatology has enjoyed a resurgence, arising from Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian influences (Karkkainen, 2002), there remains room for multi-perspectival contributions in the on-going exploration of this still-unfolding area of study.

Historically, in systematic theology, pneumatology has been subsumed under the doctrines of salvation and the church. The profound nature of the global ecological crisis we face provides Christianity with an opportunity to reconstruct and reform its tradition in light of the omissions and blind spots of our collective past. In that regard, in chapter 5, I touch on the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum *filioque* issue.

The credo statement that placed the Spirit in a subordinate position relative to God the Father and God the Son arises from that issue. In that regard, one might say an eco-pneuma-theological critique calls for a reconstruction of long-held Christian views. This study is only but one perspective among many.

According to Konrad Raiser (1989), the subordination of the Holy Spirit represents Protestant theology of the period in which Christian dogma was forged. By that, he implies that

⁷ A 1996 volume of essays by women of Asia, Africa and South America titled *Women Healing the Earth* edited by Rosemary Radford Reuther, is among a few contributions to the field eco-theology in that regard.

theology continues to grapple with contextual issues that might impinge on its self-understanding and teachings. He argues that the transformative nature within the Christian faith resides in its dialogical nature which has led to Christianity being historically shaped by challenges from within and from without.

The college of Anglican Bishops from the global communion gathered in South Africa in 2015 to deliberate on the urgency of the ecological crisis. Their verdict was that it is ‘the most urgent moral issue of our day’ (Anglican Bishops, 2015:7). Many other voices have echoed a similar note. Any academic study addressing the ecological crisis, including this one, contributes towards resources within the academy that speak to and deepen understanding that would undergird responses to this profound existential issue of our time.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

The claim I make to address the identified gap for this research is mitigated by reckoning with the breadth of pneumatology as a theme in Christian theology. The retrieval of vital force is premised on a constructive thesis that vital force is a feasible concept of nature and spirit. That notwithstanding, I realise that this is simply a single contribution and it is necessarily perspectival and written from a hermeneutical standpoint defined by experience, social standing and theological inclinations. I cannot claim to be exhaustive in that regard. Even with those inevitable limitations and perhaps even because of them, the study opens up the possibilities of further research from other perspectives and invites dialogue partners for mutual enrichment.

The study straddles many themes in theology, such as revelation, the doctrine of God, natural theology, pneumatology and hermeneutics and is undertaken within the broader context of the theology-science dialogue. The presumed interconnection with scientific discourse and the diverse theological themes that are brought to bear on the discussion could each become the subject of numerous studies. The subjects and themes that are brought to bear on the discussion and which could merit their own attention are brought in to facilitate the study. Therein lies another limitation. Subject and themes that would merit a detailed discussion may be dealt with in a cursory way and be placed in a supplementary role because they serve to facilitate the objectives of this piece of work.

Consequently, the subjects and themes that I bring together in this study serve to expand on the dialogue between Christian theology and African cultural and intellectual resources on one hand and with science on the other. There is much that makes for controvertible debate on the nature of the relationship and intersections between science and theology, on the one hand, and how the Christian notions of the triune God relate to notions of god in the African, to name just two examples. I return to the latter issue in chapter 3 for the sake of clarity on the terms of appropriation of the concept of vital force.

It is not possible to be exhaustive within such a broad scope. Consequently, I am necessarily selective and have focused on aspects that elucidate the thesis in order to achieve the goal of the study within the parameters I have set in the objectives. For that reason, the study relies on authoritative sources for the justification of the particular claims adopted with regard to such broad, and at times controvertible, issues that arise in the course of the discussion and that cannot be dealt with exhaustively.

In some instances, I select a point of view from a variety of authoritative sources and then have to substantiate my choice. The caveat again here is that the broader and disputable issues that arise serve to augment or substantiate the thesis. The retrieval of the concept of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit for an eco-pneumatological understanding, in dialogue with Christian tradition vis-à-vis Creator *Spiritus Sanctum* and science with regard to Welker's appropriation of Faraday's force field, define the parameters of the study. Where I do not belabour these themes in some instances may indicate a limitation of the scope of the study, rather than the lack of validity in the arguments that would arise from those subjects and themes, which deserve their own specific focus and could enrich this discussion.

In an attempt to develop a constructive post-modern ontology, the negative view seemingly directed at modern science seems rather pronounced in this study. To temper that view, I offer that modern science is not only at the sub atomic level where more ontological similarities converge within a constructive post-modern ontology. That is further tempered by the success of calculable science. The question that this thesis does not answer which is relevant to seal that gap is about how modern science works. Modern science, works on the principle that nature (or creation) has forms of settled order that provide a basis for calculable science to operate. The study does not deal with how the quality of spontaneity in the understanding of Vital Force relates to modern science. In other words, how self-

determination and chance in reference to causality are accounted for in modern science. Accounting for non-causal relations and categories in modern science (Bunge 2012:181) is at issue in that regard remains a gap for future research.

The discussion of western mind-set in this study seems to suggest that it is ecologically uniform. The overstatement pertains to the constructive approach, which acknowledges how the anthropocentric, hierarchical view of creation has, and continues to shape African thought in general and African theological reflection in particular. To that extent, one may claim that Cartesian modernism is alive and well, to the extent that it underlies hermeneutics in (especially missionary founded) churches, albeit in a latent form. The reconstruction based on the notion of Vital Force addresses that narrow concern. In concentrating on that, however, the study fails to acknowledge the development in the past forty years of literature that transcends the Cartesian worldview in western theological reflection. Relational epistemology has indeed burgeoned. The bias that seems to ignore that reality betrays a latent post-colonial consciousness of this study and is additionally a matter of limitation of the study's scope. There is thus no attempt to freeze western theological scholarship to a modernism that has long been superseded in western scholarship.

1.12 RELATIONSHIP: THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

When theology understands reality in its multi-layeredness, derived from the integrity of creation, it follows that there is an interface between science and theology. There is, however, a need to distinguish each of them according to their epistemological contours. In his review of the book edited by Deane-Drummond on the human genome project, in an article titled 'Human Genome Project as a case study in the debate about the relationship between theology and natural science', Buitendag illustrates the interface between science and theology. His advice about observing the epistemological contours that define each is that '[m]atters that belong together (need not be) separated and those that differ (may be) combined but solely metaphorically' (Buitendag, 2005:768).

The ongoing contemporary multidisciplinary science-philosophy-theology discourse has explored such themes as creation, spirit and human identity. Much that has been written about the critique of anthropocentrism stems from such discourse. Some encouraging trajectories have introduced pneumatological and relational categories into this multidisciplinary

dialogue. The postmodern context in which the discourse is located has transcended the modern positivist and reductionist materialistic conceptions of reality.

Whereas the European Enlightenment period ushered in modes of thought that considered the world to be devoid of spiritual beings and deities, the new order views nature and reality as more complicated than that. It is understood as consisting of emergent properties that are interactive and are not merely reducible to their most basic constitutive elements. The intersections between science and theology affirm the relational and interactive nature of reality. Hence, there is a renaissance of the re-enchantment nature of postmodern Western thought (McGrath, 2002).⁸

This challenges the claim that Christian tradition can only adapt to scientific cosmology by denying scriptural truth and Christian tradition. A lack of discrimination of issues breeds a brand of Christianity that discounts scientific theories about the origins of life. The multidisciplinary affirmation of the interactive spaces in the epistemological contours of science and theology make a good case; no longer can the two be plausibly construed as antithetical to Christian belief in the Creator God.

This study presupposes that relationship and adds to it African culture and thought as the third leg in the ensuing triangulation by appropriating the notion of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit undergirded as it is by the ontological interrelatedness and interdependence that underpins community of life. Vital force, fundamentally understood as the principle of (all of) life in African thought, harbours nuances of *be-ing* that affirm that all creatures are ontologically interrelated and interdependent in the web of life through a common descent mediated by the vital force.

In an Anthropocene⁹ era we cannot afford to ignore the vistas provided by multidisciplinary discourse. They demand that we self-critique, reconsider and reform the status quo of those Christian beliefs that prevent humans from acknowledging the interrelated and

⁸ See also Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards' Philosophy of Nature: The Re-enchantment of the World in an Age of Scientific Reasoning* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

⁹ A geological term that denotes the era in which human impact on the earth's ecological system has become a recognised force (Mauser, 2006:3).

interdependent realm of which we are part. The term Anthropocene itself denotes that there is an interface between the natural and social realms of our existence.

Human impact on the ecological systems of the world is a derivative of human social arrangements that we arrive at based on how we understand reality. This understanding in turn undergirds and shapes human interactions with nature. The bases of human notions of reality are necessarily metaphysical in nature of which theological traditions that have shaped Christian beliefs about nature are a part.

Any pursuit of ecological integrity, therefore, entails that the two realms (science and theology) not be held in a perpetual polarity. In fact, the consonance between theology and science could be said to arise from religious and theological data. Instead of trying to bend theological/religious material into an empirical mode (i.e. as natural theology), we should recognise that religious and theological data function within the milieu of scientific findings and theoretical hypotheses (Yong, 2012).

That argument is exemplified in chapter 5 by the examples I draw upon from the appropriation of Faraday's force field as a relational pneumatological category which is applied in Michael Welker's work, and which echoes prior works by Pannenberg and Moltmann as well. Among the innovative reflections that have emerged, the science-theology interaction is within the discipline of systematic theology. Traditional systematics of Christian doctrine separated human beings from the rest of creation but recently there has been a shift to an alternative understanding of humans as members of the community of life (part of, and related to, the rest of creation).

Scientific validation that human behaviour is largely responsible for climate change and other degradation/distortion of ecological patterns amplifies the nexus between theology and science. It further provides a basis for further multidisciplinary dialogue. If any far-reaching interventions to the global ecological crisis are to be found, there can be no categorical dualism in construing the relationship between science and theology. They are/should be a mutually critical, tension-ridden and interactive dialogical relationship. They cannot, and should not, be understood as being irreconcilably divergent.

1.13 ORGANISATION AND PLAN

Chapter 1 provides the background by introducing the subject, outlining the overview of the research problem and questions, its objectives, methodology and literature review. It sets out and delineates the scope and plan of the study.

Chapter 2 locates the research within the context of the ecological crisis and identifies anthropocentrism as a pervasive cause of the ecological crisis in the world today. It goes on to offer a biblical understanding of the crisis and sets the background for discussing the ethics of responsibility by highlighting the Accra Confession as an example of an ecological critique of Christianity. It also serves as an example of a reflective account of which resources are available within the Christian tradition that make reform, on ecological terms, possible.

Chapter 3 investigates and lays out the conceptual framework of the concept of vital force derived from African culture and thought. It provides an assessment of its adequacy as a concept of nature and spirit that would inform eco-pneumatological theology located within the broader frame of inquiry of the theology-science relationship.

In Chapter 4 I examine the pneumatological implications for the theological appropriation of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit, with particular reference to the *filioque* tenet and the creator *Spiritus Sanctus* doctrine. I frame that within a theological framework that understands God as the Spirit, which encompasses the whole cosmos, and is also present and moves in the history of nature and humankind (Dingemans, 2003). This approach makes the redemptive perspective relevant, as the Spirit is understood as the Giver and Renewer of life.

Chapter 5 examines Welker's appropriation (with a nod to Pannenberg and Moltmann) of Faraday's notion of the magnetic field force. Further, it brings it into dialogue with the concept of vital force.

Chapter 6 presents vital force as a triangulated concept of nature and spirit. It is presented as an epistemologically adequate foundation for an eco-pneumatology informed by an African cultural and intellectual infrastructure. The tria of the scientific notion of force field and Christian understanding of the cosmic Spirit and African vital force brings them together, in a synthesis, within the broader framework of Christian pneumatology. The chapter concludes

with a summary of findings of the study and recommendations for areas of possible future research as an extension of this dialogue.

CHAPTER 2: ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The retrieval and recognition of the concept of vital force is set against the background of the ecological crisis the world faces today. As real as the crisis is, in particular from a Christian perspective, it is important that the conversation around the subject be theologically rather than crisis-driven. That caution notwithstanding, the ecological crisis remains a critical contextual theological issue of our time that provides impetus to ecological awareness and the renewal of Christianity.

The prophetic impulse that is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition behoves us to rediscover the concern for ecological well-being and sustainability that is already imbedded within the Christian faith. This chapter begins with a background account of the ecological crisis, broadly sketching its historical origins, dimensions and effects. Despite the many and complex causes of the marginalisation of nature in Christian tradition, anthropocentrism seems to be at play in ubiquitous ways.

An overview of anthropocentrism follows for that reason, after which a biblical understanding is offered, which should undergird ethics of responsibility in light of the ecological crisis specifically and towards nature in general. The 2004 Accra Confession is offered as an example of theological reflection that challenges the dominant anthropocentric narrative. It has been generative on the discussion of the integrity of creation within the ecumenical movement.

In that sense, the Accra Confession is, firstly, an example of an ecological critique of the Christian faith, indicating the necessity of renewal of Christianity in light of the ecological crisis. Secondly, it advances a distinctively Christian response and commitment towards nature that assumes there are resources within the Christian tradition that make such a renewal both plausible and possible.

2.2 BACKGROUND

The reality of the ecological crisis the world faces today exemplifies that fact. The facts and issues of the ecological crisis merit a mention here to undergird the subsequent analysis of the

various positions and stances. The roots of the ecological crisis have been traced back to various causes that range from economic systems through to the science and technology that support it as well as the worldviews, cosmologies and religious notions that undergird it (Conradie 2006:51).

An ecological crisis happens when the environment is destabilised to the point of threatening the survival of particular species and/or populations. Environmental degradation to the point of reducing its capacity to support species, due to for instance increase in temperature, reduction in or changes in rainfall patterns characterises the current ecological crisis. Predation because of the ‘feeding’ habits of one specie, humans, threatens the survival of the other species and degrades the environment. Such predation, on the part of humans, expresses itself in terms of global consumerist greed. Disturbance in the balance within the world’s ecosystem may happen as a natural occurrence. However, the present crisis is human-induced. If James Nash’s (1991: 34) assertion that climatology is ‘an exact science’ and is a reliable discipline for understanding climate change, the reports from many international organisations that use it to report on global climate must be taken seriously.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) fourth climate-change impact assessment of 2007, titles ‘Warming of the climate is unequivocal’ gave details that indicated by region the effects of temperature rise because of green-house-emission-induced temperature rise. The report asserts that the global warming trends reduce the capacity of land and ocean to absorb atmospheric carbon dioxide. The result of that is an increase in the fraction of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions retained in the atmosphere to the detriment of the environment. The 2014 IPCC report asserts the following:

Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have increased since the pre-industrial era driven largely by economic and population growth. From 2000 to 2010 emissions were the highest in history. Historical emissions have driven atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide to levels that are unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years, leading to an uptake of energy by the climate system.

(IPCC 2014:44)

Indications of the effects of climate change are known to be strongest and most widespread in natural systems. In many regions of the world, changing rainfall patterns or the melting of

snow and ice are changing hydrological systems. This affects the quantity and quality of water resources and many earthly, freshwater and marine species causing them to shift their geographic ranges, cyclical activities, migration patterns, profusions and species interfaces in response to ongoing climate change. A number of impacts on human systems are also attributed to climate change. Many studies spread over a wide range of regions and crop varieties shows the negative impacts of climate change on crop yields far outweigh the positive impacts. The impacts of ocean acidification on marine creatures have also been attributed to human influence (IPCC 2014:6). Below is a sketch of some of the climate change impact by region from the 2007 IPCC report.

The African continent is likely to be the most affected and its population's vulnerability will, according to the projections, increase because of a projected spread of the aridity by 5-8% by 2080. The continent will record increasing declining yielding due to drought and land degradation, water stresses and changes in primary production of large lakes. For instance, Lake Tanganyika, which produces 25-40% of protein for countries that surround it, will experience a reduced primary production and fish yield will reduce by about 30%.

Sea level rises in Asia will salinize aquaculture and cultivable land. The 2,500 square kilometres Mekong delta will be affected. Per capita water availability in India is expected to reduce from 1,900 to 1,000 per cubic meter. On the other hand, extreme weather conditions are likely to cause forest fires that will diminish the forests and threaten species.

In New Zealand and Australia coastal communities, natural ecosystems and fresh water sources are threatened, with many ecosystems predicted to be altered by 2020. The Murray-Darling area in Northern Australia is expected to suffer a 10-25% water reduction, while increased fires and drought will reduce production from forestry and farming by 2030.

Europe will experience extreme winter and a doubling of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by 2080. The number of people living in water stressed areas will increase while large areas of fauna will be endangered or extinct within the 21st century. The Alpine glaciers in some of the regions will disappear and the Mediterranean region will become warmer and lose its characteristic temperate climate, diminishing its tourism-based economy.

In Latin America, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia would lose inter-tropical glaciers, which would reduce water availability and negatively affect hydropower generation. Anthropogenic climate change would also cause sea-level rises that would affect coastal morphology, reduce mangroves, flood low lying areas in Bolivia, El Salvador, Argentina and Guyana among other areas.

North America, severe storm surges and sea-level rises will incrementally compromise the standard of living. Coastal wastelands will increase even as temperatures soar and water source competition will rise. The vulnerability of indigenous peoples and other people groups who are confined to narrow resource bases will increase. By the second half of the century, it is predicted that climate change will affect forests and changes will occur due to disturbances from pests, fire and diseases.

By the end of the century, Polar Regions will lose 22-33% of its ice, depending on the emission rates. Projected losses are estimated to range from minimal to near-loss of summer ice. Such climate change in the polar regions will lead to the decrease of habitat for migrant birds and polar bears. Increased Arctic flooding is also predicted.

Sea-level rises and increase in sea water temperature due to global warming will affect Small Islands by hastening beach erosion, degrading natural coastal defences such as mangroves and coral reefs. Port facilities in the Pacific islands will experience overtopping and about 0.5 meters rise in sea level. High adaptation costs relative national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of these islands. They will also see a rise in climate-sensitive diseases like malaria and dengue, among other.

The term Anthropocene, therefore, albeit often contested, does characterise the ecological crisis we face that is instigated by human activity as illustrated by the IPCC reports. It has become increasingly apparent that as a result, the earth faces an existential crisis as the earth changes in profound ways and catastrophic occurrences are no longer simply explained in terms of random natural occurrences but as direct consequences of human activity.

The history of human impact on the environment goes far beyond the modern Western era. The rise and fall of ancient empires and civilisations are supposed to have had an environmental impact too, as did ancient agricultural revolutions. The biblical narrative in 1

Kings chapters 5–8, detail the erection of Solomon’s temple. The amount of wood, purified metals (gold, silver and bronze, etc.) and stones exploited for the construction of the magnificent monument to the worship of Yahweh must have had a telling environmental impact. Among the installations made for the temple were ‘ten bronze basins, each holding forty baths and measuring four cubits across, one basin to go on each of the ten stands’ (I Kgs 7:38). Each of the basins had the capacity of about 880 litres. A quantification of all the materials that went into the building and decoration of the temple would rank Solomon’s reign among ancient empires that left a significant environmental footprint in their wake.

Rasmussen (1996:53f.) and Northcott (1996:42f) have documented the impact of agricultural revolutions. In that regard, Moltmann (1989:64-66) makes the following observation:

There are many investigations of the connection between land and civilisation which show that, for example, the cultures by the Euphrates and Tigris, the Roman cultures of North Africa, the Maya culture of Yucatan and others collapsed because the land was exploited recklessly and short-sightedly and the fertility of the soil was steadily destroyed. Emigration and the ‘deportation’ of people became necessary, to save both the ground and human beings. It was especially the great empires, which exploited their granaries and fertile provinces ... and also devastated them through pillaging.

These ancient impacts on the environment do not compare with the global impact that the current ecological crisis has on the world today. The global nature of the ecological crisis we face today is what sets it apart from all other earlier destruction of the environment because ‘it is systematic, faster than the natural regulating mechanisms and is of a worldwide dimension’ (Duchrow & Liedke, 1987:16). Yet in both cases, the economic roots to environmental degradation are evidently of human origin. However, the current economic abuse of nature (consumerism), which has been supported by philosophical and religious ideas that give it sanction, has exceeded past human causes of environmental degradation; whereas in ancient times, religious and philosophical ideas placed limits on the exploitation of nature, and there was no sophisticated technology. In consequence, limited human populations were distributed over limited space.

Today there is burgeoning of technology, population explosion and human societies distributed all over the globe. Duchrow and Liedke (1989) identify a vast number of factors that affect the environment on a global scale. These include the following: depletion of the

ozone layer; worsening acid rain; over-fishing and pollution of coastal waters; a growing shortage of fresh water; soil erosion and its increased salination; desertification; destruction of tropical rains forests across the world; a rising concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere; extinction of and enduring threat to animal and plant species; growth of automobile traffic that pollutes the environment; and, soaring arms sales (Duchrow & Liedke, 1989:17). Poorer nations with large populations living close to the land tend to bear the brunt of this environmental degradation.

The degree to which Christianity is complicit in the unfettered degradation of nature is a contested issue. White's seminal 1967 article indicted Western Christian tradition, especially the Protestant tradition, for the religious sanction of the exploitation of nature for human benefit. Christianity's anthropocentric focus, dualism, over-spiritualised emphasis and its hierarchical view are all seen to be a basis for the exploitation of nature by human beings.

Christian eco-feminist views which bring together ecology and feminism by arguing that 'male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology and in social structures' (Reuther, 1992:2) point to Christian hierarchical views, namely patriarchy, which harbour a counter-community element. Eco-feminism valorises community as a goal within the strategy of challenging dualisms and hierarchical structures, which means that boundaries between human beings and nature also begin to diminish (Ayre, 2013).

The attempt to retrieve ecological wisdom from the Christian tradition arises from the argument that there are resources within the Christian faith which, if adequately interpreted would in fact show that Christianity cannot be held directly responsible for the environmental crisis. By contrast, Christianity would provide a solution. McGrath (2002:55) goes so far as to suggest that the idea of dominating nature is in fact not a Christian one. Rather that, it 'has its origins in classical Greek philosophy (which) was eclipsed through the rise of Christianity, and enjoyed a resurgence from the sixteenth century onwards.'

The argument is a protracted one; yet suffice to say that despite the fact that Christianity has an historical footprint of being complicit in the ecological crisis we face today, the call to an ecological reformation of the Christian faith is thereby given validity. The causes of the ecological crisis are diverse and complex. The background offered here is therefore sketchy,

with a bias towards the economic roots as well as to the roots of the Christian work ethic in the ecological crisis. That bias is advisedly necessitated by the degree of the ecological crisis itself and the assessment hitherto of the human contribution to it but particularly the collusion of Christian teaching.

Broadly speaking, the current ecological crisis can be traced back to the scientific and industrial revolutions that altered the perceptions of the relationship between humans and the rest of creation. Natural order was increasingly manipulated by newly discovered scientific and technological methods. Human beings increasingly gained supremacy and control over nature and were no longer at the mercy of its forces. Within this scheme, Western Christian theology, scientific and industrial endeavours mutually reinforced each other to the end that human beings came to be regarded as the pinnacle of creation. The rest of creation could be understood only in terms of serving human needs and desires. Consequently, the natural world soon lost the mystery and sacredness by which it had been served and became simply a resource for human utilisation.

According to Labuschagne, in the article ‘Creation and the status of humanity in the Bible’, the notion of humans as the ‘crown’ of God’s creation is presumed to be premised on the fact that human beings were created as ‘the last and supreme act of creation in Genesis 1’ (Labuschagne, 1991:124). He contends to the contrary, that the human being, in fact, was created on the sixth day – the same day as all the other creatures. And according to him the main reason for situating the creation of creatures at the very end is for literary reasons, to attain an open-ended creation story because the creatures would henceforth be the ‘main subjects’ in the creation story. Labuschagne concludes that the special place alluded to in Genesis 1:26 onwards for human beings in relation to other creatures, does not thereby render human beings the pinnacle or ‘crown’ of creation. His argument, which aptly frames the concept in this instance, is rather that:

God planted a garden in Eden and that He put in it the human being (the man) He had created, cannot be interpreted to mean that the garden was specially created for the benefit of humankind. On the contrary, the relationship between the man and the garden is rather one of mutual dependence. The garden is there for the man, and he is there for the garden: the man is put in the garden to ‘till and look after it’ (2:5). In relation to his natural environment, the human being is nothing but a humble servant, an agricultural labourer. What is more, the

garden is not his property, since it belongs to God.

(Labuschagne, 1991:124)

By the twentieth century, the scientific and industrial revolution was not only catering to human material needs but unanticipated by-products of these developments gradually became evident, with harmful effects to the environment such as toxic waste, acid rain, greenhouse gases, and depletion of the ozone layer, leading to climate change. Energy production has notoriously been identified as the source of particularly adverse environmental problems associated with nuclear power, fossil fuel usage and large-scale hydroelectric dams (Hallman, 2002).

Colonial expansion of European imperial powers into other parts of the world exported the environmental problems of the West. Coupled with the economic exploitation that was at the heart of colonialism, serious environmental problems were to emerge in the colonies. The colonised nations were exploited for natural resources to supply the demands of the West and North America. At the end of colonialism, many of these nations continued to exploit their resources for the purpose of servicing international debt and often with multinational companies leading or providing capital for the business that extracted these resources.

A case in point is my own home country, Zambia, where the colonial legacy of the Kariba dam, built in the 1960s at the border with Zimbabwe, was intended to supply mines and industries in both countries with electricity. Apart from the displacement of local people on both banks – whose livelihood was intertwined with the river before the dam was built to produce the largest manmade lake on the continent – the dam has enduring issues of still displacing people and flooding fields of peasant farmers downstream when dam gates are opened to relieve pressure on the dam walls.

Mines have been identified as large-scale polluters in Zambia.¹⁰ According to the Index Mundi, Zambia's most pressing and crucial environmental issues include: 'air pollution, and resulting acid rain in the mineral extraction and refining region; chemical runoff into watersheds; poaching (which) seriously threatens (wildlife) populations; soil erosion;

¹⁰ Appendix I illustrates issues of water pollution by mining activities of multinational corporations in Zambia.

desertification; lack of adequate water (which) presents health risks.’¹¹ These environmental problems stem from economic activities that do not take ecosystems into account. The ecological units constitute complex communities of organisms that support life-existence in their specific environments. When they are tampered with, a complex web of interwoven environmental issues is formed.

Moltmann (1993:23) affirms that ‘the natural environment of human beings cannot be understood apart from the social environment’ because it is ‘a crisis of the whole life system of the modern industrial world.’ The magnitude of the ecological crisis entails that our attempts to address it must necessarily be those that address the very foundations of our self-definition as human beings. Many Christian ethicists such as James Nash (1991:162-191), Larry Rasmussen (1996:107-109), Holmes Rolston (1988) and others hold the view that just like human beings, all the other forms of life have their intrinsic value. They are not there simply to serve human needs/greed. The retrieval of the African concept of vital force that this study attempts contributes to precisely that conversation, namely an ‘ecological theology is towards understanding of humans as an interrelated species within the totality of God’s creation, an appreciation of the inherent worth of other species in terms of their value to humans and *an awareness of the presence of the Spirit of God throughout creation*’ (emphasis mine) (Hallman, 2002:198). That is typical anthropocentric thinking!

Christian theologians have engaged in interfaith dialogue in order to promote greater appreciation of and greater respect by people for the whole of the natural world. Ecumenical organisations like the World Council of Churches, World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), now known as the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and the Council for World Mission (CWM), among others, have formulated theological statements and proposals for wider dialogue on the environment. For example, the WCC hosted a summit in 1991 that drew up proposals for the UN Earth Charter that saw a religious dimension to the global ecological crisis being tabled at the Rio Summit in 1992. Under 2.6, we consider the Accra Confession, an example of ecumenical ecological critique within the broader and longer history of its socio-economic thought. The environmental degradation that

¹¹ See http://www.indexmundi.com/zambia/enviromt_current_issues.html, (accessed 4 April 2015). Index Mundi provides country profiles of levels of environmental degradation.

has ensued from the ecological crisis has led to the travail of nature itself, economic inequality, climate-induced migrations of people and animals, among other effects. It is against this background that the cry for a reassessment of Christianity's self-understanding and ways of being is taking place. An over-spiritualised outlook on the world of the Christian faith, which ignores the world of nature and falsely dichotomises the spiritual and the natural viewing human beings as separated from the community of life, stands radically challenged. In the words of Moltmann (1985:12):

The progressive destruction of nature ... and the progressive threat to humanity ... have brought the age of subjectivity and mechanistic domination of the world up against their definitive limits. Faced with these limits, we have only one realistic alternative to universal annihilation: the non-violent, peaceful, ecological, worldwide community in solidarity.

As human societies move towards a growing respect for the natural world, relationships take centre stage; the survival of the complex world ecosystem depends on them. McFague (1993:100-101; 108) attributes ecological devastation to human encroachment on the 'space' of other habitats. She recommends 'a decentering and recentering' of humans in the community of life without which human beings would destroy themselves. The hope is that gradually we as human beings would be

at home in (our) existence – that is the relationships between God, humans beings and nature lose their tension ... the creative God himself dwells in creation ... making it his home, 'on earth as it is in heaven' ... Then at last the true community of created beings with one another also begins... The bond of love, participation, communication and the whole complex warp and weft of interrelationships, determines the life of the one single creation, united in the cosmic Spirit. A many-faceted community of creation comes into being.

(Moltmann, 1985:5)

From this viewpoint then there is no sharp discontinuity among species. They are interlinked through a continuing evolutionary process in their hereditary lineages which is determined by ancestry within the species, not by any hierarchical order of *being* or 'generic nature'. To that effect then, the species, including *Homo sapiens*, may be typified and classified according to each one's essence (Moritz, 2011:315). The argument for anthropocentrism is thereby rendered indefensible. This leads us to that very subject, anthropocentrism, and how we locate it in the context of the ecological crisis.

2.3 ANTHROPOCENTRISM

Anthropocentrism is a controversial term that alludes to one of the causes of the ecological crisis we have touched on in the earlier discussion. It stems from the Christian overemphasis of the uniqueness of human beings in all of creation. That alienation from other creatures is even more emphasised by the understanding of the human as the bearer of the *imago Dei*. Because of that understanding, it is inferred that humans as caretakers on earth, on God's behalf, partake of God's transcendence over nature. Lynn White's (1967) assertion that Western Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion in the world, as we have stated in the previous section, takes from that understanding the place of humans in the community of life.

As a result, collectively, Christians largely imbibe an uncritical anthropocentrism imbedded in Christian teaching, which makes use of scripture to justify the exploitation of the earth. Scriptures, for example, Genesis 1:28, have been used to promote human domination of nature. Such views continue to perpetuate the Enlightenment's instrumental view of nature that underpins the capitalism, industrial and technological advancements that endorse unlimited growth (Edwards, 2006) without regard to the diminishing resources of the earth and the marginalisation of the poor. In a theocentric view of life, human beings are not the pinnacle of creation but a part of God's valued creation in which each species has intrinsic value.

The visible human footprint on nature, namely the ecological crisis, has led to this eco-era being termed 'the anthropothene' or adjectivally, the ecocrisis is said to be anthropogenic (Nothcott & Scott, 2014:1). The human element in the environmental crisis is evident because it manifests itself in the economic systems of the world, the scientific and technological developments that support it. The worldviews inhabited by modernity and its accompanying cosmologies provided a basis for the religious views and beliefs that emerged therein (Conradie, 2006).

Whereas many Christian theologians have thought Lynn White's (1967) assertion that Christianity is co-responsible for the ecological crisis is overstated, not many can argue with the ever-present human-centred focus of the Christian faith. There is enough in the biblical tradition indicating that indeed humans (man – androcentric – to be specific) are elevated above nature (e.g. Psalm 8). Wolfhart Pannenberg's (1994:136) view that 'creation comes to

fulfilment in us and that the whole universe was created with a view to us’, is tempered by James Nash’s (1996:8) strong view that ‘The traditional idea that the earth, or even the universe, was created solely for humans is, in our scientific age, sinfully arrogant, biologically naïve, cosmologically silly and therefore theologically indefensible.’

In keeping with John Calvin (Institutes 1.1.1), I assert that the knowledge of humanity and knowledge of God are related and should not be separated because ‘Humanity is a theme in theology not despite of, but because God is the subject matter of theology’. The either/or about nature and human history may not resolve the issue of the seemingly skewed view of the biblical tradition towards humankind. Some theologians have therefore proposed a theocentric orientation as a way of countering the anthropocentric focus. As noted above, others continue to reinforce anthropocentrism as the focus of Christian faith. What is at issue is not compromising Christian doctrine, but rather to critique the sole focus on human interests (i.e. anthropocentrism) – culturally, economically, politically, ecclesiologically – as one of the causes of the ecological crisis that we witness through the degradation of the environment.

The focus on human beings that translates into the domination of nature, becomes a morally relevant issue that Christians need to address. The quest for a theological response to anthropocentrism is therefore a relevant theme in Christian theology. Santimire’s words are instructive for and affirmative of this study’s goal and worth quoting at length to make exactly this point. His basic assumption is that ‘The theology of nature is worth pursuing. It is worth pursuing for both extramural and intramural theological reasons’ (Santimire, 1995:7). He proceeds to underline the view that the indictment of the Christian tradition with regard to its ecological credentials is often exaggerated. Yet he outlines the reasons why Christians should endeavour to respond:

To begin with, the environmental crisis is real and, notwithstanding exaggerated claims by some environmentalists, it is deep-seated. It seems clear that Christian theologians have a public responsibility to respond to that crisis in terms of both critical appropriation of their own tradition and a constructive exploration of the possibility of new ways of valuing nature, along with new ways of affirming the values of human history. Both extramurally and intramurally, Christian theologies must attend to the theology of nature with a new vigor. But that theological undertaking must presuppose critical appropriation of the received tradition.

(Santimire, 1995:8)

In that vein, his study attempts a critical ecological appropriation of the Christian doctrine of pneumatology. The current study attempts a retrieval of the concept of vital force from the African with a view to propose a new way of valuing nature from that perspective, and within the Christian tradition. It takes Santimire's caution that Christian tradition is both promising and unpromising when it comes to ecological wisdom within. It abounds with promising material but in some respects shows evidence of antithetical aspects.

The alienation of human beings from nature that ensues from an instrumentalist view of nature founded on an anthropocentric focus entails a juxtaposition of a spiritual reality over and against physical reality (Roxburgh, 2000) while it has a tendency to focus on the individual soul rather than the communal, the agnostic rather than belief in the existence of the spiritual realm. Individualistic and gnostic views are both alien to Christian revelation through Jesus Christ. They constitute a retreat from the communal and relational, which are fundamental to God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

The Trinity undergirds the understanding of humans as relational beings who (should) live in communion with other beings. It is the basic ontology of creation in the Trinity. Roxburgh (2000:186) contends, 'For creation to be healed, for salvation to come into the world that God so loved, creation must be drawn back into communion across all systems. All its distinct and separate agencies and parts ... are to be drawn into relationship out of their separateness'. Roxburgh uses systems theory as a metaphor for the communion that takes place within the triune God, between God and creation and within creation.

The social nature of the Trinitarian view of God – living as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an interrelated communion – opens up a perspective that radically challenges anthropocentrism. When human life is understood from that perspective, the understanding of the human as an autonomous being, alienated from the rest of creation, gives way to one that sees an interrelationship between God, humanity and nature.¹²

The presence of the Spirit of God in all of creation, including the non-human 'others', radically challenges anthropocentrism that conceives of a God as being preferentially focused

¹² The fragmentation of humanity and nature in this sentence is for the sake of clarity rather than a perpetuation of the separation of humans from the rest of creation. We seek to locate humans within nature.

on human beings and on other creatures only in as far as they benefit human life. Edwards (2006:45-47), echoing Moltmann (1992:12), speaks of ‘the Spirit as the unspeakable nearness of God in creation’ and contends that ‘This presence in which we live and move and have our being, is not something. It is not simply a link or a bond uniting us with God or each other. The Holy Spirit is a personal presence, a mysterious other, a Thou, someone to be loved and worshipped. The Spirit of God is not less than human but infinitely more.’

The confession of God’s existence as Trinity reveals how reductionist it is to focus solely on human beings at the expense of the rest of creation. In the Trinity, we encounter a God who is intrinsically and inherently social and who enters into the world and redeems all of creation, not only human beings. In other words, God’s purposes for the world cannot be read as narrowly anthropocentric. What is the biblical basis for that claim?

Green (2008) references Barth’s assertion that humans are not the pivot of Scripture and makes the observation that,

Were we to take Barth seriously, we might further entertain a further “humbling” – namely, the realization that the Bible is about God, first and foremost, and only derivatively about us ... (For that reason therefore) Study of the human person in the Bible – that is biblical, theological anthropology or, more simply, biblical anthropology – is thus a derivative inquiry.

(Green, 2008:3)

He points out, however, that even though biblical anthropology may be secondary, it is crucial ‘insofar as it struggles with the character of humans in relation to God with respect to the vocation given to humanity’(Green, 2008:3).

2.4 BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

In this section, I interrogate the first of Santimire’s ambiguous claims, namely, that the Christian tradition is ecologically promising. Firstly, I broadly sketch some Christian views about the earth and earth-keeping as such. The Bible is, on one hand, held out as the authority, even while seeking its ecological accountability. The latter point is important because the eco-critical views have (rightly) noted the ways the Bible has seemed to legitimise environmental degradation and destruction. The former point is brought to the fore by the fact that as a Christian seeking ways to relate healthily to the earth, I appeal to the Bible’s religious-cultural authority in order to arrive at a biblically and theologically sound

ethic for the care of the non-human part of the community of life. Secondly, I outline some ecologically sensitive nuggets from the Bible and ask how central such ecological insights are and whether they are at the heart of the gospel. Are they at the core of the biblical message or are they only a fringe concern? If they are, it makes ethical responsibility towards nature a mandate for Christians. If they are not such, ethical responsibility is an optional extra. Without a core link to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christian theology has little to offer that is distinctively Christian to ecological discourse.

The perspective this exploration takes is within the well-established understanding of modern hermeneutical theory, which emphasises that the lens used to read a particular text entails the meaning derived from that reading. Within the Christian tradition, emphasis on human beings, their relationship with God and among themselves, are considered as foremost in the reading of Scripture. To that extent then, the reading has tended to be anthropocentric. An eco-hermeneutic reminds us that the reading of Scripture needs to be three-way. The interface of human beings, God and nature, which is implied in Scripture, tends to be relegated when the emphasis is only on life from the human perspective.

When nature is accounted for in the reading of Scripture, it has tended to be premised on apocalyptic beliefs. Some Christians take a pessimistic view of the earth and consider that the only hope for nature lies in its final destruction. The only hope, according to this view, is the promise of the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1). Others believe in the earth as God's creation and in the value of other creatures but wind up at the same place as the latter in that they may see value in conserving the environment but do not attribute to it any intrinsic value. It is doomed to destruction and the only hope is at the resurrection when all things will be made new.

Many others will understand the importance of the environmental but still insist on the primacy of humanity at the expense of the rest of creation. However, there is also a growing voice of Christians who acknowledge the deeply blemished nature of Christian history and its complicity with ecological destruction and seek an ecological reformation of the Christian tradition, its ethical codes and axiomatic assumptions that have historically shaped its life and work with regard to earth-keeping. In other words, the biblical and theological perspectives on the environment are therefore at issue and that is where a biblical understanding of the ecological crisis would help to shed light.

An ecological hermeneutic attempts to recover the ecological wisdom rooted in Scripture in order to critique Christian tradition in light of the ecological crisis the world faces today. It has been noted that the attempt to retrieve ecological wisdom from Scripture can tend to focus on only a selection of portions of it to the exclusion of others. Accordingly, that approach is perceived to reinforce what may seem like a relegation of ecological issues in Scripture. In that respect, a comprehensive view provides a broader scope that demonstrates the interwoven nature of the entire community of life as subjects of God's love and care. However, as we will note below, such a view is necessarily ambiguous in that the Bible does not consistently uphold an ecological ethos. Those concerns have informed the brief overview here in which I both show that Scripture does have ecological wisdom that we need to retrieve even while acknowledging the ambiguity therein. That ambiguity is illustrated in some theological texts, such as Jonathan Morgan's (2010) chapter titled, 'Sacrifice in Leviticus: Eco-friendly ritual or unholy waste' in a book edited by Horrel et al. (2010), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*. It self-evidently captures the ambiguity of ecological wisdom in Scripture. Paul Santimire's (1985) book, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, is an equally telling title that grapples with the mixed fortunes of the ecological wisdom that we retrieve from the Bible.

In the Pentateuch, we find a portrayal of God's act of creation that depicts both its goodness and the harmonious existence between human beings and the rest of creation. This is found in the two creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 3 depicts the distortion of the harmony that once existed in the Garden of Eden among all of God's creation as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God. Chapters 6 to 9 narrate the act of God using nature to inflict judgement upon human beings. God also acts in the preservation of all species and ensures the repopulation of the earth which culminates in a covenant between God 'and all life on the earth' (Genesis 9:17). Human life and the lives of all other creatures are bound together through their creation by God, judgement and God's restoration of a relationship (Anderson, 1994). The redemption of Israel entails the redemption of all, not only because human life depends on it but because the other creatures matter and have their own God-given intrinsic value.

Bauckham (2011) befittingly amplifies the point about human beings and the rest of creation as bound together. In the course of his refutation against the claim that anthropocentrism

originates from the biblical tradition, he suggests that the biblical distinction between humans and animals was neither ‘an absolute difference in kind’ nor were human beings confined to ‘a quite different metaphysical level in the hierarchy of existence. They stand between animals and angels’ (Psalm 8:4-8) (Bauckham, 2011:23-24) in a psalm whose overarching theme is God’s glory as the purpose for creation. Not only is the covenant relationship with human beings recounted but also the transient nature of human life is highlighted. The reference to the honoured human responsibility over the rest of creation is put into perspective when read against the backdrop of the grandeur of the whole of creation and, even more, the grandeur of God’s glory.

In Genesis 12, up to the book of Exodus, the scriptural narrative shifts focus to the people of Israel. Yet a theology of creation is sustained throughout a seemingly anthropocentric theme of God’s redemption, if the reading is limited to that view. Applying an ecological hermeneutic, Fretheim (1991:12-14) is very categorical in his recognition of a theology of creation as the orienting theme of Exodus. He argues that there is a cosmic purpose at play and, rather than simply a narrow focus on Israel as a people, Israel’s deliverance is ultimately for the sake of all of creation because ‘the earth is God’s’ (Exodus 9:25, 19:5) and to that effect Israel’s redemption has cosmic effects. If Israel’s redemption is creation-wide in scope, it means that ethically and morally Israel was duty-bound to care for the creation, not only for self-preservation but also for the glory of its Creator.

What God does to redeem Israel is therefore not an end in itself: ‘The experience of those events propels the people out into various creational spheres of life. Redemption is for the purpose of creation, a new life within the larger creation, a return to the world as God intended it to be’ (Fretheim, 1991:14). That moral and ethical responsibility, to which Israel is bound by virtue of the scope of God’s cosmic purpose, runs through the Pentateuch. The specific laws that are given for the care of animals and plants (Deuteronomy 20:19-20, 22:1-4, 6-7; Exodus 20:8-11, 23:4-5, 10-11; Leviticus 19:23-25) indicate that divinely ordained responsibility. The consequence of failing to live by those laws was banishment from the land (Leviticus 26:14-45). In the Pentateuch, therefore, we are confronted with a biblical witness to the covenant that binds God’s people, Israel and the land together (Anderson, 1994). The covenantal obligation goes beyond consideration for human survival to the flourishing of all that is. Accountability to God’s covenant required that God’s people respond conscientiously and with reverence to their environment.

In the prophetic books, the relationship between human society, the rest of creation and God is sustained. Humans are compared to animals, in some instances disparagingly – as in Isaiah 41:14 where Israel is pejoratively compared to a worm. In other instances, the prophets speak of creatures of another kind as ones that fulfil their God-given vocation putting human beings to shame. Isaiah 1:3 states: ‘The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know’ and Jeremiah 8:7: ‘Even the stork in the heavens knows its times; and the turtle dove, swallow and crane observe the time of their coming; but my people do not.’ The orderly actions within nature contrast with the erratic actions of human beings, underlining the suggestion of some ecological insight, albeit not sustained enough to make the point about care of the Earth to the extent that we experience it today.

Ecological disasters that affected human and non-human life befell Israel if she failed to live by the demands of the law of God (for example, Isaiah 5:8-10, 24:1-6; Jeremiah 5:23-25; 1 Kgs 18-18). Just as they are bound together in God’s judgment, once again we see how human and non-human life share in God’s redemption (Amos 9:11-15; Ezekiel 36, 47:1-12; Isaiah 11:6-9, 35:1-7). The shared destiny of human and non-human creation elevates the moral significance of the rest of creation unequivocally. It can no longer be a resource only for human use. The relationship, even when animals, plants and other natural things are used for food, must necessarily and fundamentally be one of reverence and not without reference to the Creator.

From the standpoint of my own cultural background, I know well the role of cultural mythologies based on nature. They are interwoven into everyday wise sayings and stories that are intended to impart morality. The hermeneutical lens for fullness of life and partnership with God and creation found in African philosophical frameworks, echoes the cultural mythologies derived from nature as partner, teacher and basis for wholeness of life. The rootedness of the African people in the land meant that traditionally the understanding of well-being and health began with healthy relationships with the divine and other (kind). The commodification of land and natural resources was unheard of because these were understood to be the basis of well-being on which all of life depended. Hence, land was held in community to ensure balance.

Disruption of climate called for self-interrogation and critique of the entire community because it entailed disruption of relationship. Coexistence with the earth in a healthy

relationship with the earth was important. To that extent, creation was acknowledged as a gift of God and, strictly speaking, throwing creation out of balance was a sin. The centring of the rights of the entire cosmos begins with that kind of understanding of human kinship with the rest of the community of life.

Isaiah 5 echoes that quest for balance when the prophet directs his critical attack on those who were bent on grabbing land: ‘Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of land’ (Isaiah 5:8). From the prophet’s mouth, come words on the type of environmental consequences and diminished fruitfulness such enclosure of land would lead to: ‘Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah’ (Isaiah 5:8-10). The prophet Micah indicts those who grab land in the same terms when he says about them, ‘They covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house and people and their inheritance’ (Micah 2:1-2). These prophecies echo the Pentateuch laws against encroaching on a neighbour’s land: ‘Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbour's boundary stone.’ God’s intervention in such a case was for these land grabbers to experience it for themselves when God visited them in retribution and, by agency of the Assyrian army, did to them what they had done to their own people.

White (1996) observed that traditional Western society, which only changed because of the introduction of technology, had a communal land tenure system. With the introduction of mechanised farming, land distribution was no longer according to family needs as it was in the past. The ability to cultivate the land with the aid of machines became the determinant of who owned how much land. Consequently, as White concludes, ‘Man’s relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature’ (White, 1996:188).

Whether this argument could be applied to land ownership today is debatable, but what cannot be denied is the stance taken by the prophets Isaiah and Micah (and indeed other prophets of their time) to defend the agricultural communal land ownership values. We may not read anything about environmental degradation, pollution and sustainability of the productivity of the land in these prophecies. To that effect, they may seem devoid of the ecological wisdom we seek to retrieve. What is contained in these prophecies is concern for

nature for its own sake and a commentary on human responsibility to maintain and nurture it (Dell, 2010).

Consequently, we may not conclude that the Bible has no ecological wisdom to offer. Yet what is accurate to say is that the ecological wisdom retrieved is not contingent on the biblical hermeneutic couched in previously Christianised Western societies, which became distanced from the earth as a result of the industrial revolution. Ecological wisdom from the Bible recalls what has been imbedded in it all along and which cannot be derived from it depending on how we choose to ‘hear’ the passage. To that extent, the ecological crisis itself has equipped us with new lenses that make it possible for us to apply an ecological critique to our reading of biblical passages. Traditional wisdom in many societies, including Africa, still harbours those insights and therefore offers us a hermeneutical posture that has potential to inform our reading of the Bible. The challenge to African and other traditional societies’ theological episteme is not to rewrite the Bible, but to read and re-read it in ways that enrich the entire Christian tradition. Consequently, we are not called upon merely to un-read what others have read but rather to contribute to the ongoing eco-theological discourse.

Wisdom literature is replete with imagery from nature that imparts knowledge of God and the wisdom by which to live one’s life (e.g. Job 12:7-8, 38-41; Proverbs 6:6-7, 8:22-31, 11:29-30, 12:10, 14:16, 22:1; 24:30-34; Pss. 19,104,148). I draw one example in which nature is invoked as teacher from Job 12:7-10:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.
Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?
In his hand is the life of every creature
and the breath of all mankind.

The passage from Job 12:7-10, which reads in part: ‘But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you’, has been touted as a celebratory passage from which

human beings can learn from the rest of non-human creation about their awareness of God the Creator (Devall & Sessions, 1985).

Buitendag (2013) pushes the boundary in that regard when he uses the wisdom literature passage of Proverbs 6:6 as a lens to make the point that reality/truth is a complex and collective endeavour and should be conceived of in terms of a constructive empiricism that transcends idealistic notions of reality. Buitendag applies Marais' work *The Soul of the White Ant*¹³ as an illustration that expands the contours of the epistemic community to include, in this case, the ant, but by extension, everything that is. Premised on the wave-particle dualism mode of understanding and the indeterminacy of reality, Buitendag proposes that Christianity's search for truth must lead to openness to 'truth of the whole' (Moltmann, 2003:7). That entails an exploration of truth that takes into account nature itself as teacher and revealer of truth. The very use of the ant's 'perspective' as entry point alters the way the wisdom passage is read. Biblical authors did not have the insights from science that we have today but their strong connection to the land and non-human world shaped outlooks and presuppositions that would educate our own attitudes today towards the environment.

As transmitter of wisdom, the natural world is understood as a dynamic participant (agent) in life. It, as it were, 'declare(s) the glory of God' (Ps. 19:1) and is a rich reservoir of what ecological wisdom we may retrieve from the wisdom literature of the Bible. Despite its imbedded riches of ecological potential, an understanding of the wisdom books is a relatively newcomer to eco-theological discourse. More attention has been paid to particularly the first two chapters of Genesis, which hold pride of place in discussions about the ecological relevance of Scripture. My own entry into eco-theological study was through that route. I wrote a master's thesis on Ubuntu cosmogony with reference to the first chapter of Genesis (c.f. Nalwamba, 2015). The bias towards Genesis has been credited with making White's indictment of Christianity as being in collusion with the root cause of the ecological destruction. What is/was read from the Genesis passages has been unwittingly generalised as being true of the entire Old Testament (Dell, 2010). However, the wisdom literature could not be more different with its rich use of imagery from creation.

¹³ In his *The Soul of the White Ant* (1937) originally written in Afrikaans and translated into English by Winifred de Kok, Eugene N Marais explored the organic unity of the termite colony and compared it with the human body. He developed an original theory based on that which Buitendag employs.

Some anthropocentrism has been attributed to the Job 12 passage for being brought up in the context of a discussion between Job and his three friends. On the other hand, Dell (2010:36) offers that ‘it is almost an attack on anthropocentrism’ for showing up human beings as not always possessing all the answers. She also, however, points out that the key element in this verse is the indication that what is at issue here is that ‘there is a relationship between the natural world and God which does not involve human beings, and in fact they have a lot to teach them’ (Dell, 2010:36). This is a potent indication of the ecological implications of wisdom literature.

The relegation of wisdom literature from the task of carving out an ecological hermeneutic is evident in mainstream focus on Old Testament views of covenant and salvation history which are absent from the wisdom books of the Bible. James Barr and John Barton, for instance, while appreciating the creation wisdom in wisdom literature could still not help critiquing the tradition for ‘the sorts of scientific and technological interests that it reveals which are not explicitly derived from the specific revelation of God to Israel’ (Barr & Barton, 2013:356). This assertion reduces the biblical text to a ‘boxed’ narrow thematic focus into which it is impossible to fit it.

From an appreciative angle, there are those, like Celia Drummond (among others) who have come to value wisdom literature as a commentary on Genesis. She approaches wisdom literature doctrinally, reflects on the creation and wisdom and draws practical wisdom for earth-care. She also speaks of wisdom personified (Deane-Drummond, 2008). Dell disavows the human-centric focus of wisdom and proposes that the interface of human beings, God and non-human nature (Dell, 2010:57) be recognised. She postulates that that interface is central to the ecological implications of wisdom literature. She presumes that would lead to fresh questions and insights into wisdom literature, with a proviso that the interpreter of those texts keeps in mind that its writers did not have environmental concerns on their mind when they wrote the texts – at least not environmental concern in scientific terms!

What the reader needs to bear in mind, rather, is the closeness to the land of the wisdom literature writers. They had a strong connection to non-human nature then which is not true in many parts of the anthropocene world today. Some of those approaches find an echo in the African culture from which vital force derives (see chapter 3). In that sense, the Christian biblical source and the traditional African source have some consonance in terms of the

attitudes towards nature that are conditioned by closeness to the land and which shape attitudes towards the surrounding natural environment. The flourishing, well-being and diversity of nature (human and non-human) depend on such attitudes.

Wisdom literature is rich with imagery that presents God in terms that recall nature (e.g. thunder, wind, fire, rock, etc.) but God is never presented as an aspect of nature or an extension of it. God has a life-sustaining relationship with nature (humans included) that intertwines with the roles of both human and non-human nature. It could be described as a triangular relationship. That interrelationship is captured in wisdom literature through imagery. Human characteristics are pithily captured through figures of speech drawn from the natural world. God is understood to be behind natural occurrences like rain, thunder, fire or as summoning the wind, for instance (Prov. 25:23). Aspects of human behaviour are captured through ‘basic observations, similes, metaphors and antithetical comparisons all of which use animal, plant or other references’ (Dell, 2010:59).

Wisdom literature discloses a sense of wonder about creation (Eccl. 3:18-21; Job 28; Ps. 104) which echoes the Genesis 1 declaration of creation’s intrinsic goodness. Its role in sustaining life and as a reminder of God’s presence within and beyond is doxological. In the Gospels, we encounter Jesus in his ecological context. It has been argued that Jesus had closeness to the natural world because of his use of examples from the flora and fauna of his context. I concur with the counter argument, that those references are used either figuratively or are intended to make a religious point, but not to affirm nature as such (Bauckham, 2011). The animals and plants mentioned indicate that Jesus had an intimate knowledge of his natural surroundings. Dodd (1961:20) suggests that Jesus’ reference to his natural surroundings is not superficial but ‘arises from a conviction that there is no mere analogy, but an inward affinity between the natural order and the spiritual order’ alluding to the fact that ‘the Kingdom of God is intrinsically like the process of nature of the daily life.’

Bauckham (2011:70-71) goes beyond that assertion by noting that Jesus presumed the creation theology of the Scriptures of Israel was centred on the belief that God created all things (c.f. Luke 10:21; Mark 10:6; Matthew 11:25, 19:19), even though that forms an important backdrop against which to read the gospels from an ecological perspective. Matthew, Mark and Luke offer some ecological dimensions of Jesus’ story that locate human beings in the midst of the rest of creation. The gospel stories are set within created

community. Jesus' own teaching about the Kingdom of God is often couched in language derived from the natural environment. The coming Kingdom that he proclaims as redemption signals a relationship between human beings and the non-human creation. His teaching does not divorce nature from the salvation of human beings. As such, the salvation plan that Jesus reveals is understood in terms that affirm creation and not one that seeks to destroy or replace it (Bryle, 2010). The new social order that Jesus proclaimed which began with him hibernating in the wild (Mark 1:13) would thus neither be human- (nor male-) centred, but would liberate all of creation (Conradie, 2006) because it stems from a cosmic scope of the Kingdom of God. That aspect is also evident in Matthew's (6:9-10) version of the Lord's Prayer. God's will being done 'on earth as it is in heaven' predicates the three petitions in the prayer. God is acknowledged as Creator, and whose will in the natural and spiritual world is echoed in one breath signalling the wholeness of creation as well as its interrelated nature. This hopeful ecological view within the Gospels has eschatological implications echoed in subsequent books of the Bible.

The Epistles and the book of Revelation echo ecological wisdom in their reference to God as the Creator. The apocalyptic references in both have shaped the Christian eschatological views that depict the earth as temporal from which believers will be rescued. Its destiny is portrayed as destruction in the apocalyptic infernal. The earth from that point of view will be destroyed and replaced by something other than what we have at present. That understanding has the implication that, at best, care for the earth is secondary (if it matters at all) and at worst, it represents the evil that is opposition to God and which must be resisted (Bryle, 2010). Just like White's (1967) critique of the use of the biblical story to justify the objectification and utilitarian view of creation, the view that the earth will be destroyed raises questions about the negative attitudes among Christians that are shaped by this belief¹⁴. The belief is not unfounded in that we read (on the face of it) in Genesis 1 and 2 that human beings are given the mandate to have dominion over creation. In 2 Peter 3 we are confronted with a narration of creation coming to an end, in a fire that would wipe away the heavens and the earth (vv. 10-12) while in Revelation 21:1 a picture emerges of a new heaven and a new earth. In the face of these assertions from the biblical text, the question to consider is whether these eschatological predictions are determinative or whether they are figurative and could be framed within the broader overarching themes of the Bible. Secondly, we need to ask what

¹⁴ Maier's chapter in Horrel et al. (2010) explores this subject.

insights exist in these very books that would nurture positive, biblically inspired attitudes towards creation.

That the cosmic extent of the work of Christ is affirmed in these books of the Bible is a hopeful place to begin. Bryle (2010) deals with the text of Romans 8:18-25 from a broader view, perceiving it as a part of Scripture read for the purpose of engaging with the global concern of the ecological crisis. He offers a consideration that the verses that refer to the groaning of creation be read within the broader context of the book of Romans itself. And according to Bryle (2010:83-83), that broader context can be understood in terms of ‘the complex (‘overlap’) eschatology of believers’ present existence; the interplay of grace and sin, and the symbolic role of Adam as instrument of sin; the consequences for creation of human existence as embodied.’

Bryle (2010) sums it up by drawing attention, firstly, to the Christian believers who have to live concurrently in the promised life and the ‘now’ as the complex overlap that the believer Paul’s eschatology addressed in chapters 5 to 8. Secondly, he explores the bodily existence of believers as the basis for Paul’s seemingly abrupt introduction of the groaning creation. Bodily existence necessarily brings people into closer relationship with non-human creation in which believers have to exist within ‘opposing “tugs”’ (Bryle, 2010:87) of the two dispensations of which they are part, and to which reference is made in the first point. Thirdly, he explains to what the eager longing of creation refers. His view is different from the traditional view that construes the longing to be related merely because of suffering the punishment after Adam’s original sin, where the ‘longing together’ of creation with mankind is a direct reference to human wrongdoing. There is, according to this view, no direct punitive causality relationship between human sin in Genesis 3 and the suffering of the non-human created order. The story of human sin cannot counter the grace story of what Christ has done for humans and the rest of creation. Rather the longing is presented in terms of the eschatological hope of what Christ has accomplished, not only for human salvation but also by a thoroughgoing redemptive action.

The conclusion then is that environmental destruction is ranked with ingrained human sin that only the grace emanating from the Christ-event can cancel. The reference to the sin of Adam (8:19-22) could therefore be applied to ecological destruction which fits in with the first argument of the complex ‘overlap’ in which believers exist as people tainted with the original

sin yet as people living out the terms of the new dispensation of the new life which Christ has made possible. Because Paul is concerned with the ingrained sin, it is plausible then to argue that the struggle with ingrained sin is also at the root of ecological destruction and is subject to the redemption that Christ offers which, as earlier stated, is cosmic in its scope.

The assertion that God created everything and that it is therefore good, is what fundamentally anchors what the Christian Scriptures say about creation. It is the hinge on which the interrelated cosmos rests – it originates in God, is sustained by God and finds ultimate fulfilment in God. This belief is re-affirmed throughout Scripture and echoed in the Epistles and Revelation, as the following examples indicate:

Everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving' (1 Timothy 4:4);

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their *faithful Creator* and continue to do good (1 Peter 4:19);

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you *created all things*, and by your will *they were created and have their being* (Revelation 4:11);

And he swore by him who lives forever and ever, *who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it*, and said, 'There will be no more delay' (Revelation 10:6).

This was later to be echoed in the credal confession 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth' (Anderson, 1994:236).

What I have outlined represents the ecologically promising aspects of the biblical tradition. The argument that the Bible holds a seemingly pure human-focus is borne out by constant reference to human beings and is heeded. Seeking to retrieve and outline positively what I consider to be ecologically relevant insights from the biblical tradition, is my attempt to augment my earlier claim that I stand alongside scholars who affirm that there is enough ecological wisdom in the Christian tradition. Furthermore, for there to be a distinctively Christian contribution to ecological discourse, derived from distinctively Christian resources, there is need to establish what it is and the rationale for the claim.

In this discussion, we have arrived at the affirmation of the goodness of nature, its intrinsic value and its place in God's cosmic purposes. We have asserted that this affirmation can be

substantiated from the biblical tradition itself, even while taking cognisance of the ambiguities and contradictions within it. That disposition will stand theologians in good stead when Christianity dialogues with other points of view. The quest to learn about and to critique our own tradition is to avoid oversimplifying what the Bible has to say and hence fall into ‘the trap of an all too shallow form of natural theology’ (Conradie, 2005:47). Reading the Bible with an ecological lens minimises that risk, as it establishes that Christianity indeed does bring something distinctively Christian to the dialogue. That in turn reduces the fear that some Christian quarters express that any dialogue with non-Christian views risks a levelling of differences among the different discourses. I am of the view that any levelling may only occur if the ecological insights from each perspective are conflated. Such amalgamation of views is likely to happen if the specific Christian contribution based on the truth claims of the Christian scriptures are not established to set the contours of the engagement. This section on biblical understanding, in this study, serves the particular purpose of establishing those contours.

The evaluation of biblical texts from an ecological perspective has drawn us to the interrelated processes within nature. Firstly, they show the interaction between human beings and those very natural processes as well as the interaction among human beings themselves. From a theological perspective, that interaction is apprehended in terms of a relationship between the natural processes and human beings and the relationship of both to/with God. Secondly, evaluation of the Scriptures brings to the fore the well-being and flourishing of the entire community of life – human and non-human, organic and inorganic. We are confronted with how nature in its entire spectrum of abundance and variety is portrayed as essentially good and splendid (Genesis 1), and as something to be beheld in wonder and awe (Psalm 104) as God’s creation. Thirdly, God is portrayed as the sustainer of creation. The latter is what set belief in a creator God apart from nature-faiths in biblical times. The creator God of the Bible, unlike that of the nature-faiths, cannot be conceived of as an aspect of creation. Yahweh God, though depicted using nature-metaphors in the biblical text, is never personified in any facet of nature. Elements of nature elevate our understanding of God without threatening the Christian belief in a God who is transcendent over creation and is the One who sustains it.

The sustenance of creation is an important entry point for our discussion as it entails the interaction between God, human beings and the non-human world. That triangular,

interwoven interaction within the natural processes of creation in reference to God (without disallowing God's direct intervention in the natural processes) is what opens up a refreshing paradigm which this study explores in the quest to establish the eco-pneumatological potential of vital force as a concept of the S(s)pirit and nature. The pneumatological entry point is important because it tempers the sense of 'otherness' within creation and presumes an ontology that begins with everything being created and indwelt by the Spirit of God, thereby according a 'point of view' to all that is (Dell, 2010) as participant and imbued with potential to reveal the supernatural (McGrath, 2008).

2.5 ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Cultures shape human minds and cultures are shaped by underlying convictions that stem from religion. Interchanges between human beings and the rest of creation are shaped by such convictions. A retrieval of sources from the Christian tradition and the African tradition, which this study attempts, is conditioned by that understanding. Yet Christianity's environmental ethic formulation 'has for the most part been following, not setting, a general cultural trend' Wilkinson (1987:7) observes. She identifies Franciscan nature spirituality to Eastern Orthodoxy, to Anabaptism and to Kuyperian Calvinism as being 'green' movements that were part of something much larger – the cultural and religious movements of their time (Wilkinson, 1987). Wilkinson's reflection is more than three decades old.

What has changed in the interim period is that environmental consciousness has grown among Christians of all persuasions. What has not changed, however, is the formulation of a contemporary Christian environmental ethic that is not simply imbedded within a matrix of various disciplines and traditions, but can be said to be a counter-cultural ethic for our time that recasts our perception of ourselves and the world around us as human beings.

The quest to carve out an alternative way of perceiving reality beyond the mechanistic view that has caused the ecological crisis has been a balancing act. The church has come a long way and there are recognisable strides to mark that journey but it is one that has always been fraught with controversy; it is an inherent balancing act of the harmony and consonance that exist in the quest for a moral stance towards ecological concerns. The interrelatedness of nature, even when we affirm it and hold a particular position in that regard, compels us to ask repeatedly whose interests would be served by the good we profess in our ethic. Bly's (1980:9) retrospective critical appraisal of the Church is searing:

The Church at the start of the Christian era did not know whether to accept the ancient view that we share consciousness with nature or declare a new era. The Church Fathers were afraid to open the door to many visions for fear the ancient world would simply flood the Church. As it happened, the Church rejected the Mysteries, smashed the temples, destroyed the relating texts and lost the doctrines.

James Nash's assertion that the ecological crisis is not 'a single, discrete problem, but rather a massive mosaic of intertwined problems' (1991:23) is most apt. In his estimation, the phrase 'environmental problem' is inadequate. He likens it to calling a nuclear conflagration a fire. He notes that the term both understates and underrates the nature and effects of the global ecological crisis. He also notes that apart from the consequent issues of the crisis itself being immense, intricate and interwoven, the magnitude of its effects is global in scale. Nash sums up his assessment by noting that the crux of the matter is that ecological issues are principally ethical.

That means the Christian ethical responsibility emphatically entails furthering life and denying death-dealing forces in society, including the ecological crisis we face. It follows that 'human moral attentiveness to the needs of persons and creatures is both central to finding meaning and purpose in human life, and to sustaining the ecological habitability of the earth' (Northcott & Scott, 2014:9) not only for human benefit but also for the whole community of life.

The understanding that human beings and other creatures share a common origin and capacity for experience means that the ecological crisis affects other creatures in the same way that it affects humans. The capacity for pain and suffering of other creatures shifts our focus from a purely anthropocentric focus to an ecological focus that takes seriously the subjectivity of other creatures. That, however, cannot be the only criterion for human ethical responsibility nor can it be taken as an uncritical guide on how humans should act. There has to be balance with reasonable accommodation, for instance, with respect to the food chain. Interdependence has built within it the fact of death to ensure the survival of the species. The practical application of relatedness has to take into account ecological and evolutionary processes in nature. It cannot be so thoroughgoing that there is not room for the feeding on each other that is a factor within the food chain and which ensures survival of the whole. In

that regard, the preservation of the larger whole may take precedence over the individual rights and the pain and suffering of individual animals for instance (Sideris, 2003).

Land ethics have implications for amplifying the role of human beings as carers rather than controllers of the earth. While respecting natural forces and processes, we should strive to discern the value inherent in nature separate from instrumentalism and resonating more with a theo-centric understanding of ethics. Thus, the guiding values go beyond human interests.

There is a gamut of ecological schools seeking to give voice to the ecological crisis. Each has a different or differently nuanced emphasis. For instance, *environmental ecology* emphasises the need for human beings to live in harmony with nature. Maintaining ecological balance is the prior issue. *Utilitarian ecology* makes no distinction between human and animal life and therefore no distinction between the respective rights of either. *Deep ecology* takes the view that where nature has rights, human beings have duties. The human is thereby identified as predator; nature is considered as a subject. For that reason, the earth (Gaia) is construed to be a living entity that breathes and gives birth to humans and all life in its realm (Minnerath, 2014). Human life is considered merely as one among a variety of components of the cosmic ecosystem.

The common ground that holds the different schools of ecology is the concern about the extent of environmental degradation and the conviction that something needs to change about how human beings relate to nature. This study shares that view, and is inspired by it, without subscribing to the views of any one of the three schools in totality. The other point of agreement is that analysis (some of which I have mentioned above) of the ecological crisis has been done and there is consensus that the crisis is a matter of urgency. The need for action as a consequence of the analysis, cannot be overemphasised or denied.

Christian action is necessarily ethical and calls for responsibility with clear objectives based on deep convictions that arise from the core of the Christian faith. Ethical responsibility, which both inspires hope and also points to a precise direction, is what we need to validate the work that has been put into addressing the ecological crisis thus far. The Accra Confession is an example of a precise direction of hope that has arisen from Christian efforts towards ecological justice.

2.6 ACCRA CONFESSION

The 2004 Accra Confession (see Appendix III) emanated from the urgent call by the Southern African constituency of the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches (WARC), which sat in 1995 in the town of Kitwe in Zambia to recognize increased global economic injustices and ecological destruction as major issues that affect humanity today. The call to member churches was to enter into what they termed ‘a process of recognition, education and confession’.

It is against this background that the 24th WARC General Assembly held in Accra (Ghana) resolved that ‘never again’ would the church sit back and watch the groaning of humanity and creation. The assembly observed that the current signs of the time made it plain to both the church and wider society that the misfortunes that had befallen humanity and all creation denied ‘God’s call to life’. The Accra WARC Assembly further highlighted the shame of poverty (especially ‘engendered’ poverty) as a scandal witnessed in many parts of the world, and in Africa in particular.

In view of the above, the 24th WARC general assembly acknowledged that the current state of affairs had worsened because of unequal relations between trading nations of the South and North as well as unjust economic systems and ecological degradation. Transnational corporations were singled out as the foremost perpetrators of the latter because of their unlimited growth, which is driven by profit, thereby compromising the dignity and integrity of God’s creation.

WARC’s response to the above-mentioned issues found expression in the 24th general assembly making a commitment of faith, which they called a ‘Confession’. That confession has come to be known as the Accra Confession. The assembly affirmed that, according to the reformed tradition and its reading of signs of times, drawing attention to and covenanting to end global economic justice was imperative if the dignity of humanity and the integrity of creation were to be upheld (Appendix 13:2). To this effect, WARC invited its member churches to respond by advocating for a just world economic order that takes all of creation into account, in the following terms:

We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (Jn. 10:10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.

We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’ (Ps. 24:1).

Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.

(Accra Confession, Articles 17, 18, 19)

The Accra WARC assembly further challenged its member churches to commit to action in the following words of the Confession:

We believe that any economy of the household of life given to us by God’s covenant to sustain life is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and well-being of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.

Therefore, we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God’s creation.

We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Ps. 146:7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.

(Accra Confession, Articles 22, 23, 24)

The ethical implications for the church that emanate from the Accra Confession are self-explanatory. The confession ‘We humbly confess this hope, knowing that we, too, stand under the judgement of God’s justice. We confess our sin in misusing creation and failing to play our role as stewards and companions of nature’ (Accra Confession, Article 34:4) enunciates the church’s frailty as well as its responsibility. The question one may ask is how the member churches of WARC (now WCRC) hold one another accountable in view of the 2004 covenant. Let me illustrate my point with two examples, one negative and the other positive in relation to the Confession from my own context.¹⁵

¹⁵ I speak as a church worker in a member church of the WCRC here.

The Zambian government approved the mining licence of an Australian mining firm to engage in copper mining on a large scale, in the middle of pristine land in Kangaluwi mine in the Lower Zambezi National Park (LZNP) area, for a period of twenty-five years. This game reserve is home to different animal species, and is also the water course of the Zambezi River basin and sustains the life of the people, flora and fauna in that area. The Zambia Environmental Management Authority (ZEMA) and the Parliamentary Committee on Lands opposed the idea, citing the grave ecological consequences of undertaking that venture (see Appendix II).

The mining venture, if approved, would disturb the ecosystem, pollute the river, displace animals and cause deforestation, among other things. According to a November 2014 evaluation assessment report commissioned by the Lower Zambezi Tourism Association (LZTA), the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which supported the government decision to sanction the project, was based on flawed documentation, apart from the well-known fact that open-pit mining is incompatible with biodiversity (Leigh, 2014). Leigh's report further states that according to the findings of LZTA report, 'there is high and long-term risk to the health and well-being of communities, wildlife and the environment from this project, as well as cross-border implications from the shared Zambezi River water resource' (Leigh, 2014:5).

Despite such predictable environmental damage that would result from this venture, the government, through its Minister of Environment, Land and Natural Resources, went ahead to issue a mining licence to the mining conglomerate. Organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and other non-governmental organisations concerned about environmental issues in Zambia, challenged the matter through the courts of law. The government has remained adamant and seems intent on continuing with plans to grant mining licences for the region.

The voice of the church in this matter has been absent from the beginning. The United Church of Zambia (UCZ) and other churches in Zambia, which are party to the Accra Confession by virtue of being members of WCRC, have remained silent on the matter. The silence begs the question about the implementation of the Accra Confession in practice. I make this observation simply to illustrate the gap that may exist between a theologically

sound confession for earth-care and actual action that bears out the conviction expressed in its intent.

The United Church of Zambia (UCZ)'s most visible ecologically-focused effort is an annual service at one of its congregations, St. Andrew's in Lusaka. The service is held under the auspices of the Council for World Mission (CWM) Oikotree platform.¹⁶ The UCZ also participates in a tree planting and eco-education programme sponsored by the Finnish Embassy that is carried out at one of its girls' high schools in the Chisamba area of Central Province at the personal initiative of a concerned science teacher.¹⁷

It has been acknowledged that the people of Africa 'have been influenced by a cosmology inherited from the West: the mechanistic perspective that views all things as lifeless commodities to be understood scientifically and to be used for human ends' (Sindima, 1990:137). Construction of theologies that would appropriate local cosmological insights and grapple with the dualistic domination-mechanistic model is therefore called for.

Despite being in covenant with other member churches, there is a dearth of alternative theological constructs for earth-keeping within Zambian Christianity in general and the UCZ in particular. The theological integration of African wisdom and resources from sources based on other traditions is a highly controversial issue in Zambia. The fear of syncretism (mostly inherited from Western missionary attitudes towards African culture) stands in the way of the Church's outlook, which is yet to be theologically liberated from missionary Christianity. For that reason, it continues to perpetuate the prevalence of the dualistic mind-set; and for that reason, the mission of the UCZ has yet to reflect the commitments of the Accra Confession in practice.

If life-affirming perspectives gain traction in the Church's theological discourse and praxis, it is possible to displace incrementally the long-held anthropocentric focus of our understanding of the church's mission (Nalwamba, 2014).

¹⁶ Oikotree is the fruit of the vision of the Accra Confession (2004) and is a collaborative effort by Council for World Mission (CWM), World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). It aims to create a movement for those seeking to live faithfully in the midst of economic injustice and ecological destruction and to pursue alternatives in response to socio-economic issues in various contexts and engages in difference areas of social justice issues. The name 'Oikotree' is taken with reference to Revelations 22:1-2, that refers to 'the tree of life' (see <http://www.cwmission.org/programmes/justice-witness/oikotree/>.)

¹⁷ The author served as chaplain at Chipembi Secondary School from May to December 2009 around the time the eco-education and tree planting programme was launched at the school.

The next chapter explores the concept of vital force, locating it within this study as a life-centred, pneumatological and relational idea that can contribute to a shift from such anthropocentric focus as referred to above.

CHAPTER 3: AFRICAN VITAL FORCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The notion of vital force recalls the belief that human beings form part of the community of life within the realm of the cosmic spirit. That assertion may seem like a truism that should not require any further enunciation within Christianity. However, belief in the Creator-Spirit, a pneumatological understanding of creation, is relatively young in the Christian tradition. In Colossians 1:15-20, Christ is presented as instrumental to creation. Christian tradition has often understood and presented creation in Christological terms.

The *filioque* issue of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, which I discuss in the next chapter, is based on that and is a question that requires revision in light of a pneumatological view of creation. Christian complicity to causing the ecological crisis, as outlined in the previous chapter, is arguably an indication that the foundational belief in a Spirit-Creator-God has not historically characterised or undergirded Christian belief about creation.

The Christian faith therefore stands to benefit from ‘companion’ and alternative ways of seeing the world that affirm the cosmic Spirit and go beyond Christianity. The African notion of vital force understands spirit to be at the centre of the universe, which is conceived as an organic whole. The web of life, understood to have been brought into being, is sustained by and inhabited by the vital force and apprehended in terms of the cosmic Spirit.

The retrieval of the concept of vital force is justified for that reason, if only to call the Christian faith back to its originating intuitions about creation. Further, this study seeks to bring the African cultural notion of vital force into dialogue within the purview of Christian pneumatology. Christianity has grown exponentially, in numerical terms on the African continent. It follows then, according to the historical nature of its transmission, that Christianity should at this juncture, be in dialogue with the host African culture to the extent that it should leave an imprint. Andrew Walls (1984:1) has argued that

From Pentecost to the twentieth century, Christian history ... represents its embodiment in a major cultural area, which has meant that ... it has taken an impress from that culture. In each phase, the expression of the Christian faith has developed features, which could only have originated in that culture whose impress it has taken within that phase.

Further still, the retrieval of the concept of vital force for appropriation for eco-pneumatology reflects a pressing issue of our time, namely, the ecological crisis we face. It is in keeping with the Christian tradition that Christian literature, including the Bible, reflects the pressing questions of our time. Hence, theological expression and the transmission of the Christian faith in our time are couched in terms of the ecological crisis as the pressing issue with which we need to wrestle.

Transmission of the Christian faith based on the conviction that all creation is God's beloved acknowledges the special vocation of human beings as members of the cosmic community connected/related to the rest of creation through the cosmic Spirit. An ecological critique is therefore meaningful for a renewed appreciation of community and shifts from an anthropocentric focus, reflects the cosmic relatedness and brings a renewed vision of the universe as a cosmic community of the Spirit. This pneumatological, relational understanding has implications for ecclesiology, thereby potentially exerting influence on the church's own self-understanding and ways of being in the world.

African experience, cultural and intellectual resources based on a relational conception of reality provide a lens for that kind of being. African Christianity is therefore a factor among the peculiarities that would condition and inform theology in our time. In addition, by virtue of its exponential spread, if the lens it provides in this regard is taken seriously, the impact on shaping a Christian mind for an ecological response inspired by the understanding of the cosmic Spirit, would be immense.

The African contribution envisioned, with its focus on the interrelatedness of being, is offered within a triad (triangulation), with firstly, the Christian pneumatological understanding of *Creator Spiritus Sanctus*, which offers a participatory and relational hermeneutic (see chapter 4), and secondly, with Faraday's force field theory (see chapter 5) within the understanding of 'power which electrical currents may possess of inducing any particular state upon matter in their immediate neighbourhood, otherwise indifferent' (Faraday, 1849:1). In that regard, vital forces which derive from African thought, Christian theology and the scientifically derived notion of force field are triangulated in this study to nuanced views of the creator Spirit, thereby enriching its potential for an eco-pneumatological hermeneutic.

The telling of the story of the universe cannot be confined to one view. Conradie (2013) offers some advice in this regard when he suggests that we should

tell the story of the universe in such a way that we can again live by this story. The plausibility of the claim that the world is God's own creation depends on the use of the best available knowledge (scientific and otherwise) of our day. However, the message cannot be derived from that. It is a message that should, in our context, inspire resistance against capitalist exploitation, consumerist greed, cultural alienation and domination in the name of differences of gender, race, class, species and kind.

(Conradie, 2013:12)

It is against that background that this chapter explores the African concept of vital force beginning with a broad exploration of its background, its dimensions and its potential for an eco-pneumatological application. The presupposition then, as alluded to in the hypothesis, is that the African notion of vital force as a companion in the ensuing dialogue has potential to inform Christian ecological reflection. It is a resource that could inform and shape Christian ecological responsibility and action, not only in Africa, but also be a cultural gift that the African brings to the Christian family.

3.2 VITALISM: BACKGROUND

Vitalism as a philosophical concept has its origins in life-oriented movements that sought to challenge a civilisation that had become intellectualistic and in many respects considered as anti-life. The contestation about life, which led to sharp contrasts between that deemed to be living as opposed to dead or non-living, was quite intricate. The distinction between what was living and what was dead became a criterion for cultural criticism among cultural theorists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson and George Simmel. Traditional ways were examined in the light of whether they represented authentic life or they denied life (Schnadelbach, 1984).

Vitalism has also been critiqued in biology where it is understood as something separate from bodies and as that which animates bodies. The argument probably goes back to Gilbert Ryle's 1949 critique of a 'ghost in the machine' in reference to intentional agency (Ryle, 2015). His was a critique of the traditional Cartesian doctrine of the mind-body dualism and the ghost-like way of understanding vitalism. In the estimation of some, Ryle's view dealt Cartesian

dualism a fatal blow by depicting the mind as a philosophical illusion concocted by the Cartesian categories.

Fredrick Gowland Hopkins (1913), the first professor of biochemistry at Cambridge, rejected vitalistic and mechanistic reductionistic ways of understanding life and opted instead for one based on principles of physical chemistry and thermodynamics within organised molecular structures and functions. In his book, *What is Life?*, physicist Erwin Schrödinger (1944) applied quantum physics to the understanding and definition of life and came to the conclusion that, in the interaction between organisms and their environments, there was a balance between entropy¹⁸ and negative entropy. In his words:

Every process, event, happening - call it what you will; in a word, everything that is going on in Nature means an increase of the entropy of the part of the world where it is going on. Thus, a living organism continually increases its entropy – or, as you may say, produces positive entropy – and thus tends to approach the dangerous state of maximum entropy, which is of death. ... It can only keep aloof from it, i.e. alive by continually drawing from its environment negative entropy – which is something very positive. ... (In other words) ... the essential thing in metabolism is that the organism succeeds in freeing itself from all the entropy it cannot help producing while alive.

(Schrödinger, 1944)

The drawing of negative entropy from its environment means there is a continual exchange of energy on which the survival of the organism depends, or, as Buitendag (2012:4) puts it: ‘Through the exchange of energy, life is consolidated and equilibrium is averted’¹⁹.

In my view, vital force is an anti-reductionist notion that seeks to say something about the way organisms move. In other words, it is about the discernment of movement (i.e. energy). The concept of vitalism can be retrieved as long as the ghost-like way of speaking is avoided. In humans this has to do with charisma, personality and a sense of purpose, as earlier stated. This view seems to me to be akin to the antireductionism that Hopkins and Schrödinger postulate from their respective perspectives, namely biochemistry and quantum physics.

¹⁸ A measurable physical quantity of the specific heat of any given substance which when altered sets in motion a process towards a chaotic state (Schrödinger, 1944)

¹⁹ ‘Deur die uitruil van energie word lewe gekontinueer en die fatale toestand van ekwilibrium afgeweer.’

David Kelsey (2009) in his book titled, *Eccentric Existence*, develops a theological anthropology based on what he dubs a triple helix that is fundamentally Trinitarian and reformed. Kelsey probes the question of what it means to be human. He deals with that complex question theologically by locating it in a relationship with God in which God is the subject, a departure from the Kantian position that the human is firstly a thinking subject. In Kelsey's theological anthropology, God actively relates to human beings in three main ways: firstly, God creates human beings; secondly, God is presented as being eschatologically present at the consummation of history; and thirdly, God is committed to reconcile human beings when they are alienated. The tripartite modes of this human relationship with God correspond to the person-triune identity of God. Kelsey posits that the 'ultimate context in which we must be understood is God relating to us' (Kelsey, 2009:46). This nuanced understanding of human beings affirms human beings' relationship with God and with one another – and by extension with all of created reality – that is not premised on an absolutised episteme, but rather one that suggests a trajectory that critiques traditional approaches. He does not drive his theological anthropology towards a unity, which could tend to be reductionist; rather he presents an alternative way of understanding that is 'organized in a triplex way rather than in the conventionally binary way' (Kelsey, 2009:447).

The presentation of the triple helix as three concentric circles signals the dynamism of the relationship, its outward disposition and lack of subordination of either mode. Kelsey is wary of the marginalisation of modes of relating to God if they are presented in a binary rather than in a multiple mode of relationship. He disavows 'a nonreciprocal way that effectively subordinates one way in which God is said to relate to the other way, theologically marginalizing the way of relating that is made subordinate' (Kelsey, 2009:473). Essentially what Kelsey achieves in his 2009 book is what he alluded to in an earlier work in which he called for the recovery of 'a full-blown doctrine of creation as a mode of relation to God other than relationships in consciousness' without marginalising the 'material dimensions of human life' (Kelsey, 1985:192). He turns to Wisdom literature to account for humans as created as well, and to the triple helix structure as a tool for the enunciation of a doctrine of creation that transcends the theological anthropologies that relegated the material world to the margins.

His triologue of creation, redemption and eschatology is not without its critics. Komline's review essay in the *Journal of Reformed Theology* (2012) points to the asymmetry in the

triple helix, which seems to be skewed in favour of creation's favour. Komline points to the imbalance that seems evident in Kelsey when he allows in his tripartite model of human existence a reciprocity that is not evident in his own tripartite proposition. According to Komline, the modes of God's relationship with God through creation and reconciliation seem to overshadow the third leg of the Kelsey's tripod, namely, the eschatological mode. The eschatological mode is associated with the Spirit, creation with the Father and reconciliation with the Son. The structure of the triple helix, therefore, 'entails an asymmetry that stands in tension with the *filioque*' (Komline, 2012:67). The analogy with the Trinitarian dynamic provides a point of contact that suggests wholeness-in-distinction within the human person, which is also mirrored in nature. The outwards disposition is achieved through dynamic interrelationship – the 'eccentricity' that may, for the purposes of this study, be accounted for by the vital force.

Vitalism, as grounding for critical theory, has been contested mainly due to the forms that it has tended to take in the past, namely, mysticism and occultism (Jones, 2012:57). Some philosophers discount it altogether as a basis for any critical theory even while maintaining life's cultural resonance and power in light of the life-threatening emergence of ecological questions and the power of technology (Jones, 2012:4). While critical of vitalism, Jones is able to affirm that

Life cannot be reduced to physicochemical matter and the emergent properties of life, and the ascending nature of living systems cannot be understood in terms of mechanistic or quantitative science modelled on the operation of machines or Newtonian physics.

(Jones, 2012:4-5)

Nancey Murphy holds a similar view and disavows reductionism in defining human nature and, by extension, nature in general. Murphy advances a two-pronged argument, firstly she is against reductionism and advocates for upward causation (emergence). Secondly, she argues for self-direction by and autonomy of the human being in choosing behaviour based on moral reasons. This self-direction, she believes, derives from use of selected information from the environment, which the human being uses to make choices.

Murphy (2006:89-91) thus concludes that there is within human nature an ability to represent oneself as an aspect of one's own processes. Because of that self-evaluation and the ability to make choices along with self-transcendence and language, the means for humans to escape

biological determinism are provided. In her view, these qualities are compatible with what neurosciences have revealed about human beings thus supporting her thesis that human beings are 'spirited bodies'. She also speaks of free will and moral responsibility in the same vein.

Murphy argues against physicalism from scientific data and notes the dearth of scientific support for the dualism that has shaped Christian understanding for ages. She understands God's actions in the world as being at a quantum²⁰ level. Within that conception, there can be no conflict with natural causation within nature for that reason. If nature is understood as a 'physical' being, then from this perspective it is possible to say with Murphy (2006:131) that 'the natural world is intrinsically incomplete and open to divine action at its most basic level.' Moreover, if there be openness to divine action at that most basic level, would it not then be probable to argue that God is (ontologically?) present to that effect in all of creation?

Despite her critique of vitalism, Jones affirms that life cannot be understood in reductionist terms. She notes how the debate about vitalism has transcended everyday scientific concepts and reached for something more that is grounded in life. She characterises that 'something' as being 'both biologicistic and spiritualist, naturalist and theological' and that it 'may not have an essence but only be the name for the set of multiple doctrines and movements premised on life variously understood' (Jones, 2012:7). Hence, to that extent, Murphy and Jones make the same basic point.

The general notion of vitalism is polysemic as evidenced by its historical contestation. The case is similar to the case of its derivative, the African notion of vital force that this study explores. The polysemous nature of the concept of vitalism could arguably be said to be parallel to the polysemy of life itself. I contend that the very polysemic nature of the concept is what makes it amenable to retrieval for the eco-pneumatological appropriation that this study attempts.

The attempt to retrieve the African vital force in this study is premised on the understanding that despite the historical critique of vitalism as a concept, it can be applied both as a term for the critique and the celebration of life. The rehashing of its contested nature and history in

²⁰ This is understood here as the minimum amount of an entity involved in an interaction.

this chapter is not intended to adjudicate the various positions of the polysemous nature of the concept. Rather, it is to acknowledge the significance of the debate itself and to locate the retrieval attempted here of the African idea of vital force within that broader discourse. However, more importantly, I see the need to transcend the historical debate, to step out of that contested space and to make a case for the adequacy of the concept for the envisioned eco-pneumatological appropriation.

Deane-Drummond gives an appreciative appraisal of the value of going back to sources of ecological wisdom and taking serious insights that emerge from the various lenses. Each has potential to reveal nature as something to be esteemed as God's creation. However, she warns about the danger of polarisation of insight that arises from the different human perceptions of nature. Idolisation of nature (as is the case in deep ecology) may also be possible if the concept of vital force being appropriated metaphorically in this study is idealised rather than critically engaged with. Deane-Drummond's appraisal is worth appreciating in full here:

It is also possible to learn from ... historical work that there are resources buried in the Western tradition that are more than the caricature of exploitation, capitalism and aggression implied by all liberation theologies. An idolisation of nature in its native wildness is also dangerous in as much as it fosters the belief that human beings have little or no hope of creating solutions to environmental problems. In addition, a simple appropriation of, for example, spiritual traditions from indigenous cultures in a piecemeal way may have good intentions, but it can also lead to further marginalisation by exclusion from an equal place in the socio-economic sphere. This is the mirror image of the problems with much of liberation theology, where inclusion in of one group or 'class' in socio-economic processes undermines other aspects of indigenous culture.

(Deane-Drummond, 2008:53)

I appreciate the African concept of vital force, particularly for its anti-reductionist view of nature, which in Kelsey's parlance is eccentricity. That quality is postulated as a critique of the reductionist ways and mechanistic approaches to nature that ultimately lead to the domination of the rest of creation by humans. African vital force could therefore form a basis for an eco-pneumatology augmented by ecological wisdom that is imbedded in the African. That wisdom postulates that the vital energy that brings forth, imbues and holds all of creation together, also sustains it as a community of life. Yet before we can make that application, it is important to

explore that notion of vital force as Tempels developed it and to outline its contours for the purpose of its application to this study.

3.3 AFRICAN VITAL FORCE

In his seminal 1959 book *Bantu Philosophy*, Placide Tempels developed the notion of vital force as an underlying principle of life that brings all beings together. He understood it as what undergirds Bantu cosmology, ethical behaviour and the ritual cycle. This overarching idea, according to Tempels' understanding is what holds the web of life together. The divine (God), ancestral spirits, human beings, plants, animal and minerals are all understood to be imbued by the same vital force. According to Tempels Bantu ontology is governed by the interaction of dynamic forces, not as an attribute of being but as being itself. 'Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force' (Tempels 1959:35). Unlike the understanding of being as static, vital force is understood as dynamic. That characteristic is an important connector to Faraday's force-field theory in which particles are understood to be in a dynamic relationship within a field. It is that understanding which this study appreciatively retrieves and appropriates as a pneuma-theological quality that denotes nature and spirit.

In Tempels' development of vital force, he construes the hierarchy of interaction within the web of life. The hierarchical set of forces governs the universe within a dynamic interrelationship. The Creator, giver of all force is at the top with the forbearers or ancestors of clans who provide a link between human beings and the creator and the lower inanimate beings and minerals. The hierarchy is premised on 'vital power, rank and primogeniture' (Tempels 1959:43).

The principle of relationality that brings God and creation together is an important retrieval for this study. In the same vein however, the way the relationship is conceived puts human beings at the centre with a hint of an instrumental relationship with the rest of creation. For instance, Tempels asserts that 'the inanimate beings and minerals are forces which by reason of their nature have been put at the disposal of men, of living human forces.' This instrumental relationship, which is inevitable in the web of life, cautions a thoroughgoing view of the African worldview as some kind of romantic view of an African cosmology that is void of anthropocentrism. The reference to the African holistic worldview is thus rather relative rather than absolute.

The hierarchy and relationality we retrieve from the vital force is not intended to inform an eco-theology that does not recognise the hierarchy of being. The ontological argument is that human beings *are* part of creation rather than they are merely in relationship with creation. What that place is exactly is beyond the scope of this study.

The unique place of human beings within the community of life is thus affirmed as long as this is done on the basis of ‘differentiation within the earth community of which we form a part’ (Conradie 2004:122). That means forms of hierarchy are legitimate and are a part of the distinctive place accorded to human beings but without thereby denying the distinctiveness and dignity of the rest of creation. Sally McFague (1993) argues that the comparison inherent within the hierarchies does not privilege one species above the other. She asks a tongue-in-cheek question that puts across the argument eloquently, ‘Would a dolphin think that we can swim, a dog be impressed by our sense of smell, or a migrating bird be awed by our sense of direction?’ (McFague 1993:120). When hierarchical thinking is universalised, it ceases to be problematic. It is simply a fact of how ecosystems are constituted. To that extent, the understanding of hierarchies in nature may avoid reductionism. By that same token, we may then acknowledge hierarchies of incremental complexity within material and biological processes. Thus understood these become a product of the evolutionary history of earthly life (Conradie 2004:124) as opposed to some inherent inalienable quality.

Such a view casts power relationships within the hierarchies in new light. It, in turn, calls for integration rather than alienation, and fully acknowledges the uniqueness and the position of power that humans occupy in the community of life. The degree of dependence of each level of hierarchy on the other/s inverts the power structure in that the more complex forms of life are more dependent on the lower forms of life for food. While humans need plants to exist, conversely, plants can exist without human beings (McFague 1993:106). As Rosemary Ruether (1983:87) aptly notes:

The more complex forms of life represent critical break-throughs to new stages of existence that give them qualitatively more mobility and freedom for response. But they are radically dependent on all the stages of life that go before them and that continue to underlie their own existence.

The preceding discussion indicates the appreciative retrieval from Tempels’ development of vital force as an ontological dynamic concept and as an underlying cosmological concept of

the levels of hierarchies within the web of cosmic interrelations. His development of the concept of vital has been hailed to be methodologically astute (Okafor 1982:89). Despite that there is much contestation and outright objection to his views.

Those who object to Tempels' articulation of the notion of vital, do so mainly on three counts which this study takes into account as valid criticisms of Tempels' project:

- (i) his notion of vital force seems to postulate a distinctly African way of thinking which postulates a cult of difference that is the product of colonial thought (Ngong 2010:77);
- (ii) the question is also raised as to whether, in fact, the idea of vital force is indeed an African concept or a European imposition (Mbiti 1969:10); and,
- (iii) whether this concept applies equally to all Africans or if it glosses over the vast and heterogeneous nature of the African continent.

Despite the contestation of Tempels' idea of vital force, African theologians and African philosophical thinkers have utilised the concept in their work all the same. As noted in chapter 1, African theologians and thinkers, such as Kaoma (2013), Sakupapa (2012), Magesa (1997, 2004), Nkemnkia (1999), Nkemnkia (1999), Okafor (1982:89), Nkrunziza (1989), Nyamiti (1976), Mulago (1969) and Kagame (1956), have, to varying degrees, endorsed the methodological validity of Tempels' thesis of vital force, by appropriating the concept and applying it to various theological and philosophical themes in their works.

Firstly, critique about positing a distinct African way of thinking abounds among African professional philosophers who hold that Tempels' characterisation, rather than valorise African thinking, in fact, contributes to imaging Africa as 'different'. The discourse of African difference is characteristically a product of colonial discourse. In fact, Maluleke (2001:29) has argued that Tempels' work 'was not ... directed at the African's or understanding's sake, but for the benefit of the colonials and missionaries'.

Poignantly, Tempels' last chapter in his *Bantu Philosophy* is titled, 'Bantu philosophy and our mission to civilise'. That locates Tempels' work as a product of his age as is borne out by that chapter. Further, the portrayal of Africans as objects (rather than subjects) of study in Tempels' work is problematic from a postcolonial standpoint. His work in that regard is construed as having facilitated colonising and civilising ideas because Tempels was a son of

his time. His work, thought never intended to be a theological treatise, has provided a hermeneutic for understanding the diversity within African cosmology. His work aimed to systematise African thought in terms of Thomistic-Aristotelean ontological frames of understanding while he has been criticised for dichotomist categories as well as for his use of the ‘us-them’ contrast of Western and African cultures. Those criticisms notwithstanding, Tempels’ contribution lies in his contribution to African cosmological interpretation using the idea of vital force, which he understood as encapsulating all of life in African thought. In this conception, each being is imbued with vital force that enables life, thereby explaining how that energy relates to ontology. In his own words, ‘Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force’ (Tempels, 1959:44).

Hountondji (1996:49) presents an incisive qualified damnation, and what seems like a tongue-in-cheek part-acclamation of Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy*, when he contends that his work is aimed:

on the one hand at facilitating what it calls “mission to civilise” (by which we understand practical mastery by the coloniser of the black man’s [sic] psychological wellsprings) and, on the other hand, at warning Europe itself against the abuses of its own technocratic and ultra-materialistic civilisation, by offering her, at the cost of a few rash generalisations, an image of the fine spirituality of the primitive Bantu.

That view seems to be borne out in Tempels’ own choice of words when he portrays the ‘Bantu ... (as having) only converted and civilised superficially’ (Tempels, 1959:18). That objection to Tempels is also echoed in John Mbiti’s general characterisation of African studies by outsiders as often ‘wrong and derogatory’ (Mbiti, 2011:17-18).

Conversely, but without excusing or defending the colonial bias in Tempels, Okafor quips that we cannot expect him ‘to shed every bias of his time, despite his protestations’ (Okafor, 1982:89). Taking that caveat into account, one could equally argue that Tempels’ ethnography was comparatively advanced for his time. He provided what would become a basis for African studies that would mark a new epoch of taking African experience relatively seriously within the context of colonisation.

In general, African people had been commoditised, treated with aversion and considered as a people without a history. Tempels is arguably credited with uplifting African history by

throwing new light on African thought in his search for a ‘Bantu’ philosophy, thereby providing grounds for African (self)consciousness to be taken seriously in an age when it was expedient to dismiss it. His work would later provide a guide to African ethnography, colonial practice and Christian evangelisation, from a relatively non-dismissive stance – to the extent that it could be for that period.

Secondly, the question about whether or not Tempels’ concept of vital force is indeed African has ignited its own debate in African scholarship. Kaphagawani (200:69) and Kwesi Wiredu (1998:25) both argue from a semantic or linguistic point of view that the designation of the concept of vital force does not translate into their own local languages, namely, Chichewa and Akan respectively.

Vincent Mulago (1969:148), Charles Nyamiti (1978:170), Vahakanga (1999:285) and John Mbiti (1969:10) also take issue with Tempels’ notion of vital force. It is, however, not entirely clear what their substantive objection is. Mbiti, for instance, ambivalently argues that Tempels’ thesis ‘is open to a great deal of criticism, and (that) the theory of vital force cannot be applied to other African peoples’ while pointing out that its main contribution ‘is more in terms of sympathy and change of attitude than perhaps in the actual contents and theory of his book.’

Mbiti (1969:16) has gone further in his work by arguably adopting Tempels’ vocabulary. He describes African ontology as being a ‘force, power or energy permeating the whole universe.’ In a footnote, Mbiti qualifies this notion by distancing his view from Tempels’ idea of vital force without elucidating what the differences are.

Mbiti (1990), on another count, seems to adopt Tempels’ characterisation of what they both term the African ontological hierarchy. Mbiti seems once again to adopt Tempels’ schema. It is not clear in Mbiti, as in the case of other scholars who are critical of Tempels in this regard, whether their objection has to do with the terminology or the theoretical underpinnings of the concept (cf. Kombo, 2007:154; Okafor, 1982:89).

Young (1985:64) has argued that Mbiti (1970) and Idowu (1983) object to Tempels’ seeming reduction of African traditional religion to magic. Masolo (1994) offers an analysis of the thematic areas, debate and participants in the African philosophy’s quest for an identity in

both English and French regions. His conclusion is that Africa's peculiar circumstances have shaped it in ways of constructing reality and acquiring meaningful knowledge, which includes contestation of imposed identities.

The English terminology, *vital force* or indeed the French *force vitale* that are employed in both the original French, *La Philosophie Bantoue*, and the translated, *Bantu Philosophy*, may not have an equivalent translation in African languages. Yet as Okafor (1982:89) argues, Tempels' designation and broad thesis is 'methodologically on the right track towards uncovering the inner structure of African cosmology'. Tempels identified that among African people the 'supreme value is life, force, to live strongly or vital force' and that 'force, the potent life, vital energy are the object of prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead as well as all that is usually called magic, sorcery or magical remedies' (Tempels, 1969:44-45).

For the purpose of this study, therefore, I would argue that Tempels' thesis of vital force recalls the biocentric impulse in African ontology and its potential to heighten our sensibilities to the intrinsic value of all of life (creation) in all of its interrelatedness. Analogically understood, therefore, vital force is the cosmic spirit that is ontologically present in (and enfolds) all of creation and which indeed unfolds herself in all modes of *being*. Vital force in African cosmology is therefore the cosmic animating potent force that interpenetrates all that is, without being identical to it. In other words, the understanding postulated here is panentheistic rather than pantheistic.

Ramose (1999:51) articulates the underpinnings of African philosophical thought as grounded in the notion of *ubu-ntu*, understood 'as a whole-ness and a constant flow of being'. To the extent that vital force (*ntu*) flows through the entire universe, one may argue that vital force enfolds organic and inorganic forms of life and all modes of being. These themes have been explored from various angles by Africanist theologians, thinkers and philosophers. In the African, human life is inseparably bound to nature in the same way that human beings are defined by their connection to the totality of the community of life (Gitau, 2000). The African inhabits a bio-centric theology and philosophy that celebrates 'pan-vitalism,' as Asante (1985) terms it, and that he explains as 'Reality (be-ing) inseparable' (ibid.). He notes the inseparable nature of reality in the African and the kinship of all creatures. Additionally,

Sindima underlines the importance of an underlying belief, which he argues is important, because:

How we think about the world affects the way we live in it. In particular, our understanding of nature – our cosmology – affects the way we understand ourselves, the way we relate to other people, and, of course, the way we relate to the earth and other forms of life. For some time the people of Africa have been influenced by a cosmology inherited from the West: the mechanistic perspective that views all things as lifeless commodities to be understood scientifically and to be used for human ends. Yet these people have an alternative way of looking at the world, an alternative cosmology, which can better serve their cultural development and social justice in an ecological context. This alternative may be called a life-centred way, since it stresses the bondedness, the interconnectedness of all living beings.

(Sindima in Birch, Eaken & McDaniel, 1990:137-138)

The third objection to Tempels' thesis is the contention on how widespread the notion of vital force is among Africans, if at all. That question has been self-evidently answered through the number of African scholars who have appropriated the concept. Even those who have qualms about the concept as discussed above have somehow found resonance with some of the associations that Tempels made to the idea of vital force.

That these scholars span the African continent south of the Sahara may point to the validity of Tempels' enunciation of Bantu ontology (cf. Jahn, 1961; Kagame, 1956; Nyamiti, 1976). The vital force as a central idea in African ontology finds expression in all aspects of life as, according to Tempels' characterisation, the 'hierarchy of being interacts and overlaps' (Young, 1985:64) within the matrix of the vital force. Vincent Mulago (1962), whose work reveal Tempels' influence (and which he acknowledges), has attempted to modify Tempels' concept of vital force by qualifying it as *union vitale* and/or *participation vitale*. Mulago's modification of Tempels' idea captures elements of the unified and participative nature of the African.

Mulago's *union vitale* and *participation vitale* nuances the concept of vital force further by recalling the African understanding that God (in whatever way God is understood in various African cultures) is essentially vital force. God is, in Tempels' parlance, the Supreme Being, whose life force is imbued in all creatures and that that vital force permeates and connects the interrelated web of 'dynamic and intricate relationships' (Kaoma, 2013) within the web of

life. Mulago's union-of-life-in-participation is instructive and therein we identify that to which the vital force may be applied. It recalls the pneumatological category of relationship and participation that echoes the biblical tradition.

Other African theologians have underlined the need to harness such insights for ecological theology. Ghanaian, Emmanuel Asante, has coined the term *pan-vitalism* that, in my view, further nuances Mulago's *union vitale*. He avers that in the African conception,

Reality is inseparable. The African is kin to all creatures – gods, spirits and nature ... The whole of nature must be understood as sacred because it derives its being from the Supreme Being who is the Creator-Animator of the Universe.

(Asante, 1985:290, 292)

Malawian, Harvery Sindima, characterises the African as based on the 'bondedness, sacredness and fecundity' (Conradie, 2004:109) of what he terms the 'community of life'. He holds that the

African idea of community refers to bondedness; the act of sharing and living in the one common symbol – life – which enables people to live in communion and communication with each other and nature ... (which) allows the stories or life experiences of others to become one's own.

(Sindima, 1989:537)

Of all the objections to Tempels' conception of vital force, two seem to be valid: firstly, his insistence on the difference between African and European notions of being, deemed to perpetuate the colonial discourse of African difference. Secondly, he is accused of the methodological error of generalising about Africa.

In this study, there is no attempt to adjudicate the various positions. On the contrary, this study postulates that, those objections notwithstanding, there is something retrievable from Tempels' notion of vital force. By looking at various ways (i.e. triangulating) in which the concept of vital force has been applied, I am persuaded that vital force is an adequate concept of nature and spirit. It opens up the African way of perceiving reality as unified and participative within the realm of interconnected and interdependent beings.

In the African, vital force finds its expression in the interrelatedness of the divine, the ancestors (Nkemnkia, 1999), the living and nature. This is exemplified in the ritual life of the

African lifecycle. All living beings – including God, spirits and ancestors – share in the vital force. Even inorganic things share in the life force because the African universe is imbued with potency. Every object is a religious *symbol* that connects human beings to the unseen by pointing beyond them to the transcendent realm. In traditional Christian parlance we could say that in the African universe every object is potentially sacramental, if we understand sacrament as referring to ‘an external action or rite or object that communicates God or in which one encounters God’ (Jenson, 2011:62). When we construe the presence of vital force in inorganic objects as ‘sacramental presence’, we secure the argument against any pantheistic connotations that may be read into this claim.

In the African belief system, misfortune is understood to have multidimensional sources. That belief stems from living in an enchanted universe in which there are multiple human and non-human actors imbued with potency and that possess force to impact life in diverse (and invisible) ways. Hence, the basic notion of vital force is understood within the intertwined interplay of spirits in the enchanted universe of African cosmology. That interplay of spirits is not limited to organic life but inanimate (or inorganic) things like artefacts and charms are understood to be imbued with potency and can impact life in diverse ways.²¹

It was, and today is not uncommon, in traditional African societies, for newly born children to be dressed in beads and charms believed to be imbued with potency to ward off malevolent spirits. The potency of the bead or charm in that respect can be said to be ‘sacramental’ as through this ‘seen’ object the unseen transcendent realm is brought close to human consciousness.

Reformed theologian, Marthinus Daneel (2001), who served as a missionary and theological educator in Mashonaland has made a distinct contribution in that regard by bridging the realms of African Initiated Churches (AICs) and ATRs. The effort by the interreligious grassroots’ organisation, Zimbabwean Institute for Religious Research and Ecological Conservation and its affiliates, Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists and the

²¹ Charms and some certain artefacts are understood to be imbued with power to ward off evil (i.e. preserve life) or indeed to inflict evil (i.e. deny life). Their potency is derived from their presence within the ‘realm’ of the vital force or as it could be summoned by circumstance.

Association of African Earth-keeping Churches, through their interfaith cooperation and dialogue, have a highlighted holistic, communal approach to earth-keeping.²²

Parsons (2010:118-122), in her ground-breaking investigation of the encounter between the local and development policy on the Zambian Copperbelt, makes an observation that illustrates this, though without reference to vital force. She discusses this with regard to mine accidents and the preventive measures miners employ. She reports how miners used physical objects understood to have potency to prevent the misfortune of mine accidents. She also notes how these practices extended to Christian prayer and the use of Christian symbols in a similar fashion.

Notably, the perception of the mine and rocks as agents in the spiritual realm meant that the mine itself was treated and spoken of as a participating agent in an ecology of relationships that go beyond humans ones to include natural objects like the rocks themselves. This is captured by Parsons in a Bemba quote from one of her informants who said, which when translated can be rendered: ‘The underground was fine by itself, the rocks were peaceful and dignified until we provoked and aggravated them into action’²³ (Parsons, 2010:viii)²⁴.

Lackson Chibuye’s (2016) PhD thesis assessed the environmental impact of mining activities on the Copperbelt in Zambia with a goal to employ theological resources as a means to enter into the national dialogue and to shape actions for mitigation of the problem. He explains the cosmology of the Lamba people of the Copperbelt as an entry point into their understanding of God, which in turn shapes their ecological response. He presents the inherent ecological wisdom and communal ethic of the Lamba culture as a hermeneutical lens for a retrieval of biblical resources that could be employed in mitigation of the environmental damage caused by the mines. He premises his proposal on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, which arguably entails a prior commitment to the biblical mandate: ‘The Zambian

²² See Daneel (2001), chapter 11, ‘Towards an African theology of the environment: The Holy Spirit in creation’ for an engagement of the traditional African from a Christian theological point of view, highlighting the Spirit’s role as the oasis of life and healer of the land whose presence and action is directed against the life-denying forces in the universe.

²³ ‘*Apene panshi pali ikalila [sic], amabwe ayatondolo [sic], ayabukata ifwe twaya yatendeka, twayabalalmuna [sic]*’

²⁴ I choose to by-pass Parsons’ (2010:viii) translation, ‘The underground world lived peacefully with its divine rocks until we provoked and frustrated them’, in order to capture the particular nuance of the agency of the underground rocks implied in the Bemba rendering. Secondly, it is to render it in the way I understand it in my capacity as a home-grown speaker of the Bemba language.

Constitution declares Zambia a Christian Country and it is therefore imperative for the government to take seriously (sic) cognisance of biblical demands'²⁵ (Chibuye, 2016:8). Nkemnkia (1999:165) aptly captures this prevalent dynamic notion of vital force in African thinking. He offers that 'African thought has a unified vision of reality in which there is no room for irreducible dichotomies of matter and spirit, religious tension and daily life between soul and body.' The African ontological and metaphysical holistic conception of reality renders its universe sacred and bio-centric. It is so suffused with life that even inanimate objects are imbued with potency because they exist in a world 'charged' with vital force. The 'vital force' then is a fundamental value in African thought and all things, animate and inanimate, are grounded in it. It 'is the creative force behind all human and non-human action.' (Nel, 2008:40) and according to Setiloane (1998b:80), it is an 'interpenetrating and permeating' influence that saturates the community of life. Setiloane (1998b:79) asserts that in African thought all creation emanates from a single source, therefore:

[T]he term community is inclusive of all life (*bios*): animals, the habitat (the land), flora, and even the elements. The success of life is found in the ability to maintain a healthy relationship with all.

Nel extends upon Setiloane's cosmological assertion by framing this relational inclusivity in terms that confirm that an ethic of eco-responsibility may emanate from African cosmology. He states that:

The most common feature of this cosmology is the integration of three distinguishable aspects, namely environment, society, and the spiritual. All activities are informed by this holistic understanding so that they singularly or collectively maintain or transform the socio-cultural and spiritual landscape. An act is never separated from its environmental, societal, or spiritual impact. The cosmology becomes visible in that indigenous knowledge informs acts of technology, agriculture, animal keeping, music, song, dance, ritual, family ... etc. It is a system of thought embedded in action. One may even go so far as to state that this thought structure is embodied.

(Nel, 2008:37-38)

²⁵ The view that the declaration of a Christian nation predisposes the nation towards allegiance to the demands of Scripture provides a premise for this argument; it is fair to view it as double-edged. While the declaration would make Christian discourse mainstream in the formulation of environmental policy and laws, it is a stretch to presume that the declaration mystically translate into obedience to the demands of Scripture. There are examples in other spheres that indicate that the assumption that biblical mandates could become mainstream by virtue of the 1991 declaration. Since the declaration, for instance, Zambia has been declared a Christian nation; it has not dropped its position in the Transparency International corruption perception index (see: <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>, Accessed 2 October 2016).

McFague aptly captures that sacramental sensibility when she advances that ‘the world lives within God’ and further offers that ‘God and the world are not two separate realities that exist independently and must somehow find each other. Rather, the world is “charged” with God as with electricity’ (McFague, 2008:115).

She construes that the Spirit is the milieu in whom (Acts 17) everything exists. In incarnational terms, she speaks of life as being *with* and *in* God. That has been captured by the Christian scriptures, using metaphors of water, breath and air, indicating creation’s dependence on God for its growth and flourishing within an interpenetrating and permeating realm of the Spirit. She concludes that ‘This understanding says that we live within the body of God; that the world *is*, and *is not* the body of God; and that all things exist within the one reality that is and that reality is on the side of life and fulfilment. God as Spirit is the power of life and love within which all bodies exist’ (McFague, 2008:116).

The inclusivity suggested by this interpenetrating and permeating power of vital force or Spirit in the universe recalls the imbedded and embodied nature of life. The implication is that this could/should engender moral responsibility toward the community of life in view of the ecological crisis the world faces. The convergence between African thought and Christian tradition is in critical relationship with anthropocentric views that historically have become imbedded in Christian tradition and are complicit with human dominance of the rest of creation to its detriment.

Though conceptually and cosmologically spaced out, the ideas of the sacramental nature of creation in Christianity, the concept of vital force as the milieu of life in African thought and the notion of field force as theologically appropriated from scientific study, all have important convergence points. These make them viable conversation partners in the articulation of grounding pneumatological and relational categories within ecological discourse that could shape an eco-pneumatology.

Belgian authors, Prigogine and Stenger, in their book *Order out of Chaos* (1985) describe African experience as characterised by a ‘fundamental instability of be-ing’, which they postulate leads to an ‘ontological and epistemological imperative’ that necessitates a dynamic quest for equilibrium and a persistent pursuit for harmony ‘in all spheres of life’, especially in the inter-subjective relations (Ramose, 1999: 55-60). To that extent, the imperative to ‘life,’

is based on harmony in relationships and summoned whenever there is disequilibrium, or a need to prevent it.

In African traditional life therefore, the meaning of life is bound up in the dialectic of the collective. As a result, when humans are spoken of as subject, they can only be spoken of in terms of relationship with ‘others’. That means human beings are not subjects in the abstract but are subjects in relation to other subjects.

The ecological crisis that we face in the world could be characterised as a tremendous loss of equilibrium and a reminder that human relations with the ‘other’ in creation is in disequilibrium. The reason for this is that human beings have ceased to see the glory of God in everything in the world. McFague (2008:115) captures our human failure aptly when she admonishes that:

We must undergo the deepest of all conversions, the conversion from egocentrism to theocentrism; a conversion to whom we truly are: reflections of God, as is everything in creation. The only difference between us and the rest of creation is that the others reflect God, tell of God, simply by being, whereas we must will that it be so. We must desire ... to live justly and sustainably on earth with all other creatures.

Living justly and sustainably in recognition of the ‘others’ in creation is the only way. Such inter-subjective relationships impute the ‘others’ in creation with value. In addition, there is the need to offer a humbling recognition that without that ‘others’ there can be no life. The imperative for life is motivated out of concern for all, including ourselves as humans. That solidarity with the ‘other’ has a self-evident societal dimension of the life-imperative and is self-evident.

In African understanding, the ‘other’ includes God, the living and the living-dead and all that is in the environment. Everything is interrelated, and therefore life should be lived in balance for the flourishing of all of creation. The sacredness, bondedness and fecundity of the community of life therefore dictated the rhythm of traditional African life. As Sindima observes:

The African idea of community refers to bondedness; the act of living and sharing in one common symbol – life – which enables people to live in communion and communication with

each other and nature. Living in communication allows stories or life experiences of others to become one's own.

(Sindima, 1989:537)

The quest for communal equilibrium in African life can thus be said to encompass the entire way of life. The vital force therefore undergirds the life-cycle and its accompanying communal rites of intensification²⁶ that mark the various stages and seasons of life. In African traditional life, communal ritual action is therefore at the very core of life. Religion is so deeply imbedded in daily life that separating religion from other aspects of life seems superfluous. Rites of passage and communal rites exemplify the ubiquitous nature of religion in African traditional life (Lugira, 2009). In an African sense, then, all vicissitudes of life could be said to hinge on the vital force as the 'realm' of life.

The rites of passage that have to do with the human lifecycle encompass those practices, customs and ceremonies performed to mark the various stages of life from conception to death. These rituals affirm the sacredness of each stage and they invoke God's participation. Lugira (2009) narrates how the Banyarwanda and Barundi of East Africa ritualise God's participation in conception. This ritual is called *Amziy'mana* (God's water). Every woman who anticipates conception always keeps a bowl of water in her room before going to bed.

The preservation of the life of the foetus during pregnancy continues to be a co-operative venture. The mother-to-be is subject to food taboos and other restrictions aimed at preserving the life of the unborn child. The pregnant woman herself is considered as chosen for the sacred duty of bringing a new life to the community in this co-operative act with the divine.

At birth, a midwife who is also a medicine woman²⁷ and regarded as sacred, attends to the mother-to-be and conducts the rituals associated with the birth. Among them are the first

²⁶ This concept is applied to congregational studies but it also describes what we are discussing here (see Ammerman et. al., 1998). Rites of intensification are rituals that focus the community and strengthen (intensify) the community's commitment to its beliefs and shared meanings. These include especially those rituals, which celebrate or focus on the core values of the community. In African traditional life these include all the rituals that mark the cycle of life from conception to after-life; the cycle of seasons and the celebration around the sacred object within nature like trees, rivers, mountains, animals and the spirits which are revered and understood to sustain and nourish life.

²⁷ The role of medicine men and women evokes the idea of healing. In the traditional African sense, healing is not confined to mental and physical health. It is the total sum of the person's interpersonal relations with the family, community (including the living-dead) and nature. 'Sickness implies that there is an imbalance between

baby bath, the disposal (not in the sense of ‘dumping’ as these items are imbued with ritual symbolism that pertains to the life of the newborn) of the placenta and the umbilical cord. Their disposal is a sacred ritual symbol that signifies the baby’s transition from confinement in the mother’s womb into another realm as a new life that is part of the community.

Conception and birth rituals indicate God’s presence in the child’s life from the moment of conception. Water is a symbol of God’s tool for the creation of a human person. John 3 refers to the mother’s womb and water for re-birth. Water is also a ritual symbol of cleansing in the newborn’s transition from the mother’s womb into the world and it is used to mark other life-cycle transitions like the initiation of boys and girls into adulthood in some cultures. The initiate is taken to the stream to wash and emerges a man or woman, ready to be incorporated into the community as an adult with accompanying adult responsibilities. The ritual washing echoes the symbolic initiation through the water of baptism, which initiates and incorporates the believer into the body of Christ.

There is an interactive participative synergy between the Divine and the water in the act of conception and various initiation stages in African traditional life. The relational life-giving process of which the Divine is participant in the creative activity is reminiscent of the pneumatological hermeneutic of creation, according to Michael Welker (1997). He argues for a creation model that transcends the conventional guiding conceptions of creation that uphold a causation/production model that depicts God as a static prime cause/mover. Instead, God is presented as a relational participant within the *creatio continua* understanding of creation.

In that view of creation, Welker notes that ‘God reacts to the presence of what is created ... through perception and evaluation ... intervening in what is already created, intervening for the purpose of further specification ... (in which) the divine and human initiative coincide (Gen. 2:5)’ (Welker, 1999:9-10). The flourishing and survival of the primordial garden is dependent, not on God’s first act of production, rather it is dependent on the cooperation of other factors (like rain) and human initiative. In this regard, we might conjecture that God reacts to the potency within the realm of creation. It is plausible to presume provisionally that God’s reaction is to the vital force.

the metaphysical and the human world as the flow of the supernatural life force may have been disturbed’ (Obinna, 2012).

We derive an ethic from the use of water as ritual symbol in the traditional African that water is much more than just a commodity for human utility. That ethic can be applied ecologically towards the healing of creation. Water is considered as ritually connected to our very being through its participative link to the divine in the act of conception. Such a primal characterisation of water is complemented by reference to the ‘water’ of the womb as the incubator of life. Conception is, so to speak, a shared, cooperative act of the divine (God and associate gods and spirits), (the ritual symbol of) water and the parents-to-be. The association with the divine in the act of conception is within the realm of the vital force. The divine association confers water with a sacred shroud and imbues it with potency to participate in the impartation and renewal of life of which the divine is a participant too. It is reminiscent of the *creatio continua*. The attendant emergent understanding in which the created is bequeathed with agency in the act of creation is compatible with the water birth ritual symbol.

There is a longstanding understanding that water is the most important element that constitutes life. There is historically no consensus about water being *the* basic element of life, but there is agreement that life as we know it cannot exist without water. The view of water as a primeval element of life is reminiscent of the Milesian philosopher, Thales, of the fifth century BC. He advanced the view that water was the basic element that constituted life. Thales seemed to opt out of the mythological explanations of his time that water was the primary element of life²⁸ by advancing a physical explanation. He certainly offered a comprehensive cosmology that concluded that everything was water (Zeller, 1963). Thales’ attempt to transcend the absolute in favour of the holistic is evident.

Aristotle questioned Thales’ postulation without necessarily contradicting the assertion about water but rather questioning the general principle of all principles being understood as material in nature. Aristotle, however, considered water (and fire) to be ‘simple homoeomerous elements’²⁹ (Cherniss, 1971:219). He considered Thales’ position trustworthy

²⁸ See Cherniss (1971:218-219). Greek philosophers already held to the view that there were four basic elements of life, namely, earth, air, fire and water. Thales departed from that and singled out water as the basic element of life.

²⁹ Homoeomerous referring to a substance consisting of similar parts recalls the Aristotelian philosophical dialectic of whether the universal is essentially present in its particulars. See Ross (1924:cvii; 132-133) for extended commentary on Aristotle’s position.

without subscribing to mythical accounts about gods that held a similar opinion as Thales. Thales postulated that the earth itself rested on water. Aristotle construed his position to have derived from the fact that all things are nourished by moisture. Heat itself is sustained by moisture and seeds have a moist nature. The conclusion then was that water is the source/origin of everything that is moist³⁰ (Cherniss, 1971).

In philosophy, religion and science, the quest for cosmological unity is prevalent, as part of the human quest for cosmological congruence and water has played a major factor in that quest in many cultures. In Chinese philosophy water is one of the five basic elements of life, the others being, earth, fire, wood and metal. Many religions, including Christianity, understand water to be the source of life itself. In the Genesis 1 creation narrative, the *ruach* of God³¹ is presented as hovering over the chaotic primordial waters. Water is also used for religious ritual cleansing as symbol of renewal or rebirth (c.f. John 3; 1 John 5:6-8). One example of science touting water in the search for cosmological congruence is the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Mars Exploration Project (MEP)'s science theme 'Follow the Water'. This maxim was the basis in its quest for evidence of the habitability of the planet Mars. The existence of water as vapour, ice or in liquid form would authenticate, or otherwise, the planet's ability to support (have supported?) life.

In some African cultures, the placenta and umbilical cord of the newly born are buried under a tree. From then on, until it bears fruit, that tree is considered sacred. When the fruit matures, it is used to prepare a sacred feast for the community. The community includes all participants in the mystery of conception, birth. The tree is linked to this mysterious act as recipient of the same nourishment as the newly born, but also as bearer of the fruit that in turn feeds the community.

Ecologically, the symbolism of the tree being nourished by the bodily elements of humans recalls the community to the shared interdependent existence. Even in death, the cycle of life remains constant; dead creatures and organisms become nourishment for plants and other creatures in the lower strata of the food chain. Thus the rituals surrounding pregnancy and

³⁰ See (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.1.i.html>, retrieved 27 August 2015).

³¹ Karl Barth (1961) contends that the *ruach* of Genesis 1 is mere wind and cannot be said to be the Spirit of God. In that vein he sees discontinuity between *ruach* and the Spirit of God and certainly between the Spirit of God and other conceptions of the s(S)pirit.

birth and that underlie the African, are a reminder of relationality and the interdependence that undergird the web of life.

Within such an interdependent web, even death is an acceptable natural part of the life cycle (Lugira, 2009). The life cycle is just that, LIFE-cycle, because even death leads to (becomes) life. The solidarity between the living and the living dead has been appropriated by some African theologians as ecclesiological, christological, and eschatologically relevant (see: Mbiti, 1979; Pobee, 1979; Sawyer, 1970). The eco-theological appropriation takes the interrelatedness of life beyond the human sphere to include all of life. Hence, the underlying respect for life that the concept of vital force entails is carried through, not only beyond death but also as ecologically relevant.

The vital-force-imbued life is life-in-relationship (Nkurunziza, 1989:126). The community and nature do not cease at death because relationality undergirds African ontology. Interaction within relationship is self-extension. Interrelations therefore regenerate and renew – that is the essence of life. Be-ing is in becoming.³²

Life is understood to have the highest value (Nkuruziza, 1989:129; Okafor, 1982:91) and so life is invoked even in funeral rites. Death therefore receives much attention in African thought. The very origins of life in African traditional mythology cannot be understood without including death. Creation myths recount the origins of human beings and all created beings alongside death (Lugira, 2009).

We have not cast the entire life cycle. The examples here are illustrative strands and intended to strengthen the case for the retrieval of the concept of vital force as a concept of spirit and nature. Due to the specific focus on retrieval to the exclusion of other concerns, this study may seem to valorise ritual rites that may be controversial, including life-denying elements and/or seemingly normalising the subjugation of women. It is not my intention to suggest or valorise such aspects of any rituals and rites mentioned above. My disclaimer is to plead that

³² Eberhard Jungel has written a book by this title which marks the self-communicative movement through which God makes God present to us; God's sending the Son in the unity of the Spirit into the world which overcomes the antitheses of 'being' and 'relationship' (see: Jungel, 2014. *Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, London: Bloomsbury).

the inadvertent by-product of attempting to carry one train of thought through is the tendency towards apparent absolutism.

3.4 AFRICAN VITAL FORCE IN AN ECO-PNEUMATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Vital force captures the participative interaction between the Life-giver (God) and the totality of reality within a vital dynamism that is at the core of being, apart from being understood to be at the core of the pattern of the African understanding of life. In the Genesis narrative, according to Welker, God reacts to what has been created. Welker (1999:10-11) proposes that,

The creating God is not only an acting God, but also a reacting god who responds to what has been created. The creating God is open to being confronted by the independence, the originality, even the need for improvement of that which has been created... (and that) ... The creature's own activity, which is itself a process of production, is not only a consequence and result of creation that is already completed. Rather, it is embedded in the process of creation and participates in the process (cf. esp. Gen. 1:11ff.).

This kind of conception of creation presents all of creation as having potency and 'as itself active, separating, ruling, and imparting rhythm, as itself producing and giving life. ... the process of creation includes cognitive and normative, culture-creating human behaviour' (Welker, 1999:10). Culture-creating is exemplified by the task divinely assigned to the human to name the animals and to tend the garden. Cultivation of the garden does not depend on human activity alone but requires the rain to participate in the life-giving activity of the flourishing of the garden.

In Genesis 1 and 2 then, God is at the receiving (responsive) end of the creation itself within a *creatio continua* frame of understanding. Welker (1999:10) argues that fundamentally and apparently (in a way that 'only a distorting abstraction can block out') in the first two chapters of Genesis, God's action is action that 'lets itself be determined.' If God's action is action that reacts to creation, we then ask: To what is God responsive? Is the answer: To vital force as a reflexive within Godself rather than something external to God? If rendered as an external force to which God responds, we may be speaking of a deity outside God, which is not the intention of the appropriation undertaken in this study.

I construe vital force as that vital dynamism which can be discerned in terms of its causal efficacy and which could be interpreted in terms of Christian pneumatology as the creating, sanctifying, renewing Spirit of God. Vital force is therefore understood in terms of the Spirit's movement in action, not as a 'thing'. I seek to portray the retrieval of the African notion of vital force within that realm of understanding, which is not unique to African thought. Whitehead's exploration of how actual entities come to be and develop into an interconnection is presented as movement (or upward trend) towards order rather than chaos (Hartshorne & Peden, 2010). Vital force construed as 'presence' within which divine action takes place, appropriates the Spirit's work and action in non-interventionist terms, in terms of contributory efficacy and interrelationship within that 'presence'. That contributory-efficacy-and-interrelationship can be characterised as movement.

The sense of interrelatedness and participation that the concept of vital force is imbued with is evident in the African. The seamless totality of the African universe is summed up in an ongoing interaction of vital forces in which the divine; human beings; plants, animals, and seasons; organic and inorganic, spiritual and material entities, depend on the harmonious existence of each other. African thought is panentheistic (all-in-God) in its understanding of a unified, single spirit or vital force which is manifest in each entity. The vital force, or divine spirit, transcends all and yet is immanent in everything.

In other words, the vital force is both a concept of spirit and nature without the two being interchangeable. The ensuing implication that there is an intimate connection between God and nature (which arguably includes human beings³³) is apparent. The divine-human-nature interrelatedness, which for better or worse, in the context of our environmental crisis can be said to be for better (and with hope), implicates the divine Spirit of God who is lovingly immanent in creation even in the midst of the environmental crisis.

The term *perichoresis*³⁴ has been used theologically to apply to the *hypostatic* mutually interpenetrating relationship within the Triune Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

³³ The United Nations Earth Charter maintains that humans are part of nature. Under the heading *Universal Responsibility*, the charter declares that 'The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.' (http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/invent/images/uploads/echarter_english.pdf, retrieved 1 Sept. 2015).

³⁴ Rigby (2007) highlights how contested the term *perichoresis* has been historically while helpfully co-opting it for her study. It is in a similar vein that I use the term here. No reconciliation of the contested views is

(Bergmann, 2005) as well as to the incarnation in reference to the two natures of Christ. The understanding in that reference is that the divine nature of Christ and his human nature mutually penetrate each other without fusing and without becoming interchangeable. It is in that sense that we construe the divine Spirit's interpenetrating nature, lovingly nourishing, renewing and making it flourish, without becoming identical with it.

Process theology and creation spirituality uphold such Christian panentheistic conceptions of God in nature. Process theology is a reconstructive theology based on Whitehead's process philosophy that deconstructs received concepts and applies them to emerging postmodern forms of thought (Griffith, 2003). Whitehead's idea of succession is based on the doctrine that in the enrichment of existence 'no individual essence is realizable apart from some of its potentialities of relationship, that is, apart from its relational essence' (Whitehead, 1929:161). In that view, 'cause is *never* "equal to the effect," the latter always being richer The subject is always ... an enrichment of existence, even of God, and it involves what is enriched but not conversely' (Hartshorne, 1941:544).

The involvement of the effect (i.e. the created) in the cause (i.e. God) runs counter to traditional Christian belief. God is traditionally understood as the One who exists, from whose divine nature all creation issues without qualification and is intelligible only within Godself. In process theology, God is understood in panentheistic terms, transcending the polarities of immanence and transcendence (Griffith & Smith, 2001). That is the view I seek to apply in the appropriation of vital force as a concept of nature and Spirit.

The vital force, understood as Spirit, is *relational* and could be portrayed as the creating, life-giving, renewing, sanctifying Spirit of God. The Spirit's life-affirming movement in action and presence are elucidated under the rubric of theories of divine action in nature that transcend interventionistic views of God (Wildman, 2013). The vital force, understood as the Spirit that holds the universe together, is seen as a forceful life-affirming relational presence, not merely as an interventionistic force experienced as a nebulous transcendence.

attempted, only to delineate the term for the specific way in which it advances the discussion here. See also chapter 4 of this study.

Non-interventionistic theories of divine action³⁵ understand God as being at work ‘creatively and redemptively in and through the natural world to bring it to healing and wholeness’ (Edwards, 2010:xiii) in relational terms, not as a divine autocratic force that intervenes in the universe in an arbitrary fashion. God is understood as One who created an emergent universe and who lovingly relates to it, lives in, with and beyond it and respects (and even lives within and responds to) the limits of the ontological structure of creation.

On the other hand, those who hold a purely interventionistic view exclude any compatibility with non-interventionistic views (and that is largely the Christian traditional view). They also hold ‘that the laws of nature reflect the deep ontological structure of reality as God created it and are happy to imagine that God might act in nature by ignoring or violating those rules of nature’ (Wildman, 2013:148).

Non-interventionist views are many and nuanced and leave room for divine intervention that defies laws of nature without being absolute – as the Christ-event illustrates. As Buitendag (2009:509) argues, ‘Neither absolutisation of transcendent revelation, nor that of immanent knowledge of nature, provides an accountable understanding of reality.’ The important thing is not to overstate interventionism, rather to hold it in a healthy tension with a scientifically informed non-interventionism that ‘leaves ontological room for God to act in this world without breaking God’s own rules for its operation’ (Wildman, 2013:149).

Non-interventional divine action in the universe can only be apprehended in terms of the (inter)relatedness of all things in the universe. It exemplifies the convergence of scientific, theological and African views. Where science sees everything in the universe as interrelated and entities within it possessing varying levels of integrity (see chapter 5), the conception of the African universe is in relational, interdependent terms while Christian theology in Trinitarian perspective, presents the cosmic Spirit which pervades all reality.

Because everything is understood to be interconnected and related through the shared principle of life, the vital force, life in the African is presumed to be the greatest good and the aim of *be-ing*. Gabriel Setiloane valorises such a biocentric focus in the African way of life

³⁵ Divine action is understood here not in terms of conclusive views of how God *actually* acts for I believe that to be as beyond human fathoming as God’s own nature is. What is attempted is to articulate characteristics of God’s action that may illuminate the subject at hand.

and argues that it is an element that would enrich the Christian view of God. He emphatically declares:

We Africans sincerely believe that by taking into its fabric these African interpretations and views about the universe, creation and nature, the Christian understanding is enriched rather than impoverished and the image of God becomes more worthy, inspiring greater wonder, love and praise.

(Setiloane, 1995:52)

The concept of vital force, therefore, provides a viable conceptual framework for an eco-pneumatology that is not only relevant to African Christian theology in the African context alone but is a gift to Christian theology as well. The articulation of an eco-pneumatology that is grounded on vital force is a concept that can be applied to the participation of Christians in the common life (Mulago, 1970), which connects the human family to God who is the ultimate source of all life and in whom all life holds together, and is not at odds with biblical foundations and science. It thus contributes to Christian discourse on the ecological crisis.

Vital force brings to the fore the pervasiveness of the Spirit as the spring of life, on which the interrelated participation of all of creation hinges. The risk of sustaining this analogy about the Spirit in non-interventionist terms can seem to err on the side of making the Spirit too immanent. Geisler and Corduan aptly capture that dilemma when they assert that

Religious language has two basic hazards. It must avoid verbal idolatry on the one hand and experiential emptiness on the other hand. If it is overly transcendent, it departs from an experiential basis for meaning. If it is completely immanentistic, it commits semantic atheism.

(Geisler & Corduan, 1988)

This study presents vital force as a concept of nature and Spirit within the broader sphere of the ecological crisis. The portrayal is therefore necessarily in corrective terms. Sustaining the argument that the Spirit is present in, with (and yet far beyond) nature could, for that reason, seemingly commit the immanentistic error. The caution is heeded while pleading the focus and context of the study as the caveat. It also becomes clearer in the course of the discussion what views I have on immanentism as such.

Life and participatory interrelationships are vital themes in scripture as some theologians have eloquently commented (Dunn, 1998; Edwards, 2006; Moltmann, 1992). The social doctrine of the Trinity is a category in theology that has implications on the cosmic scope of the Spirit. Bergmann sees that in terms of ‘new possibilities interpreting the relational being of nature’ (2005:283). It is within this kind of emphasis on the cosmic spirit, which has gained currency in pneumatological studies, that the African concept of vital force finds its conversation partners and its contribution.

Krister Stendhal (1990:49) speaks of the ‘energy of life’; Mark Wallace has introduced a representation of a biocentrically focused ‘Green Face of God’ which he based on scriptural images (see Gen. 1:2, Ps. 104:29-30 - *vivifying breath*; Jg. 6:34, - *healing wind* ; Jn. 3:6, - *living water*; Acts 2:1-4 – *divine dove*). Elizabeth Johnson speaks of the Spirit in cosmic terms as ‘the dynamic flow of divine power that sustains the universe, bringing forth life ... (and as the) indwelling, renewing, moving’ (Johnson, 1993:42). The Spirit who is the Creator and who renews Creation, brings all creatures into communion.

Peter Hodgson speaks of the Spirit as the cosmic Eros, described in the following compelling words:

God’s love for the world is erotic in the sense that God creates, desires and allures the world in its vitality and materiality, while at the same time transfiguring that materiality into relationships ... of recognition, mutuality, self-giving.

(Hodgson, 1994:194)

The appropriation of vital force as a concept of nature and spirit, therefore, is well placed among its conversation partners. Moreover, there is scope for a uniquely African contribution that is also at the same time accountable to the larger Christian family.

From an African point of view, then, the Creator whose vital force animates all of creation brings human beings into an ontological relationship with all of creation. This pneumatic understanding is analogical to the underpinning notion in Christian theology of God whose Spirit imbues all creation and calls all of creation into participation. The reverence for life that ensues from such a view is so deeply valued in the African way of life that it is a viable foundation for an ecological ethos and serves as grounding for ethics of responsibility in earth-care because everything is interrelated and interdependent.

The health of the whole community of life ensures the well-being of each kind – and humans are keenly aware of that, and perhaps we need other (‘lower’) creatures for survival more than they need us. There might be a recovery of the idea of the cosmic Spirit as the power of God that gives life (*ruach* or *vital force*), who is the indwelling Spirit - giver, sustainer of a layered and co-existent way of being that is not limited by binaries or the concrete material world. The Spirit makes possible a unity of reality in which immanence and transcendence are inextricably bound together as the realm of reality in which the presence of God may be discerned.

The cosmic breadth of the Spirit is apprehended within a Trinitarian frame of reference and understood as One who enables communion in the web of life within broader redemptive and eschatological dimensions of Christian theology. I develop this further in the next chapter when I bring Christian pneumatology to bear on the pneumatic understanding of God’s presence in nature, taking into account the historical controversy of the *filioque* issue of the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* and understanding of the Creator *Spiritus Sanctus*.

CHAPTER 4: PNEUMATOLOGY IN COSMIC VIEW

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In sections 1.2 and 2.4, and throughout chapter 4, I allude to the fact that the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity obligate us to perceive the Spirit in cosmic view. The Cosmic Spirit is postulated as the extemporaneity of history, the freedom of nature, and the splendour of all things (Jenson, 2011) and as *field* in which, as Dingemans (2003:5-6) surmises:

Reality consists in events, growth and energy. To me as a theologian this means that we can no longer speak about God as Absolute, Immobile Being or the Ground of Being, but rather as Mighty Movement, Inspiring Power, Energy, that suffuses our world. Or, in biblical terms: about God the Spirit which, at the time of creation, moved over the face of the waters and, in the course of history, attached itself to humans in a special way yet never merging with them altogether. Because of this, process theologians speak about panentheism. I prefer to describe God's presence in our world as immanent transcendence: He is present among us as an indwelling, inspiring Spirit, but without identifying with our words and deeds. He surpasses and transcends our world. He is present but, at the same time, holy! Just as electricity is invisibly and potently present in our world but can be lethal if mishandled, so God's Spirit is present in our midst.

The discussion in this chapter therefore seeks to answer the following broad questions (not necessarily in a chronological way), as stated in the objectives for this chapter. Firstly, the question of the Spirit being understood only in Christological terms and therefore mostly applicable only soteriologically, is addressed in a brief sketch background of the theological and historical landscape in which background Christian pneumatology has been conceived.

The tension between the *Spiritus Redemptor* and Creator *Spiritus Sanctus* is explained by the context in which Christian pneumatology has been conceived. Secondly, the implications of understanding the Spirit as the Creator *Spiritus Sanctus* by means of *perichoresis* which refers to the intra-connectedness in the Trinity as the Father, the Son and the Spirit, is presented as the more adequate framework that could hold the two in a healthy tension. To that extent, it could provide scope for a constructive pneumatological framework that would apprehend the insights from the African concept of vital force within a realistic, relational and concrete pneumatology that speaks to the ecological crisis in terms of the Spirit as distinct divine person within the Trinitarian relationship.

Thirdly, this chapter addresses the *filioque* issue of *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* as a point of entry for the exploration of a Trinitarian Cosmic pneumatology as it pertains to the possible subjection of the Spirit. The broader question of the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus Christ, and indeed that of the place of the Spirit in Trinitarian theology as such, also has a bearing in this chapter.

The ensuing discussion subsequently informs an understanding of Creator *Spiritus Sanctus* in terms of a creational approach but which does not exclude the Spirit of Christ and the creative and life-giving Spirit of God and are hereby understood as one and the same Spirit. That insight in turn provides the impetus for this study in recognition that the understanding of the Spirit goes beyond the confines of the Church. It leads to the retrieval of a nuanced understanding (taking into account the continuities and discontinuities) that the Spirit of Christ may be (metaphorically) identified (within a nuanced ontological understanding) as the same Spirit identified as vital force in African ecological wisdom which is at work in the ecosystems of creation.

Structurally, this chapter therefore firstly provides a theological/historical background of pneumatology. Secondly, it attempts to articulate a pneumatology based on the understanding of the Creator Spirit as Cosmic Spirit by means of a *perichoretic* intra-connected interrelationship within the Trinity. Thirdly, it applies the ensuing discussion to the *filioque* issue of *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*.

This chapter offers issues from a Christian view for the subsequent triangulation undertaken in chapter 6 which through the three lenses employed in this study, namely, Christianity, science and African thought, brings the discussion into a *trialogue* and the subsequent triangulation of faith, creation and Creator. The ideas that emerge in this chapter and those that emerge in chapter 5 provide the content for the other two legs in addition to that offered in chapter 3.

4.2 THEOLOGICAL/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PNEUMATOLOGY

Pneumatology is a reference to the study of the Spirit. The Stoic concept of *pneuma* refers to the idea of wind, force or the vital spirit, or creative force within a person. It found its way into Christian tradition through Old Testament studies and, in particular, the study of pneumatology as a derivative of that Stoic notion. In this chapter we use it to refer to the

broader systematic study of the Spirit and borrow from Welker's (1994:296-97) pneumatology. This apprehends the Spirit of God as one who 'effects a domain ... not determined by self-relation exercising control, or even merely by intellectual self-relation' but One who is other-directed and creates an ever-extending domain that exudes a power or force that affects persons and consequently enlists 'their services in order to protect, liberate, renew, and enliven other creatures.'

The term is significant for this study as it is applied to, and is at the centre of, the reinterpretation of the hierarchical conception of God's relationship with creation and in turn human beings' interdependence with other creatures. Based on the triangulation of insights from the African idea of vital force, the scientific notion of force field and Christian rendering of the cosmic Spirit, this study postulates a pneumatology that underpins the concurrence³⁶ of Spirit and nature.

Green pneumatology forms part of a broader renewed interest in the Spirit during our time that has been identified in at least three contexts in which the quest for the Spirit has been made manifest. These are an individual Christian life with an appetite for a spirituality yearning for a profounder intimacy with God with disregard to the real needs in the concrete world around; church renewal through life-giving disciplines in a quest to reclaim and return to sources; and through the research in the academic disciplines of theology and philosophy (Kärkkäinen, 2002).

At a personal level, I have been attracted to the quest for a renewed spirituality that takes creation into consideration as a way to live more authentically within created order. The ways in which life and faith relate to creation have become important themes to explore as an aspect of Christian life as I have grown in awareness of the ecological crisis of our time. I seek to find and adapt ways of living and worship that do take creation into account, in order to nurture an eco-spirituality on a personal level and hopefully through my work of ministry. I contend that that kind of spirituality can be mediated only through an understanding that as a human being I am part of the larger cosmic order, imbued by the cosmic spirit who encompasses and indwells every aspect of nature.

³⁶ The word reconciliation is too soteriological to employ in this regard. Whitehead (1929) is correct to see God as present in nature in a persuasive way.

Beyond the personal, a quest to reclaim and return to sources in ecclesiastical life also calls for a renewed interest in the Spirit. A return to sources is an exercise in critical examination of the past and present of our understanding of God. Vogel captures the essence of this endeavour aptly when he disavows the domination and objectification (reification) of nature and contends that the human-centred abuse of nature is heightened when nature is ‘(d)isenchanted and objectified ... (as something) ... to be overcome and mastered for human purposes, and not to be imitated, propitiated, or religiously celebrated’ (Vogel, 1996:52). He then spells out the human responsibility to re-enchant and *subjectify* (so to speak) nature as ‘a *practical* responsibility, [because] we produce that world (in which nature is disenchanted and objectified) through our practices and can change it only by changing those practices’ (Vogel, 1996:172).

McFague (1993:5) underlines human responsibility in bringing about that change when she argues that,

We human beings are not the only ones who deserve a fair share, but we are among those who do and in addition, we alone [to our knowledge] have the ability to make decisions about sharing along lines other than ‘make right’, both for the needy of our kind as well as other vulnerable species.

Habel (2000:69) goes a step further and both acknowledging human responsibility and the need to change human actions by highlighting that, ‘self-awareness is the pre-requisition for the experience of shame.’ He identifies that as the quality that differentiates humans from other animals. He depicts the shame that Adam and Eve felt after eating the fruit as an example of such self-awareness while noting emphatically that upon the realisation of their nakedness the two proto-humans still depended on another member of the community of life, a tree for its leaves, to cover their shame. Thereby they are reminded of the intrinsic worth of the rest of creation and the interdependence of the entire community of life. The tree provides cover for the human beings in the same way that it provides shelter for soil and plants, and a habitat for other living things.

The simple act of being clothed with leaves from a tree evokes the interconnected nature of life in the primordial garden that God entrusted to human care. It also carries with it a reminder of how the other creatures and indeed the earth (which preceded humans in the

chronology of creation³⁷) may be granted a voice and served rather than be dominated as humans acknowledge the intrinsic value imbued within creation by its Creator. We humans may also learn how to take our place within the community of life. Genesis 9 begins with the rest of the community of life depicted as frightened by, and estranged from, humans. The narrative ends with the entire community of life being bound together equally in a covenant with God the Creator.

Historically, we continue to acknowledge that the Enlightenment ethos provided tools for human beings to dominate nature whose outcome spelt trouble for the environment as McGrath (2002:129) puts it. If a reversal were to happen, new tools for relating to nature need to be availed to human beings, ones that portray creation as the essentially united whole that it is. What aspects of the past and the present do we need to critically appropriate for an adequate ecological pneumatology?

Thus far, with regard to the tria, I have attempted a retrieval of a biblical ecological tradition in chapter 2. This chapter continues the retrieval as well as ecological critique of Christian theological tradition, and in particular pneumatology, as the entry point for theology that affirms the holistic and interrelatedness of nature.

Vital force from African thought is apprehended and based on the understanding that life is an interconnected unit. In the next chapter, I explore the scientifically derived force-field which is appropriated in terms of quantum physics which avers that at the deepest fundamental level, nature is ‘a single unified whole, indivisible and bound together by a simple yet powerful force’ (Bradley, 1992:19).

The Christian scriptural tradition, African thought and scientific studies affirm an underlying relational quality of reality (ontology). It is within such a life-affirming holistic reality that we seek to locate the explorations of Spirit categories that would support a holistic pneumatology; one that transcends the dualistic matter-spirit dichotomies or holds a fixation on matter.

³⁷ The chronological order in creation seems to apply as a compelling basis for prioritising males ahead of females. Nevertheless, the same logic does not seem to apply to the chronology of creation. If it did, we would argue for the earth to take precedence over human.

Ogbonnaya (1994:1) recounts the ‘communality, relationality and fundamental interconnection that underlie the African mode of seeing and being in the world.’ He uses that as an entry point of his articulation of a Trinitarian understanding based on the idea of the ‘many’ in reference to community. With this idea, he conceives of the relationship between humans and ancestors as representing the openness that exists in African community to the divine. According to Ogbonnaya (1994:9), the community is not a static notion but a process of being/becoming. That process includes taking the past, the present and the future into account. It is within that context of the becoming-community that divine revelation takes place.

Ogbonnaya (1994:13) introduced the idea of ‘the one and the many’ as a way of appropriating the triune God on African terms, recalling the African maxim: ‘I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am’ (Ogbonnaya, 1994:14). Using that maxim, he conveys the African religious system of ‘a community of gods’. Ogbonnaya attempts to reconcile this with Christian belief by proposing that the community of gods can be appropriated at the two subsequent levels of monotheism and polytheism. His attempt has been critiqued for being weak on depicting oneness against the plurality of the divine. That weakness notwithstanding, the attempt to bring traditional communal interconnectedness into theological debate is, to that extent, a contribution worth noting.

Nyamiti (1996:38) attempted to appropriate the doctrine of the Trinity from the standpoint of the African traditional conception of ancestors. He highlights the link between the living and the dead perpetuated by childbearing as an aspect of that continuity. He notes that the naming of children after departed ancestors links generations, thereby transcending time and space. He identifies the medium through which that link happens as spirit and notes that communication happens among the living as the S(s)pirit.

Nyamiti conceives of ancestors as being close to the ultimate Divine Being, a perception that brings them closer to the Supreme Being. Nyamiti (1996:49) understands that the Father and the Son communicate the Holy Spirit to each other with ‘ancestral gifts and oblation’ as a symbol of their reciprocal love, reverence and appreciation. In his view, God the Father, analogically speaking, is the ancestor (ancestress) of his son who is his descendant.

Kombo (2009:133) has scrutinised the work of Idowu, Mbiti and Setiloane. His entry point into the subject is the question about African gods before the arrival of missionaries. He critiques the missionary stance that vilified African gods and concludes that in the end it has turned out to be that the African God is in fact the God of the Western missionaries. Kombo illustrates his point with names of God from various African societies such as Modimo, Nyame, Nyasaye, Ngai, Mulungu and Xikwenbu, which indicate the presence of a Supreme Being in many cultures with a hint of interrelationship with divine manifestations.

Of the three examples of attempts to appropriate the Trinity, I gravitate more towards Ogbonnaya (1994:68), especially when he postulates the ‘concept of inter-generative interconnection, based on a never-ceasing belonging within the community that fosters a continual and unbroken communication’ within African metaphysical consideration. There are many discontinuities with what are considered Christian views in the thought of these three African thinkers, yet the recognition of relationality seems to be central to all.

Without attempting a rigorous engagement with the gaps in each of their arguments, I wish to acknowledge their attempt and isolate that single contribution for the sake of advancing my argument. That quality is relationality within the metaphysical conception of the African, which can be theologically appropriated to Christian theology.

Amos Yong (2012:43), an Asian theologian, recommends ‘a triune and relational theology which understands the interconnectedness of God and creation, of human beings and society, of humankind and the environment.’ The Spirit is understood as full participant in the Trinity. The Spirit in turn *relationally* summons the entire community of life to participate in the unpredictable cosmic work of God. Such interconnectedness values a diversity of contributions and discernment of the work of the Spirit in spheres that transcend the confines of the Church. The contributions of science and those of traditional African wisdom are admitted as participants in the pneumatological renaissance that has emerged.

The Church’s understanding of the Spirit was formalised at a very early period of Church history, from about the third century onwards, and it emerged at two related points. The first aspect was the understanding of the Spirit within a Trinitarian framework from which emerged very specific pneumatological views. The second aspect pertains to distinguishing the Spirit from the other two persons of the Trinity (McIntyre, 1997).

In the first instance, the Trinity historically was cast as the ‘mould’ for an understanding of the Spirit. The language used in the formalised creedal statements about the Trinity subsequently had a bearing on accounts of the Spirit. For instance, the words *essence* (*ousia/substantia*) and *person* (*hypostasis/persona*) were used to define the nature of the triune God. The Church Fathers adopted the word ‘person’ to the understanding of the triune Godhead. McIntyre (1997:67) notes that the meaning is not identical with what we understand as ‘person’ or ‘personality’ and the correct rendering would be closer to *prosopon*, meaning ‘mask’ or an ‘aspect’.

Because of the problematic conceptual nature of the word *persona*, the Greek Church Fathers chose the word *hypostasis*, which is bivalent. It could denote *substantia* or *ousia*. Trinitarian history, therefore, parallels *persona* with the Greek *typos hyparxeos*, and the Latin *subsistentia in divina essentia* (McIntyre, 1997:77) in *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum*, the creedal statement that speaks about the being of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence, it is what was stated about the Trinity as a whole that had implications on the understanding of the Spirit specifically, and it informed and shaped the resultant pneumatology, which affirmed the divinity of the Spirit.

The second instance suggests the attempt to distinguish the Spirit from the other three persons within the Godhead. The doctrine therefore took the form of describing three sets of relationships, namely, (i) the relations between the Godhead and the three persons; (ii) the relationship that obtains among the three persons in the Godhead and, (iii) the relationship between the triune Godhead to created order and persons (McIntyre, 1997).

In the first instance, the issue was whether the starting point is the Trinity existing as three persons, in which case God could be understood in modal terms, which tend to minimise God’s tri-unity. On the other hand, to begin with the three persons as ‘subsisting’ in the Trinity favours an understanding of the three persons in the Trinity as sharing their full divinity. Calvin quoted the words of Theodore Beza (1519-1605) affirming that approach to the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘a relation in God whereby the Divine and single essence there subsist three persons, truly and actually distinguishable from each other by the modes of existence, namely, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which single persons are the same one true God’ (*Institutes*, 1.13.6).

The relationship among the three persons in the Godhead brought to the fore issues of equality and distinctness of the three persons. The equality among the three persons was understood in terms of the nature, essence and substance. The three persons are *homo-ousioi*, that is of the same essence and so they are ontologically identical (distinguished from being alike, or *homoi-ousioi*). As the Athanasian Creed of 500 AD (Articles 24 & 25) pronounced: ‘There is nothing prior or posterior; nothing greater or less; but all three persons are co-eternal and co-equal to themselves.’

The relationship among the persons within the Godhead is thus understood in terms of a community of participation or interpenetration (*perichoresis* or Latin *circumincessio*). This idea is connected to and has its foundation in the biblical reference ‘The Father is in me and I am in the Father’ (Jn. 10:38). This mode of subsisting in each other in the Godhead suggests a dynamic *sequential* relationship. Its etymological origin is in the Greek language and it literally means ‘rotation’ (*περιχώρησις perikhōrēsis*). Its first use in Christian theology is attributed to the Cappadocian Fathers; Maximus Confessor (d. 662) is said to have been the first to use it as a noun. Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389/90) is a contender for the first position in that the verb *perichoreo* preceded its use as a noun in his earlier work. In Gregory, *perichoreo* is used to depict the dynamic ‘rotational’ relationship that exists between the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. John of Damascus (d. 749) extended upon the dynamic ‘interpenetration’ of the three persons of the Godhead. From then onwards it became a technical theological term for thinking about the relation within the Trinity (Cross & Livingstone, 1974).

The issue of the distinctiveness of persons was to become controversial because of the ontological prioritising within the intra-Trinitarian relationship of the Father and Son at the expense of the Spirit. I pick up that discussion separately in the next section because the issue of the subordination of the Spirit was at the centre of the *filioque* issue and has implications for the constructive cosmic pneumatological view that this study seeks to postulate.

The relationship between the Trinity and created order of nature flows directly from the understanding of the intra-Trinitarian relationship. Divine action in creation, redemption, renewal and sanctification is what defines God’s relationship with nature, human beings and all of created order. These are understood in terms of their common source – God’s power – and their common end understood in divinely ordered eschatological terms.

The three persons of the Trinity are understood to work in cooperation in these divine activities with creation being attributed to the Father, while redemption is attributed to the Son and the renewal and sanctification are attributed to the Spirit; yet they are at the same time understood to be indivisibly present and operative in every activity. It is clear how this way of thinking about divine action could morph into reductive thinking that divides the Godhead into differentiated persons assigned to exclusive actions. Augustine's words in response to the choice of the *persona* in describing the nature of being in the Godhead are instructive here. He noted that the choice was necessitated by the fact that 'they could not discover any more suitable method to describe that which they could understand without words' (*De Trinitate*, V10).

As McIntyre concludes, the pneumatological views inherited from the Patristic period, particularly from the Latin Western church, although they can be said to be sensitive to the Spirit's action in the world, inherit a legacy of controversy, which continues to this day. Not least among those controversies was what would occupy the Greek Fathers, namely 'the refutation of the views of those who affirmed that the Holy Spirit was a creature' (McIntyre, 1997:85). This focused on the unity within the Godhead, divine activity and distinctiveness, which served to highlight the issue of the Spirit issuing from the Father and the Son – the *filioque* question.

While questions of the divinity of the Holy Spirit concerned the Patristic Fathers (evidenced by the *filioque* issue), the Reformers concentrated more on the work of the Holy Spirit in Redemption, given the context and issues that prompted the Reformation. For instance, Calvin's theology was principally focused on the Spirit's role in uniting the believer to Christ. His pneumatology is, nevertheless, Trinitarian and it transcends a mere Christocentric focus. In Calvin, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit receive equal emphasis. In the first volume of the *Institutes* he declares, 'I cannot think of the one without being encircled by the splendour of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightaway carried back to the one' (*Institutes*, 1.13.17).

Calvin thus conceived of the Spirit in terms of union and co-equality with the Father and Son. Warfield ([1956] 1980:484-487) christened Calvin 'the theologian of the Holy Spirit' because of the centrality of pneumatology in his *Institutes* and the integration of pneumatology into

other areas of theology such as regeneration, Scripture, sacraments and sanctification (Lopes, 1997:40).

Reformed theology has mainly interpreted the work of the Spirit in two basic ways, namely, in terms of redemption and creation. Given the context of the Reformation, the emphasis has historically fallen on the redemptive-centred understanding of pneumatology. That has in turn created a tension between redemptive and creative pneumatological views and in some cases a dichotomy because of overemphasis of one at the expense of the other. The role of the Spirit is that of the One who awakens faith in the believer and makes the reality of God's self-revelation – particularly through Scripture – evident to the believer. Thus in reformed perspective, the work of the Spirit is primarily to lead people to faith in God through Christ, thereby uniting them with the Triune God and the community of faith.

There is evidence in the history of Christian theology, of an understanding of the cosmic and universal Spirit, the giver and renewer of life who inhabits all of creation. However, that view has been in constant tension with the redemptive understanding of the Spirit. The tension between *Spiritus Redemptor* and *Creator Spiritus Sanctus*, owing to that historical legacy, is still evident in pneumatology.

4.3 WELKER'S PNEUMATOLOGY

In that regard, Welker (1994) suggests that some notions in the history of Christian theology are far removed from biblical traditions. He noted that this is the case particularly in regard to ideas that pertain to the understanding of the Spirit of God. He contends that those ideas are largely responsible for the alienation of human beings from the rest of creation and that as a result:

[r]eligion and theology also were made to serve the development of a history – a history of culture, institutions, reason and consciousness – that many people have come to regard as fatal to the natural surroundings of human beings.

(Welker, 1994:284)

Welker (1994:281) also suggests that the Western conception of 'self, reality and validity' that have been applied to theology, premised on the works of philosophers like Aristotle and Hegel, can be credited for giving rise to the 'abstract, private person and of the stratified, monocentric institution, as well as at the cognitive or cognitively controllable domination of

the world.’ In other words, Welker is proposing that what we have read into our biblical interpretation are really the dominant views of philosophers at different turns of the history of ideas. Those views may therefore not necessarily reflect authentic teachings of Scripture. The call for a retrieval of the biblical tradition in Welker’s critique is self-evident.

According to Welker (1994:284-285), Aristotle’s metaphysics gave rise to the understanding of the Spirit as living in the realm of thought and in relation to self and no other: ‘I am only insofar as I know myself’ (Welker, 1994:290). The Aristotelian view thus gave rise to a complex dialectical understanding of being that elevated the materialistic view of the universe which is ‘reductionist’ (Welker, 1994:291) and which is characteristically one-dimensional and self-interested in orientation.

Welker (1994:294) presents Hegel’s philosophy view of the Spirit as an extension of the Aristotelian view. Hegel apprehended the Spirit in terms of community and as the basic principle that ‘mediates unity and community “love” and “God as present”.’ According to Welker (1994:295), this is a virtual return to Aristotle’s view. He, however, offers a caveat that ‘Hegel corrects formality, abstractness and a reflexive distance from reality of classical metaphysical pneumatology.’ Yet Welker (1999) dismisses Hegelian pneumatology as of no consequence because it largely upholds the hierarchical view of creation, which he classifies as the causal view that speaks of creation in terms of ‘production’.

The production mode of thinking about creation is what he holds to be responsible for deistic views that present God as the transcendent prime causer who stands far removed from creation. That belief is also the premise for the power-dominion relationship between human beings and the rest of creation because human beings, by virtue of creation in God’s image, become an extension and partakers of the quality of being removed from the rest of creation to the point of alienation.

Welker (1999:7) argues that the act of production (or creation) by a higher superior being ensures dependence on the part of the created. Arguably, it is through dependence on the Creator that the hierarchy of being is established and codified within nature. In the traditional dualistic view of creation therefore, human beings come to be understood to reside at the summit. The rest of creation, according to this view, is dependent on (or more crudely at the mercy of) human beings.

Welker (1999:7) advances that the ‘how’ of the act of creation which unfolds in myths, sagas (including the biblical one) and cosmological theories has been reduced to abstracted notions ‘of an ultimate process of causing and being caused’ resulting in the conclusion that the ultimate process is production by a transcendent being to whom creation should relate in absolute dependence. Conditioned by Aristotelian and Hegelian dualistic metaphysics, it gives rise to a reductionistic view of creation.

The inaccuracy of this view of creation is not the view itself but the consequent reduction of God’s creation to what can be conceived of in conceptual terms alone, to the exclusion of other ways of perceiving. The universality of the Spirit’s economy in creation and the Spirit’s particularity in redemption cannot be reconciled within such a framework.

Welker (2006:228) proposes that we speak of a ‘multicontextual and polyphonic presence of the Spirit (that) accounts for the connection of various phenomena addressed by biblical traditions.’ He amplifies this idea by proposing that a varying constellation of relationships of the Spirit in different spheres and contexts should be understood in terms of mutual modification and thus have effects on the whole that are only possible because of the complexity of the interactions and interrelationships.

In other words, the Spirit is manifest in varying contexts and relationships in creation within what Oberdorfer (2006:230) postulates as ‘The Spirit (who) has the dual character of a personal, namely, context-sensitive and intentional instance and of a structuring force field which operates in poly-contextual and polyphonic forms’. Welker’s explanation of how this is understood is instructive:

The multi-contextual and polyphonic presence of the Spirit challenges simple one-to-one relations and mono-hierarchical forms of social interaction, questions their ability to express basic religious experiences and interactions. *Theories of emergence have to be used to explain this character and working of the Spirit* (emphasis mine). The pouring out of the Spirit brings about a pluralistic striving for God’s righteousness and truth. The complex unity brought forth by the Spirit is not a postmodern invention, but an act of divine power by which God works through frail and finite human creatures against sin and distortion. The Spirit works in emergent ways that alter a complex constellation with a multiplicity of internal relations and clusters of relations, whether gradually or at once. The new relations and constellations not

only modify each other but also have unforeseen effects and joint-effects on the whole constellation.

(Welker, 2007:246-247)

Hence, Welker (1994) urges that biblical traditions be reclaimed and reinterpreted with critical exegetical tools in ways that speak to present concerns, which is the premise of this study. In that regard, Welker's pneumatology serves as a model, representative of a constructive frame of understanding that does not shrink from the plurality of perspectives, but at the same time does not attempt to relegate the faithfulness of biblical witness about the cosmic nature of the Spirit.

According to Welker (2006:74), therefore '[a]ll uniformity and homogeneity ... must be corrected associations evoked by some oneness statements' in the Bible. For instance, 1 Corinthians 12:13: 'For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.' And Philippians 1:27: 'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then ... I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel'; and Philippians 2:1: 'Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ ... if any common sharing in the Spirit.' Welker argues that the defining character of the Spirit is what is captured in 2 Corinthians 3:17: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.'

The reference to the homogeneity and uniformity of the Spirit in these parts of Scripture, when read in correspondence with other parts of Scripture, reveals that the Spirit is at the centre of creation. The New Testament references that seem to confine the Spirit to redemptive views should be read as a complementary (never in isolation) reference to other scriptural references that render the Spirit differently or speak about the other dimensions of the Spirit. The biblical pneumatology that ensues from employing such a hermeneutic would then bring creation and redemptive themes together. When the Spirit is understood as one, an entry point for dialogue with the concept of vital forces opens up.

A biblically derived pneumatological understanding places the Spirit at the centre of creation. God's actions in creation/nature, when understood in pneumatic terms, provide a basis for the

understanding that God is immanent within it. What Moltmann says complements Welker's view and is worth citing in full to capture its essence:

According to the biblical traditions, all divine activity is pneumatic in its efficacy. It is always the Spirit who first brings activity of the Father and the Son as its goal. It follows that the triune God also unremittingly breathes the Spirit into his creation. Everything that is, exists and lives in the unceasing inflow of the energies and potentialities of the cosmic Spirit. This means that we have to understand every created reality in terms of energy, grasping it as the realized potentiality of the divine. Through the energies and potentialities of the Spirit, the Creator is himself present in his creation. He does not merely confront it in his transcendence; entering into it, he is also immanent within it.

(Moltmann, 1985:9)

Moltmann speaks of creation in the Spirit as 'a Trinitarian process' (Moltmann, 1985:9). He notes that theological understandings derived upon a hierarchical view have stressed the place of Father God as Creator in a 'fixed' monotheistic way that upholds God's presence in creation without upholding the causation idea. God in Trinitarian process must be understood as being at once *immanent* in creation and *entering* into it (Moltmann, 1985:25). Johnston (2007:218) puts it another way and in specific reference to the role of the Spirit in the Godhead when she describes the work of the Spirit in terms of movement as

the presence and action of God actually arriving and affecting the world ... the Spirit continuously draws attention to the unreachable source ... and to the source coming forth ... Apart from the dynamic pattern of God's coming forth in love, the Spirit is not thinkable at all.

The difference and mutual relationship of the Spirit with the other two persons inspired the early church fathers to capture the Spirit using technical terms, such as 'person, nature, substance and subsistence' (Johnston, 2007:219). However, the being of the Spirit is not confined to that language, pneumatologically speaking. We have asserted that the predominant vocabulary in theological discourse that depicts the Spirit was in fact, derived from non-biblical Hellenistic philosophy.

Trinitarian talk then only makes sense in existential-ontological terms. John Macquarrie (2003) in that regard, speaks of God in terms of energy that is characterised by letting-be and self-spending. That refers to God's ability and character to bequeath life and to let that life *be*. The Greek theological term, *perichoresis*, which describes the relationship of each person of

the Trinity with the others, captures that divine quality. The etymological roots of the concept reveal that. *Peri* means ‘around’ and *chorein* means ‘give way’ or ‘make room’. The triune relationship is one that lives freely, making room and giving room for the being of the other.

The synonym of *perichoresis* is *circumincessio*. It is similarly used to express the inherently reciprocal nature of the relationship of the three persons in the Godhead. The stem *circum* (around) and the stem *incessio* derive from *incess* (in + *cedere*) and is the noun based on the past participle of *incedere*, which signifies ‘to give in’, ‘to surrender’ or to ‘go along with’. The triune relationship within the Godhead is thus rendered as being within the circumference (around) of the three persons (us) existing in reciprocity (‘giving in’ and ‘going along with’); that is a *realm* in which the one affects the other. Thus, the one is understood only in relation to the other. The triune relationship therefore has resonance with the relationality and holistic understanding of life that the notion of vital force speaks to and the dynamic realm of *akin* forces that the concept of force field exhibits, if only analogically.

The mutual interpenetration within the Trinitarian relationship signifies a movement of the energy or the spirit of the divine primordial being. The mutual intersection and interpenetration of the persons of the Godhead are an expression of the intimacy and unity that is the Trinity. The spirit that is the Trinity is expressive, relational and uniting and is outwardly oriented towards the whole universe.

The outflow of that expressive, relational and uniting being finds expression in the omnipresence of God who also intersects with creation (Acts 17:28). God gives life to all of creation, intersects with it and lets creation be. That is why God would respond to creation and even ‘give room’ for potential for emergent forms within creation, thus endowing creation with agency.

The ensuing pneumatological view of creation transcends the mechanistic view and is akin to the interrelationships within the complex systems that are imbued with vital force in African thought and force field in scientific terms. The dynamic interrelationship is the flow of life in which new forms of life and the ‘becoming’ are conceived within the relationship itself. The exchange of vital force between the constituents is causal in ways that transcend the deterministic conceptions of being.

The consonance with the view that the entire gamut of life is constituted by interrelationships, rather than by individual components or some universal foundations or fundamental particles, is evident. That view herewith challenges the essentialist view that upholds physics or natural laws as being at the foundation of *being* (or ontology). It replaces it with the view that dynamic interrelationship is in fact what is foundational. It is akin to the biblical depiction of the hidden work of the Spirit whose outworking may be hidden in character and cannot be disintegrated into independent particles that easily separate creaturely from divine work. Scientific findings have characterised ‘the edge of chaos’ as the place where the contingencies in nature can be said to interweave and provide for new possibilities to emerge (Polkinghorne, 2012:9-10).

Therefore, pneumatologically speaking, production by a removed creator is set aside in favour of a relational, unitive Being. That is not to say we cast aside the formulations of the early church. Rather it calls for a recognition of the gaps and tensions therein, in order to both dialogue honestly with/within them and to transcend one-sided traditional theological thinking while remaining faithful to the Christian faith’s imperatives. That is the faith I seek to express. The African cultural wisdom imbedded in the concept of vital force that is appropriated in this study is presented as a lens to enunciate the relational quality of being, but without enmeshing God with creation. For in an attempt to argue for the restoration of the ‘whole’ as interrelated and unitive, it is possible, unintentionally, to skew the argument towards Spinoza’s God and nature equality.

In that vein, Welker provides a compelling Christological argument when he argues for a distinction between God’s Spirit and the human spirit. He points to the biblical assertion that ‘God can “withdraw”... and leave creation to self-jeopardy, self-destruction, decay and death’ (Welker, 2012:138). He takes into account the connection between creation and the new creation and speaks of the Spirit of God as being christologically fashioned, a view that I concur with and uphold as the defining mark. This study construes the relationship between creation and new creation as a nuanced order of continuities and discontinuities. In terms of its location, the study is an interdisciplinary contribution that employs an African cultural lens but within the Christian tradition. The new creation, understood only eschatologically (even though its trajectory is that), is inadequate if it does not take seriously the present in general and in nature specifically. Therein lie some of the gaps that have historically shaped Christian pneumatology.

One clear gap in traditional Christian pneumatology that we have identified here is the procession of the Spirit that raises the issue of the *filioque* that we consider in 4.5. The concern that the Spirit is often confined to a soteriological understanding, despite the creedal affirmation that the redemptive Spirit is also the universal Spirit in creation, is another issue that we turn to now.

4.4 THE SPIRIT IN COSMIC VIEW

The previous section makes it plain that Spirit as a topic in theology has been shaped by notions of personhood used in philosophical inquiries and cultural thought. Trinitarian theology is founded on the personhood of the *persona* of the three persons in the Godhead. It has been rightly argued that such notions of personhood that have characterised Christian theology were especially brought into sharp focus by Aristotelean and Hegelian conceptions which conceptually identified the Spirit as *nous*³⁸. That identification casts the Spirit in cognitive self-referential terms (Welker, 2006) rather than co-operative relational ones.

Welker (2006) and Polkinghorne (2006) both argue that apart from the theological imperative, interreligious and pluralistic relations demand that the personhood of the Spirit be understood in a more complex way that goes beyond cognitive self-referentiality. Polkinghorne (2001:71ff., 97; 2006) postulates a ‘context-sensitive and individuality-sensitive’ Spirit who is empathetic and acts according the varying contexts and situations of manifestation as depicted in a variety of biblical texts.

The Spirit’s context-sensitivity may suggest that she is understood as a nebulous amorphous entity within the Godhead, expected to change according to each encounter and particular context; but Polkinghorne does not present the argument in that way. If that were the case, it would become problematic to account for a Trinitarian Spirit. The Spirit’s contextual and individuality sensitivity has to do with the Spirit’s relationship to God the Creator and to Jesus Christ the Redeemer within the economy of the Trinity as one and the same Spirit, understood as one and the same indivisible God, present in all of creation.

A sacramental view of creation holds that God and creation are not separated and that creation is most itself when ‘completely within God, and can most adequately be expressed

³⁸ Identified in Aristotle as *spirit, reason* or *thought* (see Ross, 1924).

with the metaphor spirit ... the empowering spirit that brings all things to fulfilment' (McFague, 2008:115-116). The metaphors of water, wind, breath, air, field, force and others are used to speak about the Spirit as the reality in which everything exists in utter dependence. These metaphors also allude to the life-affirming nature of that reality as the power of life and its fulfilment. It suggests an ontology that speaks of the world as being within God, as it were. And as Peter Hodgson (2001:140) postulates this means:

that the whole world is animated by the Spirit and the Spirit proceeds from the whole world as God's body. It means that the Spirit manifests itself in nature, that the Spirit slumbers in nature and nature cries out to the Spirit.

Accepting this ontological portrayal of the Spirit casts God in profound relational terms towards the world, which potentially is the grounding of our hope in a time of ecological challenges in our world. The relationship with the world underscored by this ontology reframes God's commitment to the world and is couched not only in redemptive terms but also in terms that depict an enduring accompanying presence of God that pervades all reality through the ubiquitous presence of the Spirit. Sally McFague puts it well using her own enduring metaphor of the world as the body of God. She asserts that because of this divine presence,

The world is charged with the grandeur of God and it is so by being most fully itself. God as the body of the world is that body by way of zillions of bodies that compose the universe. There is only one reality: God visible (body) and invisible (spirit), but the latter is known through the former. Everything is suffused, infused, with God's breath and light and power. The World is alive with God – but indirectly, incarnationally.

(McFague,2008:117)

It would therefore be reductionistic and one-directional to account only for the Spirit, who can be accounted for within the Godhead but who does not relate in 'individual' and contextual ways to creation. Non-reductionistic renderings of the Spirit take seriously each manifestation and relationship while at the same time being grounded in, and allowing for access to, Jesus Christ the Redeemer and God the Creator within a Trinitarian framework. It is within that tension-laden framework that a notion of the universal cosmic Spirit would emerge. The Trinitarian understanding is helpful in that regard as long as we do not seek to resolve and base our argument on the problem of the three persons, one substance.

The perichoretic understanding of the Trinity depicts a God who lives in communion, not isolated and alone. By contrast, the Trinitarian relationship is a continuous flow of mutual giving and receiving, sharing and living with and in one another, of interdependence, that underscores the nature of reality as process, related and *existing-in*. McFague (2008:119) sums up this thought and aptly:

Things *are* themselves as and to the extent they acknowledge the source of their being. This is an extraordinary thought: life and grace are the same thing. Grace is the gift of acknowledging one's total dependence on God, who is life and gives life.

The reason for the dialectic distinction between nature and spirit in reformed theology was a largely polemical one. Reformers sought to discount the scholastic view that held to a continuum between creation and redemption. The dualism in Protestant theology is therefore just that – protestant! As a result a pneumatology emerged from such a theology in which, though some of it affirmed the cosmic Spirit, more emphasis was placed on the soteriological aspects of the Spirit, arising from the polemical context of the Reformation regarding that question.

The descendant theologies of the reformed legacy have tended to present a discontinuity so that the cosmic Spirit upheld in Protestant theologies for Christian public engagement, is exemplified in Abraham Kuyper's (1900; [1975]) pneumatological construction. Jürgen Moltmann's (1992, 1993, 1997) 'holistic pneumatology' rejects a permanent discontinuity between the human and divine Spirit; instead he emphasises experience as an aspect of his pneumatological reflection. By so doing he seeks to transcend the Western one-directional formulations and to indicate that some of the aspects of the relationship between God and the world that have been held as antithetical are in fact not; by contrast they can be integrated for a more holistic pneumatology.

The legacy arising from the tendency to confine the work of the Spirit to the Word and the Church, limits the understanding of the Spirit. To that extent, the Spirit's activity in all of creation is diminished. That limitation of tying the Spirit's identity to the Church, construes that the Spirit cannot be said to be 'hypostatically eternal, if he is dependent for his identifying relation on the existence of Israel of the church' (Jenson, 1997:147). There is therefore a need to retrieve the language of the cosmic Christ, (Col. 1:16-17) and the cosmic Spirit (Acts 17:28) for a congruent pneumatological argument that retains the internal logic

that unifies the Triune God without limiting the Spirit to the Church and the Christ to the Jesus of history. Without continuity between the Spirit and Christ, we cannot have a Christian pneumatology. A Christian pneumatology is necessarily be Christocentric just as every Christology is pneuma-centric.

4.4 A THEOLOGY OF NATURE

There are different epistemological perspectives for natural theology some of which require a sharp distinction between reason and faith or a disdain of the material world in order to apprehend that which is transcendent. Yet human beings are themselves natural and must necessarily encounter the world on those terms, naturally, through observation. Alister McGrath (2011) postulates that observation to be a *discerning in nature* of that which is transcendent. That view is instructive and fruitful for the premise of this discussion.

Discernment in nature is not an exercise for gaining explicit knowledge about nature, as if the discernment of nature were a purely objective exercise. Human beings are related to nature within a transcended reality that is not ‘out there’ but one that is within that relationship. Buitendag extends upon the notion of *discerning in nature* proposed by McGrath and asserts that:

Nature cannot be observed as such, but has always to be observed as *something*.

Consequently, there is no transcendent reality above, behind, or in front of the observable, but rather a transcendent reality *in* the relationship that man has with nature. When interpreted correctly, nature becomes Creation to the faithful.

(Buitendag, 2009:7)

The pneumatological epistemology and hermeneutic that is applied in this study is grounded in the understanding of what the Spirit’s dynamic categories entail which extend to scientific as well as religious and cultural perspectives that attempt to make sense of nature. Within it, it is possible to establish grounds for dialogical and intersubjective arbitration of the multidisciplinary and multi-religious claims to truth that ensue within the discussion. Understood in those broad terms, natural theology becomes the converging point for new avenues explored within a multidisciplinary and multi-religious dialogue. The outcome is cross-pollination and mutual enrichment of the perspectives that are brought into dialogue.

The pneumatological perspectives are formed by human engagement with nature as well as human responses to the transcendent reality experienced. Because it is rooted in human

engagement with nature and experience of reality, natural theology is rightly understood to be a cultural phenomenon that is not confined to the Christian tradition (McGrath, 2011). That lack of confinement notwithstanding, natural theology undertaken within the rubric of Christian theology cannot escape being embodied by it, even while acknowledging the broader scope within which the Christian perspective is one among other perspectives that grapple with nature.

I seek to explore vital force as a concept of s(S)pirit, within the broader scope using the Spirit as an entry point and approaching the understanding of that Spirit from a universalistic (epistemic rather than soteriological) point of view. One should take seriously that the scientific contribution to the dialogue is grounded in the understanding that the various perspectives, namely Christian, African thought and science, are networked with one another by their common discernment of the natural world (Yong, 2012).

The act of discernment implies that the knower is integral to the process of acquiring knowledge about nature. The knower is therefore accorded a genuine place in the process of knowing within the dynamic categories that pneumatology makes possible. Within the dynamic pneumatological framework, we are able to apprehend the presence of God in creation, not just in terms of existence and activity in nature but as *becoming*, which can be accounted for in terms of participation. Within that, human responses to what is experienced are discerned over time as ongoing and ever-changing empirical manifestations of the world (science) or as truths that relate to the ultimate reality (religion).

A pneumatological view of science and other forms of knowing like the African cultural infrastructure therefore pertain to engagement with the world. Even without rushing towards the conclusion of what the result of the engagement is, the fact that the pneumatological perspective empowers a quest for truth on the terms of the particular perspective, points towards a participatory epistemology that does not have a subordinating tendency. Rather, the pneumatological perspective endorses the interrelationship that exists between different modes of knowing without attaching infallibility to any one of them. When the quest for truth is predicated on the need to review and even question truth claims of the past (Yong, 2012), there is the possibility for renewal as the social, cultural and religious practices that shape belief in a dynamic way that is apprehended as the dynamic work of the Spirit through the various modes of engagement with nature.

Theologians have bemoaned the epistemic isolation of theology (c.f. McGrath, 2011; Van Huyssteen, 2006) even though theology, like other epistemes, grapples with one and the same reality. Van Huyssteen (2006:75) proposes a post-foundationalist interdisciplinarity that takes evolutionary epistemology seriously but one that does not take nature as an abstract entity that can be subjected to observation as an objective entity. I take as the orienting statement of his thesis these words:

When we take the evolution of human cognition seriously, we quickly realise that even theological reflection is radically shaped by the ongoing influence of traditions and therefore by its social, historical and cultural embeddedness, and is also definitively shaped by deeper biological roots of human rationality (however) ... the voice of evolutionary epistemology has been almost totally neglected by contemporary theology.

The *filioque* issue, to which we now turn, is a factor in addressing the question of the understanding of the cosmic spirit within the evolution of Christian theology and one that bears out the above statement and justifies it as an evolutionary epistemological approach.

4.5 FILIOQUE ISSUE OF NICAENO-CONSTANTINOPOLITANUM

The foregoing discussion at least arguably establishes that the universal cosmic spirit transcends Christianity. Hence, the narrow identification of the Spirit with Jesus Christ and soteriology limits the work of the Spirit to a redemptive, leaving no room for a universal cosmic pneumatology. As a result, the *filioque* issue arises because it presents an understanding of the Spirit cast only in redemptive light to the exclusion of a cosmic view. There is no room within that frame of understanding for a dynamic, creative, expressive and relational reality, which is the universal cosmic Spirit.

From a dogmatic standpoint, a cosmic pneumatology is in keeping with a cosmic view of the Spirit on account of the assertion of the unity, co-equal relationship and the divinity and reality within the Trinity of Father and Spirit. For the purpose of this study, I can say with that assertion that we have tentatively established viable grounds for reading vital force metaphorically into a cosmic pneumatology as a valid concept of nature and Spirit, without sacrificing Christian orthodoxy.

Despite the controversy that ensued during the formation of the creeds, McIntyre (1997) construes two aspects of the legacy of pneumatology that arise from the Trinitarian

formalisation. He presents them as being two-sided, namely, positive and what he terms ‘the legacy of controversy’ (McIntyre, 1997:84).

Positively, he firstly notes the affirmation of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. Despite the controversies, including the *filioque* controversy, the divinity of the Spirit remained secure with the formalisation. The nature of the relationship with the other two persons in the Godhead and how the divinity of the Spirit was concretely expressed were at issue, not the divinity of the Spirit as such. Secondly, he notes that the Spirit was affirmed as being fundamentally God and equal to the other two persons of the Trinity.

With regard to the second point, what was not secured was a methodology for defending the Spirit’s equality and divinity, which led to various controversies that we cannot entertain here. Among those controversies is the tendency to employ the same arguments for defending the divinity of Christ to the defence of the Spirit’s deity. That inevitably (at least from our vantage point of being removed from that era) entails a relation of the Spirit to the other persons within the Trinity and the universe/creation, which remain unclear and are subject to being diminished.

A legacy of controversy that resulted from the Trinitarian formulation concerns pneumatology. Despite the positive legacy of affirmation of the divinity and equality of the Spirit to the Father and Son, understanding the nature of the Spirit whose contours are set in Trinitarian terms has been an ongoing enterprise in Christian theology, one often steeped in controversy, as the *filioque* issue illustrates. Be that as it may, the enduring search for the Spirit in Christian theology points to an enduring sensitivity to the Spirit’s work in the world and the accompanying desire to discern that work.

Sometimes the debates about the Spirit have been couched in sophisticated philosophical arguments that appear to diminish biblical tradition because it seems one cannot read those arguments in any passage of the Bible. This study’s exploration of African vital force as a concept of nature and Spirit obliges us to revisit and re-examine the problem of the *filioque* as an important point of entry into a discussion of a Trinitarian cosmic pneumatology, which raises the question the Spirit’s relationship to Jesus Christ and Trinitarian theology as such.

The *filioque* issue arose when the Western Church inserted the clause *Spiritus Sanctum qui ex patre filioque procedit* (i.e. ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and from the Son.’) to the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* Creed by the third Council of Toledo in 587 AD. That gave rise to the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. The *filioque* issue caused a rift between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Church and marked their differences in theology, liturgical practice and their views of Trinitarian theology specifically. It is considered as one of the oldest enduring debates of Christendom (Sciecienski, 2014:7).

As a result of the *filioque* clause being included in the *Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum* Creed, the Western and Eastern Churches came to hold different theological views of the Trinity, with one tending towards monism (an undifferentiated Godhead) and the other defending the hypostases of the three persons of the Trinity. The ensuing debate focused on the subordination of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ in Christology and in soteriology and according to Heron involved

a downgrading of the Holy Spirit, enfeebling the sense of his creativity and restoring energy, his activity in the incarnation, life and resurrection of Jesus and his divine work as divine restorer of the cosmos. Salvation is thus narrowed down to the event of the cross, seen as standing in total isolation and interpreted simply as a sacrifice, a punishment or an example, and to the ‘benefits’ flowing from it and “Christomonism” obscures the action of the whole Trinity in the work of redemption.

(Heron, 1981:113)

The Eastern Orthodox Church’s reservation about the *filioque* clause hinged on their reservations at interpretations of the clause that would tend to depersonalise and subordinate the Holy Spirit within the Trinitarian relationship. While the *filioque* enunciates the relationship of the Spirit with Jesus Christ, and to that extent can be said to shield the Spirit from being identified as simply a nebulous influence or a divine force, the narrow identification of the Spirit with Jesus Christ and soteriology limits the work of the Spirit to a redemptive focus, leaving no room for a universal cosmic pneumatology.

Those who see the strength of the Spirit as identified with the Spirit of Christ argue that the Spirit is thus protected from novel spiritualities that completely remove the Spirit from Christ and the Trinitarian frame of reference. In some instances, that abuse could take the form of

ignoring the mediatory role of Jesus Christ and a claim to direct access to God the Father through the Spirit. As Vischer (1981:17; c.f. Houston, 2005:142) argues, the *filioque* then becomes ‘a necessary bulwark against the dangers of christologically uncontrolled “charismatic enthusiasm”’.

The argument that procession can be understood as the only grounds for relationship within the Trinity advances the reason that without the *filioque* there would be no relationship between the Spirit and the Son. The Eastern Church’s doctrine of procession was that the Spirit proceeds from the Father without mention of the Son. Double procession is therefore advanced, arguably in mitigation of the Eastern position.

In that regard, Barth saw the *filioque* as a necessity for the articulation of the bond between the Spirit and the Son and as a means to preserve the integrity of the Trinity (CD 1/1: 549-557) and he is not alone in advancing that position (c.f. Badcock, 1997:245-246; Heron, 1981:111-112). However, an understanding of the procession of the Spirit from the Son that depicts Jesus as ‘the *giver* but not *receiver* of the Spirit’, as it is in Barth’s view, is necessarily one-sided and it omits important elements that would support a dynamic pneumatology because it fails to portray a distinctive person and work of the Spirit.

In mitigation for the view that seemingly swings the Western Church’s view of the *filioque* to the extreme, McIntyre offers an apologetic on behalf of the Greek Fathers, that they

occupy the middle field, between saying that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and saying that he proceeds from the Father through the Son; and that to try and describe this relationship purely in terms of ‘proceeding’ is to oversimplify a relationship which for them is complex – or, more accurately, a very rich – relationship. Their aim could be said to conserve that part of the truth, which contains, without falling into the error implicit in both.

(McIntyre, 1997:107)

However, there is an important residual problem about the *filioque*. While the involvement of the Spirit in all of the divine actions of the Godhead is affirmed, namely, in creation, redemption, sanctification and providence, there is a historical bonding of the Spirit to the Word or the Son in Christian theology that undeniably fails to highlight the Spirit’s distinct person and work. There is evidence in Scripture that the Spirit is a distinct person outside of a solely Christocentric focus.

That is not to say there is no convergence between the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit, but to simply admit that one view has overshadowed the other in much of Protestant theology, which has produced a skewed Christological pneumatology. The ecological age compels us to relook at and to rediscover the communion, equality and interdependence of the *perichoretic* Trinitarian relationship and the specific work of the Spirit in linking divinity with nature. Moltmann, in his critique of classical monotheism, proposes a social Trinitarianism as an orientation and foundation for understanding the mutual indwelling of God and the world. He describes it in this way:

Here, thinking in relationships and communities is developed out of the doctrine of the Trinity, and is brought to bear on the relation of men and women to God, to other people and to mankind as a whole, as well as their fellowship with the whole of creation. ... In this way it is not merely the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that we are trying to work out anew; our aim is to develop and practice Trinitarian thinking as well.

(Moltmann, 1993:19)

A cosmic pneumatology should therefore transcend the redemption-focussed pneumatology that attaches the work of the Spirit solely to the work of Christ. As we have seen in chapter 2, the biblical tradition has resources that undergird that kind of holistic theology. From the point of view of a systematic theology, taking the whole gamut of biblical teaching on the Spirit, a universal cosmic pneumatology could be authenticated. Instead of splitting the understanding of the Spirit into various roles and dimensions, we could speak of the one Spirit who is creator and who also sanctifies.

4.6 CREATOR *SPIRITUS SANCTUS*

In the biblical tradition, the Spirit takes on different designations depending on the particular role being emphasised; reference is made to the Spirit under various names. The Spirit has many dimensions too. In biblical references, therefore, there is no rigid logic that compels authors to refer to the Spirit in any particular way at all times. Nor was there a need for biblical authors to systematise the teaching about the Holy Spirit. Depending on the subject at hand, the context and the nature of the discussion itself, biblical accounts have various starting points for discussion of the Spirit. That does not suggest that the Scriptural references to the Spirit are not coherent. Rather, it implies that logic is not the only form of coherence available to us in the Scriptures.

The logic of the Western scholastic tradition introduced the dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural as categories of thought in understanding reality. A supernatural phenomenon is understood to be the direct interventions of the divine/God (Spirit) while the natural phenomenon is not a direct cause of God as such. Supernatural (or *hyperphysiko*) is an extra-biblical category that has no place in the holistic of the Bible. What is understood and what is not (or is yet to be) understood by humans, according to the biblical understanding, is the whole creation of God. According to the Bible, the working of the Spirit is not to be confined only to the spectacular phenomena but to every aspect of life because all of creation is God's creation (Anderson & Tang, 2005). This manner of understanding reality strongly resonates with the African world-view, in which there is no ontological divide between the supernatural and natural phenomenon.

The biblical account is presented as a coherent narrative that intermittently breaks into poetry, hymns, doxologies and allegory. Thus, the biblical narrative is held together, mediated by and brought to life as it were, by the Spirit of God, which rendering of reality resonates with African forms of intellectual infrastructure from which the notion of vital force is derived. African reality is expressed in myths, song, artefacts and symbols that narrate the coherence of reality by virtue of its interconnectedness, interdependence and communality mediated by the vital force.

The most common name for the Spirit is Holy Spirit or *Spiritus Sanctus*. Christianity seems historically to have differentiated between Creator *Spiritus* and Creator *Sanctus* by assigning to one the life-giving role and to the other to a sanctifying role. The distinction between the two, if not apprehended in a healthy tension, could convey the sense that we have two Spirits, when, in fact, what is at issue is the two dimensions of the same Spirit.

Pneumatology then, is the work of the Spirit in the context of creation. Moltmann (1985), in his *God in Creation*, applies the Trinitarian framework to the understanding of the doctrine of God within the broader frame of creation. Moltmann (1992) applies the same principle to his pneumatological argument in his book, *The Spirit of Life* when he presents the work of the Spirit within the context of creation as life-giving and sanctifying. His basic argument is that 'God's life-giving and life-affirming Spirit are universal and can be recognised in everything which ministers to life and resists destruction.' In other words, the anchor for a biblical pneumatology is the affirmation of life.

Therefore, a universal holistic pneumatology no longer confines the work of the Spirit to human beings alone or to ecclesiastical institutions; nor does it limit the Spirit to the mediation of grace and enlivening the preaching and proclamation of the Church. There is no dialectic between the divine revelation and human experience³⁹. In that view, the Spirit is not solely bound to the Word. Various dimensions of experience become important – and experience is not merely a rationalistic notion based on the active determination of the human mind. Rather, there is a relationship between human beings and the world they live in which is part of experience. The basis for primal experience is the human body, which is part of nature. Hence on that basis, experience cannot but be understood as *multidimensional* and beyond consciousness.

Based on that understanding, the experience of God is not restricted to the Word and the Church or the individual's consciousness. If the Spirit is allied with life, then a holistic pneumatology cannot be restricted to a matter of revelation. It has to take into account the continuity between revelation and human experience instead of seeing them as antithetical. According to Moltmann (1992), our understanding of the Holy Spirit as 'holy' enunciates the role of the Spirit as sanctifier of life and renewer of the face of the earth. That assertion contradicts the Barthian position that understands the Holy Spirit to be holy *only* because of being *eschatologically* present to the human spirit exclusively in God's revelation, which reduces pneumatology to revelation.

The biblical account makes it clear that all of creation, not only Christian people, are endowed with God's Spirit (Gen. 2:7; Acts 2:17). Consequently, the Spirit is not confined to Christians. That opens up avenues that truth can be found outside the Christian faith within the realm of life and experience. There is therefore a possibility of exploring opened up by the universality of the Spirit that the truth and wisdom of other cultures and traditions could enlighten, enrich and inform Christian theology and praxis. The continual inflow of the Spirit imbues everything that exists. Wisdom literature captures the expansiveness of the Spirit. Creation in the Spirit exudes life inhabiting everything that exists. There is no realm in which

³⁹ Here, I adopt Moltmann's rendering of it as '...awareness of God in, with and beneath the experience of life...' bearing in mind the critique that this view of experience could be one-sided in that it accounts for the positive (life-affirming) aspects but not for the negative ones like suffering and death. Neal (2009) contends that Moltmann does not take the ambiguity of life seriously enough. Because the case being made is against the backdrop of ecological destruction, one might say that the emphasis for life-affirmation is called for without discounting negative experience and the ambiguity of life; at the same time to contend that there are other theological entry points for understanding evil and suffering without implicating the Spirit of life.

the Spirit is not present as the convergence of creation with the community of life. That insight, when appropriated theologically, fundamentally anchors the notion of the Spirit as the foundation of a relational, interrelated conception of reality.

Proverbs 8:22-31 captures the expansiveness of the Spirit, depicted as Wisdom that is the very principle present from the beginning and as realm of existence of all things:

The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be. When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.

In that view, the African concept of vital force is plausibly presented in this study as a dialogue partner of Christianity and a scientifically derived force field in order to articulate an eco-pneumatological view for a holistic view of life as a contribution to global Christian ecological discourse.

The immediate Christian response to that assertion among Christians tends to be the fear of syncretism. The Brazilian liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff (1982; 2012), has made a case for a positive view of syncretism⁴⁰ by suggesting that it is by digesting some aspects of alien systems of thought that religion nourishes itself. The biological metaphors he employs clearly indicate that what he argues for does not include negative views of syncretism that

⁴⁰ While appreciating the potential distraction that the use of the term syncretism may cause, I name it advisedly. The question which has arisen many times as I discussed this research project with many Christian friends was if I was proposing a return to animism by suggesting that a concept derived from the African world view would be adequate grounds for the articulation of an eco-pneumatology. Boff's ideas in relation to liberation theology in general and the Catholic Church in particular are varied and could themselves take this discussion off on a tangent. The particular reference to his thought recalls his view of a pneumatic ecclesiology which recalls the primitive Church's dynamics of community, cooperation and charism as the bases of a non-hierarchical church and existence. His theologising is born from his own South American context of *comunidades eclesiales de base* (or base communities), where participation challenges hierarchy and creates instead a community based on commonality and equality; all this without understanding this as a kind of utopian aspiration but as an outflow of the Christian faith and a recall of its history as well.

require a change of identity on the part of the organism that feeds off another. He disavows loss of history and identity as being incompatible with what he seeks to put forward. In other words, there is continuity and discontinuity from a ‘substantial nucleus’ that is Christian.

From that ‘substantial nucleus’ of Christian tradition we understand that human beings and all of creation have life because the *Creator Spiritus* lives in us and bequeaths life to us. When God’s Spirit is taken away, there can be no life. Therefore, if we argue, as I do here, that the biblical account does not indicate that there is a distinction between the *Creator Spiritus* and *Spiritus Sanctus*, we may therefore speak of *Creator Spiritus Sanctus* – the God who is life in all of creation, who bequeaths life and who is at once the Sanctifying Spirit.

The life of God that resides within all of creation finds an outward expression through the Spirit who renews all things. From a sacramental standpoint then, we can assert that creation, suffused with life, love, inclusiveness and equality is a manifestation of *Creator Spiritus Sanctus* – that is the work of the Spirit understood in a holistic pneumatology.

CHAPTER 5: FORCE FIELD

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines Michael Faraday's electromagnetic field theory and highlights the concepts within it that theology has appropriated. The works of German theologians, Wolfgang Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann and Michael Welker are examples of such appropriation. I choose to highlight Welker's work, because his work is presumably an extension on the work of the other two. His work arguably moves the appropriation of field force theory into a dialogue with current theological themes.

The category of relationality has emerged as an alternative to traditional theological reflection on the Trinity. In his study, Jele Manganyi (2013:246) has juxtaposed the African concept of *Ubuntu* and perichoresis. He asserts that the former is from below (human) and the latter from above (divine). The two concepts share a common foundation of being undergirded by relationality or community. Even while acknowledging its contribution, *Ubuntu* as a concept that derives upon human community has its limitations. Human community can tend to emphasise commonality at the expense of diversity. The cultural definition of what constitutes community is also subject to change for the simple reason that culture is dynamic and tends to shift (Pato, 1997), which may render the reference to *Ubuntu* somewhat retrospective. Theologically speaking then, the concept of relationality, if it does not connect the human community with the divine community, remains limited.

Jesus' priestly prayer for the oneness of the church is not just that the church as a human community may be one, but that it is as Jesus dwells in the Father and the church dwells in Christ that we may speak of the perfect union in diversity (Jn. 17:22-23). The mutual indwelling to which Jesus alludes can best be apprehended pneumatologically. It is within that view that Welker (1997) proposes a constructive 'realistic' pneumatology that takes seriously biblical witness as validation and orientation for theology and that emphasises the concreteness of the Spirit's activity and the Spirit's context-sensitivity. The Spirit is the matrix of the living God who encircles and interconnects the whole and thereby expresses a genuine solidarity with God and nature within a reciprocal relationship, albeit not a strictly symmetrical one, because God and nature cannot be equated as we have argued above.

Emphasis on relationality tempers the overemphasis on transcendence, which portrays a God who is distant, passionless and removed from creation. When God is understood in relational terms, we stress the immanence and God's relatedness to nature. Such a portrayal captures the dynamic and social character of God.

5.2 FARADAY'S FORCE FIELD: AN OVERVIEW

The experiments of English chemist and physicist, Michael Faraday (1885), significantly contributed to the understanding of electromagnetism. He was well known for his experimental study method, which he used to postulate that electric and magnetic fields are two parts of a larger whole – the electromagnetic field. Scientists had previously understood electricity and magnetism as two separate unconnected occurrences (Faraday, 1885).

Faraday's scheme was conceived in an interrelated frame. In his own words, he opined:

I believe no man, who has in philosophical matters a competent faculty of thinking, can ever fall into it. Gravity must be caused by an agent acting constantly according to certain laws; but whether this agent be material or immaterial, I have left to the consideration of my readers (3rd letter to Bentley, 5th February 1692-93).

(Faraday, 1885:532)

He even conceived that relationship related to a greater power, namely gravity. Even though he later conceded that his experiments failed to establish conclusively the fact of that relationship, Faraday also maintained that his failure was not proof that his hypothesis about the existence of that relationship was thereby nullified. He tentatively stated:

It is, no doubt, difficult in the present state of our knowledge to express our expectation in exact terms; and, though I have said that another of the powers of nature is, in these experiments, directly related to the rest, I ought, perhaps, rather to say that another form of the great power is distinctly and directly related to the other forms. ... Here end my trials for the present. The results are negative. They do not shake my strong feeling of the existence of a relation between gravity and electricity, though they give no proof that such a relation exists.

(Faraday, 1885:20; 168)

Danish physicist, H.C. Ørsted (2003), later revealed the experimental effect of electricity on a compass needle using a wire conductor. Even though a committed scientist who should consider experimentally established facts as the final word, Ørsted held to the view that 'on the contrary, it is evident that experiments can make us familiar with only a small part of

nature [...A] universal construction is necessary to complete science, and it stands to reason that such a construction cannot be given through experience but can only be expected from speculation' (Ørsted, 1998:198-99). In this manner, he made room in his scientific method for interdisciplinary interaction between natural science and philosophical thought. Ørsted's methodology gives a nod to interdisciplinary collaboration, on which this study is similarly premised.

French physicist and mathematician André-Marie Ampère's further development on the work of Faraday and Ørsted revealed that magnetic force was circular and, as a result, it produced a cylindrical magnetism around a wire. Such a circular force had never been observed before. Ampère's cylindrical magnetism thus became the antecedent of Faraday's force field.

In 1831, Faraday, who understood the implications of both Ørsted and Ampère's discoveries, made the ground-breaking observation that the magnetic field could induce an electric current. He became the first scientist to produce an electric current using a magnetic field. He later invented the electric motor and dynamo. He thereby experimentally validated the relationship between electricity and chemical bonding in substances. He demonstrated the effect of magnetism on light and called it diamagnetism. Diamagnetism is the particular behaviour of certain substances when placed in strong magnetic fields. It was that finding which provided the basis for James Maxwell's electromagnetic theory.⁴¹ Maxwell expounded upon and disseminated his views through a paper published in December 1864. He advanced Faraday's electromagnetic theory. Maxwell's thesis was that 'The most obvious mechanical phenomenon in electrical and magnetical experiments is the mutual action by which bodies of certain states set each other in motion while still at a sensible distance from each other' (Maxwell, 1864:459).

According to that theory, the electromagnetic field produced from a charge distribution has a reciprocal effect on other charged objects in the field. The objects experience a force that resembles one that planets experience within the gravitational field that the sun produces. If

⁴¹ Fisher (2001: vii ff.) observes that for many Faraday scholars, Maxwell's work seemed to overshadow that of his predecessor despite Maxwell's own admission of his indebtedness to Faraday. He notes that 'the Faraday influence in Maxwell was increasingly obliterated' because Faraday was no longer accessible to his readers as his books were out of print. In addition, his work was becoming dated after one and half centuries. As Fisher observes, 'some experimental apparatus, terms and concepts are unfamiliar to modern readers.' For this research, I am indebted to Fisher's single-volume guide to Faraday's investigations, his vision and reasoning with regard to electromagnetism.

the other charges and currents are equivalent in size to the sources that produce the electromagnetic field, a new net electromagnetic field would subsequently be produced, consequently producing a realm of *akin* magnetic intersections. These intersections would not exist without others.

The electromagnetic field can therefore be regarded as a dynamic sphere that makes other charges and currents move. The field is also itself in turn affected and conditioned by the charges and currents. That means the electromagnetic influence within the field is not one-directional (i.e. a diametrical cause and effect). Neither is it a mono-directional reciprocity, but it could be multi-directed to and from, and in as many directions as there are charges within a given sphere.

In his lectures, published under the title, *Forces of Matter*, Faraday outlined the laws of gravitation which he explained by asserting that all bodies attract each other by gravitational power exerted through ‘their respective centres of gravity’ which ‘attract each other at sensible distances’ (Faraday, 1993:16). Faraday’s field force notion therefore perceived nature as primarily made up of active fields that are concentrated at certain specific gravitational points within a field.

The notion of the interactive energy in the electromagnetic field has been appropriated by Christian theologians to characterise metaphorically the reciprocal intra-Trinitarian relationality and divine-nature relationship. It constitutes a social category that critiques traditional theological reflection which evokes an image of a God who is distant, isolated and disengaged. Rather, it recovers the social, dynamic character that reflects internal relationality and God’s external loving relationship towards creation.

5.3 FORCE FIELDS IN PANNENBERG

Pannenberg was the first to develop a pneumatological theology of nature that presents the Spirit as ‘the field’ which binds the other two persons of the Trinity in love; and also relates God to nature as the unifier of the many within creation (Pannenberg, 1993:37-41). He employed the idea of *pneuma*. The Stoic idea of *pneuma* is understood to underlie nature, and as that which subtly penetrates and binds nature (masses and bodies) together.

Where the Stoics emphasised the materialistic underpinnings of nature – as masses and material bodies – Pannenberg applied Faraday’s field concept, understood as spirit. His thesis was that spirit could be applied to dynamic field energies of creation generally and material bodies and organic life particularly. Imbued with the dynamic field energies, they are imbued with the capacity to self-transcend and possess emergent propensity. The force fields are construed to be self-organising and dynamic, systemic relationships. The dynamic relational quality and interconnectedness inferred by the force field theory suggests a holistic view of life as ‘becoming’ in relationship that lends it to ‘a pneumatological reconception [that] would enable an understanding of creation’s emergent potentialities and complexities’ (Yong, 2012:49).

This rendering of God and nature in relational terms assuages the metaphysical traditional Christian dogma that portrays God as ontologically transcendent and independent and that God can predictably only be understood as detached from nature. Pneumatologically speaking, the force field theory makes it plausible to understand God’s presence in nature. It challenges the Aristotelian emphasis on substance with its attendant dualism. For Pannenberg, Faraday’s force field became a theological resource that supported a pneumatological view of creation in relational and holistic terms, supporting the immanence of God in creation.

Pannenberg (1991) in his *Systematic Theology* and subsequent works, delineates his appropriation of Faraday’s force fields by offering a distinction between Christ (*Logos*) and the Spirit (principle of life) founded on biblical sources. He particularly draws upon Philo’s conception of logos as well as the Johannine prologue. He illustrates the Spirit and Christ’s co-activity as concretely anchored within creation. The Spirit, who signifies the historical Jesus manifest through the Church, is presented as the same Spirit who makes the Christ (*Logos*) manifestly present within nature. According to him, ‘the being of creatures ... is constituted by the creative presence of God, his Logos, and his Spirit among them’ (Pannenberg, 1991:75). He notes that according to Paul in Romans 1:20, divine revelation of the deity of God was present even before the historical Christ-event of revelation (Pannenberg, 1991). The location of the Spirit’s divine revelatory work prior to the historical revelation of Jesus Christ is theologically significant and relevant to our argument in this study, which seeks to advance a holistic understanding of nature. From this perspective, a

dialectical methodology that divorces divine revelation from human experience (which may be termed to be an aspect of the experience of the cosmic spirit), is disavowed.

Pannenberg takes insights from modern natural sciences and makes it possible to appreciate the complexity of the self-transcendence of matter (i.e. the nature and origin of matter). He presents it as an act of creation (independent) and at the same time an effect of a force that enables a living being to transcend its own limitations (dependent). By way of this act, an enabling force relationship of every organism with others develops, because none of the organisms develops on its own but each is dependent on a force from without. This notion is also at play naturally and can be said to account for the organic relationships that form human history. The broader process of evolution could be said to encompass this process leading to the ultimate goal of history. To that effect, Pannenberg theologically articulates reality and the process within that reality.

The relevance of what Pannenberg puts forward to this discussion is his grounding of reality; he locates the particular within the broader context of the whole. Because of his lack of a pause, as it were, to ponder or grasp the content in the gap between the particular and the whole, Pannenberg has been considered quite abstract in his rendering of the reality found in the history between the spaces in history. If the end is posited as the driving force of reality, the nuance between spirit and Spirit may be lost and we rush towards the conclusion of the matter without appreciating what lies in between or what could be discerned in the exploration of the evolutionary process in the spaces in history.

Pannenberg puts forward the notion of the Spirit as a necessary category of exploration within the natural sciences. That approach is not only innovative but it brings together the two ways of knowing that were traditionally set apart. Pneumatological categories as a viable approach to science break down dialectical methods of knowing that segmented knowledge into self-contained categories and that especially relegated religious categories to a lower level.

Pannenberg is ardent in his viewpoint that faith, and the science related to it, should not be construed as a separate entity whose subject matter is so transcendent it does not relate to concrete living reality. His assertion is that faith, and particularly the pneumatological view of it, is the reasonable secret key to the exploration of the totality of reality. In other words,

only by means of an authentic faith are we, as human beings, able to establish the foundation for understanding the intertwined world we live in. This means that real insight into the construction of a body of knowledge about the world we live in cannot be achieved by excluding the perspectives offered by theology.

From that point of view, theology cannot therefore be construed to consist of only metaphysical and supernatural verities. It should rightly add to the coherent human enterprise in search of the truth of our co-existent being. Investigating the history of human thought with regard to the quest for the truth of existence, we are confronted with the reality that human beings, while having discovered our own importance via use of our own reason, by the same token, have banished other ways of knowing, like faith, from what were considered to be reliable fields of investigation. Faith and its accompanying studies were declared as entirely extraneous as avenues for the attainment of an understanding of reality, even for the mundane everyday life of a person.

Traditionally, faith was at the centre of what was considered as authentic knowledge of reality. That reason overtook faith and became the revered means of gaining understanding may seem like an invasion of the territory previously occupied by faith. Reason and all the studies that came to represent it became the dependable way of knowing to the exclusion of all other perspectives. The displacement of faith by reason was so drastic that faith and perspectives shaped by it were relegated to the fringes of human knowledge that sought the meaning of human existence. Faith perspectives were allowed a ‘voice’ only when reason and human capacity were considered inadequate to fathom a matter. In other words, faith and its accompanying science, theology, were allowed to serve science within the confines of the ultimate questions of life, such as notions of what lies beyond this life and issues to do with the realm of death.

In the face of the exciting science-theology dialogue, which is especially facilitated by the ecological issues of our day, an important theological endeavour must be to reclaim the territory that was ceded to science in the past. The ground that faith lost during the Enlightenment has come begging for attention in our day. The contours of theology are being relocated in our day and the resulting interdisciplinary space being created seems agreed that a claim to explicit and exclusive knowledge by any sphere of knowledge is not a tenable position. The theological category of pneumatology provides a way of knowing that takes the

place of previous ways of knowing that subjected everything to intense scrutiny and critique to find concrete proof for the foundations of reality.

This approach indicates that using reasonable, rational arguments, on a par with modern natural scientific thought, positions theology to offer a perspective that facilitates natural sciences in their quest to understand their own subject matter. That position is attainable through an understanding of the Spirit that transcends the church's traditional views concerning the Holy Spirit. Traditional views of the Spirit were excessively narrowed and constrained to the realm of the inner being of a person. Thereby, the Spirit was deprived of the cosmic sphere of effect and restricted to the subjective realisation of personal salvation and sanctification. Other than that, the Holy Spirit was traditionally tied to the church and the theological development of the subject locked up in ecclesiological categories. Hence, the Holy Spirit in Christian theology is traditionally subsumed under the subjective while the ecclesiological is excluded, for the most part, from the broader horizon of a natural theology that opens up dialogical space with science and other religious perspectives. Understood as the cosmic presence of God, the Spirit opens up a realm in which the interconnected reality may be apprehended, as asserted in chapter 4 (section 4.4).

Pannenberg seeks validation of his claim from the Bible that the Holy Spirit is not only confined to the role of giving us new life and eternal (i.e. spiritual) life. He goes further to claim on biblical grounds that the Spirit also gives us the natural biological life. He retrieves the Nicene Creedal affirmation: 'The Spirit which is God gives life', which he construed as undergirded by the following bible verses:

Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters ... so God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so (Gen. 1:2, 2:7).

This passage is echoed in the New Testament in, among other passages, 1 Corinthians 15:45: 'So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.'

The Ezekiel 37 passage about the valley of dry bones that are vitalized by God's Spirit, reconnecting the bones, rebuilding the sinews and restoring the flesh, is a graphic example of God conferring biological life on the human being. Psalm 104 is a lyrical rendering of God's involvement with the physical world and how God sustains it. Verses 10-23 are particularly

instructive in the manner they present God's involvement in the mundane activities that sustain the life of the creation:

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the sky nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate— bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts. The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the junipers. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the hyrax. He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God.

In Genesis 6:3, God's being as giver of life is implied in the cessation of temporal human life: 'Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years."'

Pannenberg's argument is that the claim that the Holy Spirit gives life is specifically compelling because ordinary life is temporal and ceases at death. Conversely, the life that the Spirit of God gives is not 'real life' if it ceases, which would be the logical conclusion if the only understanding of the Spirit is personalized views which limit the realm of influence. A look at the understanding of the Holy Spirit in the history of theology reveals movements like Pietism in the West that exhibited the tendency to internalize the Spirit in that way.

Pannenberg himself is particularly critical of that tendency in the West to internalize the Spirit, which at its worst predicates the Spirit on the human subject. Apart from yielding an anthropocentric understanding of the Spirit, such a view fails to capture the cosmic-relatedness that a pneumatological view of reality makes possible.

Pannenberg therefore champions a new formulation for the understanding of the Holy Spirit that can transcend the idiosyncratic subjective reduction. Within that frame of thinking, the Spirit can be known for the whole scope of activity with which the Spirit is associated. A pneumatological entry point that makes use of the physical and biological categories without

resorting to dualistic categories, opens up for the holistic view in which interdisciplinary research may flourish.

Pannenberg attempts to appeal to a relationship between the Spirit and reality, drawing upon insights from physics. His thesis is that all movement is caused by energy; an energy created by motion of the heavenly bodies, vibration of atoms, the life of animals, plants and human beings. Traditionally, physics attributed this energy to the movement within the object itself or to the movement caused by the impact of the mutual influence caused by interaction among the objects. This was termed tangential energy. Currently, that energy is understood in terms of a force field outside which is created a realm within which the object moves. That is field theory, derived from Faraday's work as we have noted above in 5.2. Within this understanding, energy is not dependent on the movement of objects; rather the objects are dependent on the autonomous energy within the force field for their movement.

The image of a magnetic field illustrates the force field. When a magnet is placed beneath a sheet of paper holding crushed graphite, it causes the particles to move and form patterns as the magnet is moved around. The interactions among the graphite particles are interrelated and become meaningful in reference to other particles by the influence of the invisible force beneath the surface, which creates the energy and realm of their movement and interaction.

According to Pannenberg, this phenomenon is true of biological life too, even though the tendency has been to think of biological life as contained in a single cell that develops through multiple reproductions and division. The biological process of cell division cannot happen without the surrounding environment of water, heat and other factors that are not internal. Organ transplants and in-vitro fertilisation show that the vitality of the human body is also dependent on factors within its environment. The force-field idea illustrates the indispensability of the environment, without which life cannot develop. In this study, I parallel the notion of vital force on force field. Both utilize pneumatological categories for the comprehension of reality in a way that indicates the interdependence and interrelatedness of reality.

The environment as the basis of motion and life (i.e. the energy force field and living environment), the biblical depiction of the Spirit as creator/giver of life and the African idea of vital force as the essence of life, when brought together, offer a nuanced theological

interpretation that affirms the dependency and reliance of all created things on the Spirit. Pannenberg thus provided a model from the natural sciences which determined that motion and life cannot be self-directed, but rather, dependent. The biblical affirmation that the Spirit is the source and giver of life, underpins that understanding and is a significant theological insight for an eco-pneumatological application. The interdependence of life offers us insight into the pervasive nature of the ecological crisis. The resulting ever-growing intertwined effects result from it. By the same token that relational insight provides axiomatic perspectives that make us aware of the potential mutual effects, ‘for better, for worse’ that are possible within the community of life by virtue of the inherent interrelationship within nature. The Bible, modern science and the notion of vital force validate each other in their honouring of interrelationship independency (single cell) and dependency (environment).

Vital force is construed to be the unifying, animated force through which mankind and non-human creation are brought into relationship with reality. The interrelationship with nature is complex and one that cannot be deciphered through explicit knowledge. Faith therefore becomes a window through which the wonder of creation and Life (the Creator) in all its manifestations can be appreciated. As Buitendag (2011:4) notes, ‘thus faith works as a critical correction on the reasonable/rational investigation of existence.’

God’s Spirit, understood within a cosmic view, takes human experience and nature as aspects of pneumatology specifically and of theology in general. Some have warned of the postmodern influence of such a view of the Spirit. The caution is well founded and it raises the question of sidelining revelation as such. From the point of view of this study, there is a point of contact between revelation and experience (or nature). The study is triangulated, thereby providing a premise that seeks to balance rather than skew the exploration. In my view, therefore, the danger of being one-dimensional is minimised to a greater degree than one of pitting revelation against nature in an irreconcilable binary.

Catholic nuclear physicist, Lawrence Fagg (1999), in his book *Electromagnetism and the Sacred: at the Frontier of Spirit and Matter*, attempts a similar analogical construction. He focuses on light – visible and invisible – understood as electromagnetic radiation in scientific terms, and religiously as a symbol for God (the Transcendent divine), who inhabits inaccessible light. Furthermore, he construes electromagnetism as responsible for empowering the mental activities of human beings and all the vital activities of organic life

without exception. He argues that inorganic materials are likewise empowered in their atomic and molecular relations. The same electromagnetism also underpins technology (e.g. radio, television, computers and the Internet).

Although Fagg's appropriation of force fields is not pneumatological in its focus, he makes a similar point to Pannenberg's. They both use the concept to underline the relational nature of the entire cosmos undergirded by interactions of gravitational, nuclear, chemical and biological forces within nature. Thus, in this view too, the inclusive field of electromagnetic interaction (EMI), which undergirds the interactions of natural forces within the entire cosmos, becomes a physical correspondent to divine immanence, the universal presence and action of God in all creation (Fagg, 1999).

Fagg discounts pantheism as being representative of the relationship between God and creation (Fagg, 1999:111). That is his way of avoiding accusations of advancing a kind of pantheism that might be implicit in his view of divine immanence. One of his reviewers argues that the conventional God-creation relationship is often critiqued for being dualistic by separating spirit and matter sharply. Fagg (1999:111) argues that the electromagnetic field is at the boundary of spirit and matter. He therefore employs the force field metaphor of the electromagnetic field and other basic forces in the cosmos, as incorporated within the divine field of action appropriate to the dynamic relationship of the person within the Triune Godhead (Brachen, 2012:11) but without conceding the possibility of any ontological relationship between nature and divinity.

Both Pannenberg (1991, 1994) in his *Systematic Theology, I, II and III* and Brachen (2001) employ the force field metaphor to contend for the triune God's concurrent transcendent and immanent presence within creation. This is an analogical and representative depiction rather than an empirically established evident God-creation relationship. Fagg's main insight and contribution has significant implications for the religion-and-science dialogue in general and the eco-pneumatological view of creation. Fagg (1996, 1997) moved his own views forward when he allowed for a view of transcendence as something that goes beyond viewing the electromagnetic field simply as an analogue or as a 'physical correlate' of God's immanence within creation (Brachen, 2001:252).

Pannenberg (1991:44-45), arguing from another point of view, introduces the relational quality of life when he avers that '(t)here's no living being that could live without an ecological context. ... only by transcending themselves do the creatures participate in the spiritual dynamics.' The self-transcending quality is conceived in terms of participation, which signifies relationship. The partaking 'in spiritual dynamics' is not limited to humans alone but includes organic and inorganic creation. Pannenberg (1991:45) further argues that 'the Spirit is not given to all creatures but operates in all of them by arousing their self-transcendent response which is the movement of life itself.'

Pannenberg's notion of God as power of the future and the Spirit as force field are captivating ideas which have to be understood against the background of his philosophically framed notion of 'future and 'eternity', which he construes as not being timeless but of a time-spanning, and eschatological character. Pannenberg's ideas are important for this study and arise from his notion that the Spirit is the source of life. According to his view, all creatures owe their movement and activity to the Spirit, which entails relationship. Relationship in turn entails solidarity and flourishing emanating from a shared source. Thus life is no longer 'contained' in a fundamental principle, rather is 'freed/released' into a 'force field'. In this view, ontology could be apprehended in terms of *being*, *becoming* or *relationship* and not in 'material' terms as 'contained in'. In summary, Pannenberg's metaphor opens up for a hermeneutic of the creator-creature relationship, which is participatory, rather than one of a causal-dependent interaction between the creator and created.

This force field as a metaphor for the relationship between God and creation transcends the dualistic relationship that has traditionally been construed to separate spirit and matter. There are several ways to expand and develop this metaphor into a metaphysical structure in which force field is understood as a realm with a web of relationships that are not limited to material substances. The transcendent 'interrelated events taking place within them (i.e. force fields), rather than simply (being understood as) physical bodies or other material things, are the foundational realities' (Brachen, 1999:252). Such a structure is significant to this study and its consequences for the religion-and-science dialogue are immense.

Hence, it is within that dialogue that we seek to associate the Creator Spirit with the African notion of vital force as an archetypal relational idea for the whole sphere of life. Vital force is the source, realm of existence and renewer of life. African relationality is therefore an

inclusive idea that ‘deals with an imbedded and embodied sense of responsibility towards community’ (Bujo, 2003:41). The community in an African sense includes the whole sphere of life – the living, the living-dead and all phenomena around. All things, within this view, are constituted in their outward material characteristic and their inner dynamic interconnected element by the vital force.

Bujo’s ‘we are [related] therefore we are’, a parody of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, implies that relatedness that is not confined to human community. Because the well-being of the community of life is dependent on the well-being of the entire web of relationships, every aspect of the interrelated elements of life is relevant. The implied communal embeddedness of life and the societal impact of such a view on African anthropology are also evident. The wellness and flourishing of life is an interdependent and interrelated venture in which all participate, not solely human beings.

Therefore, for vital force to be a viable eco-pneumatological concept, we should neither romanticise nor trivialise the holistic it recalls. In a holistic approach, we learn to step conceptually beyond ourselves, construing our lives as individual threads within the web of life. That awareness leads us to understand that whatever we do in life causes a ripple that could potentially travel throughout the entire web and eventually back to us. For instance, mining in ecologically sensitive areas that hold bodies of water that sustain diverse life forms could endanger not only the species that live in that habitat, but could lead to national insecurity caused by a scarcity of fresh water. Our actions in regard to the earth have manifested themselves in various ways and in the disappearing wildlife. Holistic thinking is therefore a principled way of understanding and of being in the web of life.

Our retrieval of biblical ecological wisdom has shown that the notion of vital force resonates with the Creator Spirit who is operative in nature. We have also hitherto affirmed that the originating intuitions of Christianity are not absolutely anthropocentric, even though the ecological message within the biblical account and Christian tradition is ambivalent at best (Santimire, 1985). Christian convention does not interpret God and humanity to be apart from, nor in a relationship of dominion over, nature. God has an overall relationship with all things – the entire community of being, large and small. From that understanding, we derive an understanding of a God whose interest is not solely in human beings and their well-being,

but rather in a God whose Spirit is the realm for all beings to interdependently exist as the community of life.

An ecological imperative from the African world view which ontologically links all of life with the divine and with one another both informs and behoves us to position the human community within the larger community of life (Edwards, 2006:7). Prioritising human needs at the cost of the rest of creation goes against life itself.

In Christian terms, we locate human life within the whole household⁴² (*oikos*) of God and also affirm that human beings are part of the larger community of life. Konrad Raiser (1996:9) has argued that the relatedness of life in ecological, economic and ecumenical terms can be adequately conveyed by the household metaphor, although one has to be mindful of testing the elasticity of this metaphor for it evokes other dimensions of living in a household where there could be exclusion of those outside the household (Conradie, 2005). The same argument can be raised about the cultural connotations that accrue to the idea of vital force which can tend to emphasise kinship, apart from the limitation mentioned above, which locates relationality primarily within the human sphere. As long as the location is within that sphere, elements of anthropocentrism cannot be ruled out.

Such limitations notwithstanding, the dialogue with pneumatological categories with indigenous ideas dates far back to antiquity and cannot be set aside because it may be tainted by ideas that would adulterate the concept theologically. For instance, Hellenistic philosophy of the pre-Socratic period influenced the rendering of the idea of *pneuma* that had implications on the understanding of the Spirit and nature that have conditioned Christian understanding – for better or for worse! We have also noted the impact that Aristotelian and Hegelian thought have had on pneumatological categories and ideas in theology. It is in this long-standing tradition that the triangulation of this study is orientated. In keeping with this tradition and within the science-theology dialogue, Pannenberg has appropriated the concept of *pneuma*, as the force field.

⁴² The Theology Faculty at the University of Pretoria has undertaken research on the theme of Ecodomy, producing articles on the various dimensions of the fullness of life, understood in terms the totality of life. *Verbum et Ecclesia* (2015, (36):3) is dedicated to reflection on the household of God, grappling with it in Christian theological tradition, its moral implications on animal life, for mission and mutual care in the community of life for the purpose of attaining fullness of life for all. See: <http://www.ve.org.za/index.php/VE/search/results> (accessed 10 September 2016).

The Spirit has further been associated with the ‘creative and expressive field of divine life as it interacts with evolutionary process of the world’ (Yong, 2012: 50). The Spirit is not only the source of life, but also the renewer of life who works in the natural world that was created as an emergent universe. God is therefore understood to lovingly live in and with nature’s limits within an eschatological hope of bringing everything ‘to healing and fullness of life’ (Edwards, 2010:xiii) at the end of time. From that view, the Spirit’s action is implied in the evolutionary processes of creation. The understanding of a God who is universally present in creation is thereby concretised. Finally, as Pannenberg (2001:791) states, creatures ‘are granted existence of their own within undivided space of God’s omnipresence and the presence of his eternity’ thus making plausible the understanding of the Spirit as the realm of possibility within which creatures can self-transcend.

James Fowler (1981) has applied the field principle to the patterned process of finding meaning for human life. What he terms the force field of life is comprehended as the realm of possibility, anchored in the shared meaning and purpose of life in which human beings interactively and interdependently flourish. Faith in his view is therefore regarded as a ‘way of being-in-relationship’ and ‘a way of moving into and giving form and coherence to life’ (Fowler & Keen, 1978:24), thus it is a ‘way of moving into the force field of life’ (Fowler, 1981:4).

The self-conscious quest to bring coherence to the various ‘forces and relations’ that make up one’s life and the ongoing re-imagining and re-interpretation (potential renewal) as a person develops through the totality of their life experience of events and relationship is the dynamic flow within the force field of life. The potential for renewal that life-events and relationships bring about subsequently shape one’s priorities and values (depending on one’s independent choice) and thus become the basis for any self-transcendence that could occur.

From a faith-based⁴³ standpoint, that kind of self-transcendence, arguably takes place within the creative and expressive field of divine life’s matrix. The milieu within which that happens can be understood as representing the Spirit’s interaction with the evolutionary processes of

⁴³ Faith here is understood as universal and fundamental to life, but not confined to Christianity because beyond the rituals, symbols and ethical principles, faith expresses itself in the same way in different religions as inexhaustively mysterious and therefore requiring self-examination and interaction and dialogue with other faiths (See Fowler, 1981:xiii ff.).

human development. That kind of development is dependent on the transcendent Spirit but not just that. The person freely self-examines, is lively and ready for encounter with others through which personal transformation occurs; and yet it is also far beyond those personal initiatives and free choices. The force-field life is therefore a dynamic model of the complex patterns that shape a person's life and seek its coherence. We need a holistic understanding of reality to make sense of it. The Spirit is source of life and its renewer but operates in consort with the processes within the human person. What is true of such human experience is a parallel with what occurs within nature itself (Yong, 2012:50).

Pannenberg utilised the force field as a concept to liberate the notion of God's omnipresence from being merely vacuous and without any concrete referent in the world. Divine action within the force field concretises the immanence of God in nature. It provides for a non-interventionist view of God at work in nature without intervening in an arbitrary fashion but lovingly participating in and within its processes. The Spirit is the field that provides space and time for creaturely possibilities within its realm, while holding to God's indivisibility. Pannenberg sums up his view of this divine realm as an 'ecstatic openness of life to its environment and to its future (which) corresponds to the creative activity of the divine spirit' (Pannenberg, 2001:792) analogically speaking. He further affirms that 'if the divine spirit works as a dynamic field, then we have here a field concept that is connected with contingency regarding the efficacy of the field' (Pannenberg, 2001:792).

The efficacy of the field is the pneumatic action that enables relationship within the matrix of the field where the divine and nature interact. God is therefore understood as one who acts in and through all interactions of organic and inorganic creation while respecting its integrity and autonomy. God the Spirit enables and empowers creaturely entities and processes to exist, to interact freely and to continue to evolve. These actions within nature are testament of God's omnipresence, which manifests in daily acts of grace to them. Such a theology can only make sense within the eschatological hope that God acts in Christ⁴⁴.

Pannenberg (1991:46) applies the concept of force fields to theology, based on his appreciation of what he terms 'the independence in the principle of the field concept of force

⁴⁴ For our present purposes, I highlight rather than engage in a detailed discussion of this important dimension of Christian theology.

from the notion of body that makes its theological application possible so as to describe all actions of God in nature and history as field effects.’ According to him, this view of creation can be sustained without any need to ‘physicalise the theological concept of the creative, sustaining and redeeming actions of God.’ He further notes the relationship between and rootedness of this concept within the *pneuma* theories of the classical period (Pannenberg, 1991:47). Therein lies the possible link between the notion of vital force and Creator Spirit with regard to the solidarity of all creatures as indwelt with the same divine breath.

Pannenberg and Moltmann come to a similar conclusion that the notion of force field as a scientific concept that has been influential in the field of physics is historically grounded in the idea of *pneuma*. That idea of Spirit in the Old Testament ‘is more appropriately conceived of as a dynamic force, especially in terms of the creative wind that breathes the breath of life into animals and plants’ (Pannenberg, 1991:43-44). The effect of the pneumatic breath of God is summed up in Psalm 104:30, ‘When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.’ The Spirit of God is thus understood to perform a creative function that brings forth and renews life within the force field. The force field theories can thus be taken beyond the realm of physics and ‘be considered as approximations to the metaphysical reality of the all-pervading spiritual field of God’s creative presence in the universe’ (Pannenberg, 1991:47).

This study adopts that pneumatological insight for the conception of creation as a divinely imbued ‘ecological context’ or a community of creatures in which human beings are one species among many participants. They are involved in a mutually beneficial existence that is not understood in hierarchical terms. Being part of the essence ‘of creation in the Spirit is ... *co-activity*’ (Pannenberg, 1991:47) for the flourishing of all.

Amos Yong (2102) criticises Pannenberg’s pneumatological speculations based on force fields. He questions the founding of his hypothesis on force fields whose concentrations of material realities could constrain force fields in their movements, because, as he argues, the ‘fields and material entities are mutually and relationally constituted’ (Yong, 2012:50). Their mutual and relational constitution could be interpreted as a claim that God (the divine) and material entities in nature are accordingly mutually constituted. To argue otherwise would be to claim that the interrelationships within the force field are asymmetrical and a one-

directional dependency (i.e. the creature depending on the divine but not the other way around).

At the risk of offering a simplistic rebuttal to Yong, I appeal to Pannenberg's claim that he attempts an analogical rather than a concrete correlation between the divine realm of the Spirit and force fields. When any analogy or metaphor is pushed to its limits, it necessarily breaks down. McFague (1987:26-32) has highlighted the comparative nature of metaphors and the need to 'elucidate primary metaphors' and their associated models in order to distinguish them from what she terms the 'is-not' aspect of a metaphor. Could it be the case that Yong presumes that force field (which is applied metaphorically) represents every nuance of the numerous possible permutations of the divine-nature relationship, thereby testing the elasticity of the analogy to breaking point? For instance, Yong (2012:50) wonders if indeed God can be conceived of in terms of 'physical fields' and he further wonders if Pannenberg employs scientific denotative language. That observation presumes that the analogy at some point has become the explicit, direct and literal referent. My reading of Pannenberg does not suggest denotative language and neither does the scientific method require it.

Scientific method metaphorically represents realities we think we know but which we cannot actually see. The power of a metaphor lies in its predictive power, not its denotative accuracy. In other words, to use metaphors as images, which do not replace abstract thought, is as MacFague (1987:47) argues, to allow them to remythologise 'the relationship between God and the world ... (and make them) credible candidates for theology today'. Can the use of force fields help us to predict some qualities of the interrelated reality that life is? I think so and aver that the theological appropriation serves that purpose rather than the purpose of concretely denoting the reality of the Spirit's action in nature.

As such, we require the ability to fine-tune a metaphor so that we avoid the logical error that presumes that the reference is reciprocal in every way. If I use a virus as a metaphor for how war spreads, I cannot then claim that the soldiers involved in the war function in the same way that a vector that carries the virus does in every respect. The metaphor does not adequately account for all the outcomes or phenomena of its referent. It is at this point that the boundaries of a metaphor become apparent and there may be a need to change the metaphor or simply to state its limitations.

Yong's caution to avoid speaking of God as the direct reality referent of the force field analogy is relevant. Regarding force fields, however, Yong himself later concedes that what may be identified as ambiguity in Pannenberg's language, should not be mistaken for a 'literal mode of the Spirit's presence and activity'. He continues, that it is 'not a univocal equation of pneumatology and field theory but only a co-relational relationship between the two, recognising both notions as analogies of human inquiry' (Yong, 2012:56-57). That said, it is still important to bear in mind the tendency to become univocal in a discussion like this one, if not in intent, unconsciously, as the argument proceeds.

A number of theologians who have built upon Pannenberg's force fields as a pneumatological motif provide additional affirmation of the viability of his construction. Relational and realistic pneumatologies are based on developments of his appropriation of force fields. The ensuing theology of the Spirit is an understanding of the Spirit who does not flee the world, and is not hostile to the body and life, but participates in, and transforms the world and confers freedom on life within the force field (Welker, 1994:263). Their projects open up to an understanding of the divine 'Spirit (as One who) acts in, on, and through fleshly, perishable earthly life' (Welker, 1994:339).

5.4 MOLTMANN AND FORCE FIELDS

Moltmann's shift from an eschatological focus to a pneumatological one as the starting point has shaped a pneumatological doctrine of God, marking a shift from the past pneumatological focus that was ecclesiological and Christological. That shift has paved the way for a pneumatological theology of creation in his theology that is a sustained theme in his works (see Moltmann 1977, 1981, 1985, 1992).⁴⁵

The pneumatological shift does not prioritise the Holy Spirit at the expense of the other two persons of the Spirit. Moltmann's proposal is to move away from the substantialist unity in the Godhead and to move 'towards a relational unity in which the divine Threeness is given priority' (Peters, 1993:103). The pneumatological focus is conceived of within a social model

⁴⁵ These works (among others) signal Moltmann's theological progression (Moltmann 1977, 1981, 1985, 1992, 1997). The respective titles are instructive: *The Church in power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*; *The Trinity and Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*; *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation*; *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*; *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*.

that puts aside modalism. In the social model, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are dynamically joined and they co-exist in a perichoretic communion and harmony that is mutually open. It is that same openness that is understood to extend to the Creation, while in Moltmann's theology it is also understood to be open to the suffering of humanity.

The essential unity within the Trinity is exemplified by the Cross of Christ. As Moltmann (1993:244) observes, the Cross ostensibly depicts the Trinity as 'most deeply separated in forsakenness', yet it also simultaneously made the triune persons 'most inwardly one in their surrender.' His second book is titled, *The Crucified God*. It is in fact through this treatment of the Cross as part of Trinitarian history that Moltmann transcends the traditional ideas of God's immutability and goes on to advance an understanding of a God who affects, and is affected by, created order.

That understanding presents a God whose relationship with history is not interventionistic. Rather, God can be seen in the history of creation – i.e. Moltmann presents a panentheistic understanding of God. God, as it were, in a self-limiting act begins within the Godhead and extends to creation. The resolve to create on the part of creation is derived from God whose very being inhabits that resolve to create. That divine resolve results in God creating a world outside of Godself with a built-in necessity to share itself in love. In Moltmann's panentheistic view, divine self-humiliation, self-limitation and self-surrender are a precondition of what it means to be God (Moltmann, 1993:80ff.).

Returning to the forsakenness of the Cross of Jesus, Moltmann (1993:91) speaks of the eternal God (who) enters the Nothingness out of which God created the world. God enters that 'primordial space' which Jesus conceded through initial self-limitation. Jesus pervades the space of God-forsakenness with God's presence. It is the presence of God's self-humiliating, suffering love for creation, in which God experiences death itself. That is why God's presence in the crucified Christ gives creation eternal life, and does not annihilate it.

Through the Christ figure even God is understood to overcome sin and death and to thereby make creation itself part of God's own eternal life, which presses 'towards eschatological consummation of history in which even the triune God's triumph over death and suffering will be overcome with finality' (Moltmann, 1993:255). Hence, God is understood as being

ontologically linked with history and creation; there is a mutual indwelling of God and creation. To that end, Moltmann (1993:19) affirms that:

Thinking in relationships and communities is developed out of the Trinity, and is brought to bear on relations of men and women to God, to other people and to mankind as a whole, as well as on their fellowship with the whole creation.

The Spirit is depicted as the one who relates the Father and the Son, building upon the Augustinian view of the Spirit as the bond of love. The Spirit is also the one who relates the triune God to created order. To that extent, the Spirit lends concreteness and dynamism to the Father and the Son (Bloesch, 2000:237) as ‘the principle of creativity’ and ‘the principle of evolution’ (Moltmann, 1993:100). Therein lies Moltmann’s contribution to a constructive Trinitarian pneumatology that brings the Spirit to the fore as the locus of God’s involvement with creation. Through the Spirit, God relates to and continuously inhabits creation through the indwelling and renewing Spirit. To that extent, creation is understood to be involved in the very being of God (Badcock, 1997:199).

The quality of relationality provides for an alternative to the metaphysics of substance which shaped Christian theology and that undergirds the spirit-matter dualism. The plurality of persons in the Trinity presents God as relational, characterised by mutuality and self-giving. The Spirit is presented as a personal agent within the triune Godhead. The Spirit is assigned a distinct role within the Trinity and the divine life, which is at once economic and immanent. The Spirit is, or ensures, the union between God the Father and Jesus Christ, and is the realm of the relationship between God and creation: ‘The Spirit who indwells all of creation is the Spirit who lives in eternal communion of the Trinity and thus allows for creation’ (Badcock, 1997:202).

Not without criticism, Moltmann has suggested that creation exists within the perichoretic space of the triune God. He has been criticised for seemingly identifying that space with the actual triune God (c.f. Park, 2005:160ff.). Those who take a favourable view of Moltmann’s view point to his desire to contribute to a gap because of more focus on time than space⁴⁶ to

⁴⁶ Granted the understanding of space itself is multivalent and contested. Cavallaro (2001:170) aptly captures the nuance that space is interpreted symbolically and emotionally when he argues that ‘The complexity of space both as a concept and as a physical reality is testified by the fact that there is no single universally accepted definition for this term. The multi-accentuality of space has been problematized by the increasing recognition that space is not an immaterial idea but rather the embodiment of cultural, political and psychological phenomena. Space is always, to some degree, social. Its organization and the way in which it is experienced and

the exclusion of focus on space since the time of Augustine (c.f. Geiser, 2013:109ff.) Moltmann (1993:140) notes to that effect: ‘Ever since Augustine there have been many theological meditations on time. But meditations on space are rare.’

This emphasis on space is as a place to live and to form identity for embodied life, but also as what offers context for relationships within the interdependent existence that creation is. One could therefore construe that Moltmann advances a strong point about the creativity and dynamism that by extension have pneumatological implications. His view that the triune relationship is the archetype of all relationships in creation, in keeping with the Johannine prayer of our Lord ‘that they may all be in us’ (Jn. 17:21), makes that link. It is on that basis that he offers that *perichoresis* as the divine space which is also extended to creatures.

Christian doctrine of the creative and dynamic work of the Spirit in Moltmann’s work is understood as the active immanent presence of God in the whole world that penetrates and calls all of creation towards consummation. The Spirit thus brings salvation by liberating the whole community towards life-giving communion and fellowship within the divine space of nature. Moltmann anchors the personhood of the Spirit in relationality. His point is instructive when he states that ‘The personhood of the Holy Spirit is the loving, self-communicating, out-fanning, and out-pouring presence of the eternal divine life of the Triune God’ (Moltmann, 2001:289). By characterising the Spirit in that way, Moltmann offers a negative appraisal of the *filioque* tenet. He exposes its failure to account for the abundant scriptural resources that attest to the Spirit accompanying, resting in, and shining from the Son (Moltmann, 2001:309).

5.5 WELKER’S PNEUMATOLOGICAL APPROPRIATION OF FORCE FIELD

In his *Creation and Reality*, Welker (1999) recommends an interdisciplinary engagement in the critique of abstractions that have shaped, consciously and unconsciously, our guiding theological conceptions. This is a theological task that commits us to calling into question the guiding conceptions that we have learned to take for granted. Welker provided a re-examination of guiding conceptions about creation and using that example, demonstrated that theology has not always derived its orientation from biblical texts (Welker, 1999:19). Hence,

conceptualised contribute vitally to the mapping of individual lives and social relationships.’ This view leaves room for a relational application that takes into account the interaction of living and non-living *things* that share the symbolic and emotional connotations of the various dimensions of the given space.

the need for new, orienting abstractions, compel us to re-examine and retrieve wisdom from our primary texts and sources.

Welker lays the ground for an understanding of the Spirit's work in redemption and creation within a reciprocal relational model that affirms the immanence of the Triune God. That affirmation moves the discussion of this study forward. The pneumatological appropriation of the notion of the African notion of vital force can thus be located within an apprehension of the dynamic relationality of the Triune God which is manifest in the world, attested to by biblical accounts and that is also context-sensitive.

Welker (1991) advances the public personhood of the Spirit, understood as a 'force field' that constitutes public fields that generate 'a domain of resonance'. He speaks of the Holy Spirit as a public person. Welker accepts references to the Holy Spirit as an individual action centre concentrated in the person of the Jesus Christ as part of the Christian understanding of the Spirit, based on Johannine portrayals of the Spirit in John 14:26, 16:13-14 and 15:26.

Welker, however, argues that the tendency to confine our understanding to only that view is a reductionist conditioning that emanates from the Western spirit. He further argues that it is one-sided and 'does not do justice to the resurrected and ascended Christ' (Welker, 1991:312) neither does it account for personhood in what he terms the 'extra-theological contexts of experience' (Welker, 1991:312). He holds that the individual action centre only becomes a person in organised social environments. As he notes:

A person acquires features of personhood only by being formed in diverse webs of relationships... As persons we are complex composites such as we are children of our parents, a relative of our relatives, friends, colleague of our colleagues, contemporaries of our contemporaries.

(Welker, 1991:313)

Welker contrasts the Spirit of God and what he terms, the spirit of Western thinking. He advances the view that 'the western world has been shaped by a spirit that exhibits another constitution, other interests, other goals and other power structures than the Spirit of God', adding that '[th]is spirit has spread over to the rest of the world.' And that '(i)t has defined and accounts for the essence of the human person' (Welker, 1994:279). In other words, the accepted notions of personhood (and by extension all of creation) that have traditionally been

shaped by this same ‘spirit’ lead to distortions and reductionist thought that diminish the complexity of *being* that the relational quality and its attendant dynamic of *becoming* imparts to all things. Welker further notes, among other things, that the Western spirit has been confused with the Spirit of God. For that reason established ‘forms of domination that ... seek to suppress and to erode alternatives to itself’ therefore impede the flourishing of life that the Creator Spirit engenders.

Welker (1994:279-80) affirms that there is an alternative view. He contends that the life-denying orienting constructs we have inherited from Western thought

contrast the Spirit of God (which) places people in the community of conscious solidarity, the community of responsibility and love ... who can live with a clear consciousness of perishability to their relative world and reality because they know they are ordained to participate in the divine glory and its extension.

(Welker, 1994:280)

The focus on relationality echoes Greek Patristic thought, particularly the Cappadocians, for emphasising relationship over substance in their conception of the triune relationship (cf. Cunningham, 1998:26-27). That thinking wrests the understanding of God from a binitarian concept. The ensuing Trinitarian tendency accords the Spirit agency. The Spirit is no longer just ‘something’ that Father and Son share, but rather an agent that acts, affecting the Father and Son. That extends the economical understanding of the Spirit to the immanent Spirit. The Spirit is therefore understood as having both an economic and immanent role in divine life (Badcock, 1997:202). The relational insight accords depth to our understanding of the Spirit’s work. It elucidates the union between Father and Son, between Christ and believers. The relationship between God and creation is understood in terms of the Spirit’s indwelling, that opens up for a participatory interaction of the divine and the natural.

Welker’s view echoes the holistic view of reality that the idea of vital force invokes. He conceives of reality in terms of participation and extension in a spread out force field. The domain of resonance, which is construed as the ‘power in the Spirit of shared participation’ (Welker, 1994:280), resonates with the communal participatory spirit within the African, which is also emphatically echoed in the Creator Spirit, understood as *ruach*. Signified as the moving air or wind, *ruach* defies the dualism of matter. Thus, the Spirit of God opens up the

divine to the whole of creation and the community of life ‘rides on the wings of the wind’ (Psalm 104:3) that is profoundly interconnected in a free participatory sphere.

Welker considers the Spirit of God to be the energy that enables human beings to go ‘beyond ourselves inasmuch as we resituate other creatures into, or enable them to move into, structural patterns that are beneficial to them’ (Welker, 1994:280). Therefore, for Welker the overbearing task of pneumatology is to overcome the tensions that separate the Spirit from action. His pneumatology is a search for the Spirit as God’s power that is real and can be experienced in life in the world (Welker, 1994:41-44). According to him, that cannot be found in fossilised orienting constructs from Western metaphysics, which provide a particular view of reality.

Welker proposes an alternative view that frees our thought from the bondage of the past through what he terms ‘realistic theology’ in which God’s vitality is understood to act in freedom. God’s vitality and freedom are manifested in a plurality of contexts and numerous structural patterns of life which lead us to conclude that ‘even the most elementary perception of the world cannot be grasped and constructed by means of person-to-person relations’ which derive from ‘the orientation toward dialogical personalism’ of the I-thou model of European metaphysics.

Welker’s realistic theological model proposes to be ‘a theology that is related to various structural patterns of experience and that cultivate a sensitivity to the difference of those various patterns’ (Welker, 1994:x). Welker’s realistic theology takes into account two kinds of materials, namely, ‘primary testimonies’, from biblical traditions and ‘secondary testimonies’ from the postmodern context.

Welker’s realistic pneumatology explores a pluralistic biblical-theological orientation, which takes seriously the contexts of the biblical traditions. This orientation departs from a persuasion that ‘the dominant fundamental concepts of and theoretical models of Christian theology need to be subjected to a critique on a biblical-theological basis’, and also that ‘this “Reforming” orientation is still relevant and promising today’ (Welker, 1999:3). The biblical sources are varied and they present continuities and discontinuities in the experiences and expectations of divine action. However, they are real experiences that refer to concrete experience of life in their time and as such attest to the reality of God’s action in the world.

Welker therefore takes Scripture as a containing multitude of testimonies of concrete experiences of God and testimonies to the reality of God and the world as God intended it. The Spirit brings these testimonies to life and makes them relevant to various contexts and experiences. Welker's orientation towards the retrieval of biblical wisdom forms the matrix for bringing together the complex interconnections of the variegated witnesses to God's reality and presence in the world, which lays a sound foundation for a pneumatological view of nature and spirit.

Welker's theology deals with the past, present and future experience and expectations of God with a view to develop within it 'a sensitivity to difference' (Welker, 1994:276) that emanates from investigating contemporary society. His pneumatology takes into consideration what he calls 'postmodern theology' (Welker, 1994:47). Postmodernism refers to an age in which the dominant epistemological foundation and the intellectual framework guided by the Enlightenment has lost its universal claim to knowledge monopoly in preference to other epistemic claims based on gender, race, nation, class and other categories. According to Welker (1994:29-35), postmodern societies are by definition 'functionally differentiated societies' constructed on a pluralistic ethos.

Different forms of understanding and interests find their expression in each other, and are dialogue partners to, and provide resources for, the construction of the unity of reality. Emergent processes, realities and experiences that potentially bring new understanding, congruence and continuity in the fragmented world we find ourselves in, are taken seriously. The notion of an unbroken reality that emerges in Welker's pneumatology does not seek to distil reality to the same ultimate underlying uniformity.

The postmodern lens lends sensitivity to variety and difference. The rendering of the Spirit in Welker is therefore one that cannot be reduced to a simplistic uniformity. The action of the Spirit is understood as that of one who at once maintains unity and nurtures difference without contradicting God's being and relationship to creation. Welker avers that the Spirit's action 'is pluralistic for the sake of God's righteousness, for the sake of God's mercy, and for the sake of the full testimony to God's plenitude and glory' (Welker, 1994:25). In other words, God's grandeur is demonstrated in the 'multi-contextual and polyphonic presence of the Spirit (that) requires us to question simple one-on-one relations and mono-hierarchical

forms of social interaction in their ability to express basic religious experiences and interaction' (Welker, 2006:228-229).

Though he proceeds from a postmodern perspectival stance, the multi-contextual and polyphonic presence of the Spirit is not a design of the postmodern paradigm. Welker distinguishes between 'individually disintegrative pluralism', to which postmodernism is prone, and 'the life-enhancing invigorating pluralism of the Spirit' (Welker, 1994:27). Postmodern pluralism tends towards the dissolution of all forms, in contradiction to the Spirit, which is life-enhancing (Kärkkäinen, 2002:134). Welker is emphatic in pronouncing that distinction when he argues that 'the pluralistic unity of the Spirit is the divine power by which God works through frail and finite human creatures against the power of sin and distortion' (Welker, 2006:229).

Welker's emphasis on the particularity and concreteness of the Spirit's action in the world is a noteworthy contribution to pneumatology. He opens up a field within which to locate the understanding of the Spirit within a cosmic view and without limiting the sphere of influence to traditionally understood avenues. He discounts reductionist views and instead affirms that God's presence through the Spirit 'is not grasped with metaphysical and other reductionist, abstract distortions, but is experienced in the complexity of diverse, concrete, mutually challenging and mutually enriching attestations to the reality intended by God' (Welker, 2004:147-158). This provides the avenue for cosmic pneumatology to account theologically for the Spirit's work in cultures and religions outside of Christianity. A cosmic pneumatology is therefore itself a theology of relationship, which strongly underpins Christian theology's apprehension of society and other religions. Welker's view of the sphere of the Spirit as transcending Christianity provides the premise for ethical engagement with and in the transformation of the world by the Christian faith.

With the aid of a systematic exposition of Joel 2:28-32, Welker proposes that the views of a ubiquitous Spirit, 'universal causality' and 'universal effectiveness' of the Spirit that tend towards uniformity and present the Spirit in terms of uninterrupted action which purportedly appeal to God's omnipotence, must acquiesce to biblical testimonies of differentiated action of the Spirit (Welker, 1994:162). Welker equally rejects the notion of the Spirit as the 'unknown God' or as 'the most hidden mystery within the Trinity' and instead calls for

recognition of the Spirit as present and real in the salvation event ‘in a way that can be experienced with the senses’ (Welker, 1994:184).

The renewal of creation by the Spirit attests to that same concreteness of the Spirit’s action that does not erase nature, but, as Welker (1994:164) argues, ‘the renewal of creation goes hand in hand with a renewal of and change in fleshliness.’ He exemplifies this argument with references to biblical resources from Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-28. According to Welker, unless we take the clear and concrete realities of the world in which divine action is demonstrated and which we have and continue to experience, we are guilty of ‘blaspheming the Spirit’, a sin which Jesus said was unforgivable (Welker, 1994:218-219).

Welker wrests the confines to which we sometimes limit God, expanding our systematic theological contours for an understanding of the action of the Spirit. Within those contours there is room for the triangulation that brings Christianity, the African concept of vital force and the scientific notion of field-force in conversation anchored by ‘relational ontology’ (Green, 2008:180), which points to the reconciliation of all things. In Christian idiom, all things are grounded in Christ and accomplished by the Spirit, if we understand that the victory of Christ attained reconciliation of all things in God. Consequently, the entire cosmos is caught up in God to the end that ultimately God will be everything in everything (Moltmann, 1996:81).

To speak of redemption is to speak of universal reconciliation or *at-one-ment*. It is the gathering of all thing in which rest Christian hope and trust in God’s goodness (Moltmann, 2004:150) that will culminate in the universal reconciliation of all things in the ultimate ‘field of resonance’ that is God’s eternal presence!

5.6 FORCE FIELD IN PNEUMATOLOGICAL VIEW

Explorations in pneumatology in recent science-theology dialogue have proposed various entry points for the articulation of a pneumatological theology of nature like the ones explored in this chapter. Among others, and taking after the patristic view, is the conception of Word and Spirit. In that view, the Word represents creation, and Spirit the ‘air’ that gives the word breath. Both are postulated to ‘reveal the image and presence of God in and to creation’ (Yong, 2012:45).

Exploratory pneumatologies present the Spirit as the bond between the Father and the Son and as the communion of the ecclesial community, which is also reflected in the community of the living systems of creation. Drawing upon the Genesis and Johannine images of the Spirit blowing randomly, a connection has been made to chaotic theory and spontaneous random processes of evolution in nature. The Spirit is recognised as the One from Whom order, surprise and unpredictable elements emanate, including the ability to bring back life from death (Murphy, 1996). The Spirit is also identified as the One who gives spiritual gifts that enable a relationship between human beings and nature. An outcome of such a gift is science and technology as gifts with eschatological ramifications as they participate in divine purposes (or not!).

Avenues for dialogue between pneumatological motifs and quantum field theory, while drawing upon God's kenotic relationship to creation and postulating a kenotic Spirit as the quantum arena of entanglement that, signal God's self-emptying presence that gives freedom to creation to realise its own potential and possibilities. The quantum field operator is analogous to the Spirit. Both remain hidden yet their effects are evident (Simmons, 1999). The process-panentheistic frame of reference employed here preserves the understanding of God as transcendent and yet present in a kenotic relationship with nature.

CHAPTER 6: TRIANGULATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding three chapters have opened up avenues for a conversation that brings together insights from Christian tradition, the African, and science that indicate the existence and significance of a cosmic pneumatology. Before we conclude on the specific implications of those insights on the adequacy of the concept of vital force as an eco-pneumatological concept, we return to the methodological issue of triangulation introduced earlier in the discussion.

The retrieval of eco-pneumatological wisdom from the Christian tradition, the African world-view and science, thus far has provided insights drawn from that triangle of perspectives. Their interaction has led to conceptual convergence that has deepened and widened the scope of this study. It has thus lent complexity to the discussion, which has made plausible the thesis that vital force is indeed an adequate eco-pneumatological concept. As a methodological strategy, triangulation fits the interdisciplinary approach we have applied. Being favourably disposed towards interdisciplinary study, triangulation opens up to that kind of interdisciplinary and even trans-disciplinary approach, rather than confining the research to a single, strongly circumscribed discipline.

My choice of methodology is variously influenced by my theological and normative commitments as an educated African woman of Reformed/Evangelical Christian convictions. My methodological considerations are variously intertwined with theological and normative commitments that arise from my social location. Being part of different interpretive communities has bestowed upon me the ability to live with and be sensitive to the different philosophical and theological loyalties that my background entails. In that respect, a constructionist view that accepts the potential of triangulation for putting forward a persuasive argument through the lens of multiple perspectives offers this study a vantage point from which to discuss the potential of vital force as a concept of nature and s(S)pirit. The insights from science, African thought and Christian tradition are adjudicated by way of triangulation, without seeking to reconcile their epistemological premises, but rather taking each seriously on its own terms.

Structurally, this chapter, firstly briefly outlines triangulation as applied in this study. Secondly, it offers a justification for its relevance to this study. Thirdly, it addresses the normative issue of the theological rationale that justifies the application of pneumatological insights drawn from non-Christian sources of science and African thought. Finally, it sums up the insights derived from the dialogue, with specific reference to the nature of revelation and the soteriological framework of Christianity, which are the major sticking points for Christians who object to, or are sceptical of, the kind of interdisciplinary and interreligious dialogue that this study involves.

6.2 TRIANGULATION AND THE RETRIEVAL OF VITAL FORCE

Triangulation as a method derives from geography, and is based on Pythagoras' laws of trigonometry. A surveyor uses three measurements to determine the position of a fixed point on a landscape. According to the law, the unknown angle of a triangle can be calculated if one side and two angles are known. Triangulation is also used in navigation and military strategy. Using more than one reference point to detect an object has improved the accuracy of location. As a result, triangulation in analytical research is metaphorically related to its mathematical counterpart in the use of multiple viewpoints that converge at a single point.

In this study, insights from three perspectives, namely, science, African thought and Christian understanding of creation converge to affirm a point of convergence for the apprehension of reality. Their point of orientation, or at least a point where the three perspectives do not contradict one another, is that the pneumatological categories of relationality and interrelatedness are informative. For Christians, those insights are informative for the ways in which God's presence and action in the world are discerned. In African thought, a univocal ontology comprehends reality as founded on vital force that vivifies everything in an enchanted universe, while the scientifically derived notion of force field suggests pneumatological categories as being informative for how reality is constituted and experienced.

The triangulation of the three perspectives and their interaction improve prospects for arriving at a more holistic view and convergence on a single construct. For this study, science, African thought and Christian perspectives converge on a pneuma-theological relational quality as inherent in nature. This brings about a new understanding of ontology. The corroboration of the three perspectives strengthens the case for our thesis that vital force

is an adequate concept of nature and s(S)pirit. We arrive at that conclusion based on positive theological and philosophical grounds for that affirmation, not apophatic or a simple affirmation that there is common ground among the three, but a new reality emerging from this *perichoresis*. Some of those affirmations, advanced in the preceding discussion, include theological constructions that support the claim that vital force is a viable concept of nature and s(S)pirit that could contribute to Christian theological discourse on the ecological reformation of the Christian faith necessitated by the ecological crisis the world faces today. What has been advanced thus far is a suggestive theological reconstruction. It is by no means comprehensive and stands to benefit from further research, critique and development.

From a Christian perspective, we have asserted that the ecological crisis presents an opportunity for the revision of the Christian ethic and understanding of creation. In that regard, the study advances a critical appropriation of Christian tradition, drawing upon the Judeo-Christian tradition as a resource, while acknowledging the historical footprint of Christianity's collusion with ecological degradation because of its human-centred utilitarian teaching about nature and the ensuing fragmented view that juxtaposes spiritual reality over against physical reality. We have drawn upon the social nature of the triune interrelatedness as the fundamentally decisive corrective to the fragmenting tendencies of anthropocentrism. The retreat from the communal and relational tenets of God's revelation through Jesus Christ that ensues from placing human at the pinnacle of creation at the expense of the rest of creation, is radically challenged by the Christian confession of a triune God. Within a Trinitarian paradigm, the purposes of God for the world cannot be read in narrowly anthropocentric terms.

In ontological terms, the Trinity offers us an understanding that places all of creation within the matrix of the divine breath as an interconnected whole, together within a relationship of mutual indwelling and reciprocity with the divine. It is within that matrix of the living God that we locate the person of the Spirit, as the continuous creative giver of life, whose dynamic flow of divine power sustains and brings forth life. The primordial intuition that we derive from the Trinitarian designation of the Spirit as the giver and sustainer of life, echoes other insights that further illumine what a theological retrieval of Christian tradition contributes in view of the ecological crisis, which provide grounds for a theological reconstruction that appropriates insights from African tradition.

From an African perspective, the univocal ontology undergirded by the vital force has both a divine and a clear societal dimension. In terms of the divine connection, we have affirmed the link with an understanding of the cosmic Spirit within the framework of a pneumatological understanding of creation that traditionally has not undergirded Christian theology. The foundational belief in a Spirit-Creator-God has historically been overshadowed by the Christological preference. Vital force apprehended in terms of cosmic spirit recalls Christian tradition to its originating theological intuitions about creation. Having noted the ways in which Christian thought has embodied and taken an impress from its host cultures, this study presents the African cultural and intellectual infrastructure in terms of relationality as a lens to shape a Christian mind for an ecological outlook and response.

In terms of its societal dimensions, the understanding of life as imbedded and embodied within the realm of vital force has the inherent imperative and implication for concern for the other. The kinship of human beings and other parts of the created community of life is understood as an outflow of belief in the Creator Spirit. That kinship connection of all is not built on a competitive or exploitative model, where the powerful humans dominate the weaker levels of the community of life. By contrast, it is built on reverence for all of life that arises from the interrelated nature of life, created, nurtured and perpetuated by the Creator Spirit. From that understanding, ensues an ethic of responsibility towards nature that acknowledges that human beings and all of life are manifestations of the Spirit's creative vital force.

Living in consort with the vital force therefore entails acting in ways that promote the flourishing of all of life. The concern for all of life, even if not always inspired by altruistic motives, may arise from the existential reality that the well-being and survival of the whole is dependent on concern for the other. By borrowing the African concept of vital force, we are arguing for a multi-religious theology of nature before appealing to a specifically Christian theology of nature. Within the wider view of a multi-religious theology of nature, a pneumatological hermeneutic provides a theological rationale for Christian dialogue with a concept derived from the African traditional religious sphere and in reference to a scientifically derived idea of force field.

Aquinas argued that theology, first and foremost studies *God*, and not Christian phenomena like reconciliation. The exploration of vital force as an eco-pneumatological concept of

s(S)pirit therefore brings religions closer to one another. So perhaps rather than speak in terms of a Christian treatment of the subject, we should speak more specifically about theology.

The first objection to that assertion might be the matter of God not seemingly being the object of this science. For in every science the nature of its object is presupposed. However, this science cannot presuppose the essence of God, for Damascene says (*De Fid. Orth.* 1. iv): ‘It is impossible to define the essence of God.’ To that extent then, God is not the object of this science.

The second objection and further to the first, is that whatever conclusions are reached in any science must be comprehended under the object of the science. Yet from biblical data, we reach conclusions not only concerning God, but concerning many other things, such as creatures and human morality and ethics too. In that sense, then, we may tentatively assert that God cannot be the object of this science.

On the contrary, however, the object of the science is that which it principally treats. In this science, the treatment is mainly God. Its name is theology, implying, as it does, that theology is a treatment and understanding of God. To that extent, therefore, then, God is indeed the singular object of this science.

If God be the object of this science, what would be our response to the two-fold objection? The relationship between a science and its object is the same as that between a habit or faculty and its object. Rightly speaking, the object of a faculty or habit is the thing under the aspect to which all things are referred in that faculty or habit. For instance, man and stone are referred to the faculty of sight, in that they have a particular colour. Hence, all coloured things are rightly the objects of sight.

However, in sacred science all things are treated under the aspect of God; either because they are Godself; or because they refer to God as their beginning and end and/or grounding. Hence it follows that God is indeed, rightly, the object of this science. This is made clear by the principles of this science, namely, the articles of faith, for faith is about God. The object of the principles and of the whole science must be the same, since the whole science is contained virtually in its principles. Some, however, looking to what is treated of in this

science, and not to the aspect under which it is treated, have asserted the object of this science to be something other than God – that is, either things and signs; or the works of salvation; or the whole Christ, as the head and members. We treat all of these things in this science, in truth, but only so far as they have reference to God.

In response to the first objection then one may say, although we cannot know in what consists the essence of God, nevertheless in this science we make use of God's effects, either of nature or of grace, in place of a definition of a presupposition, with regard to whatever is comprehended in this science concerning God. Similarly, in some philosophical sciences we demonstrate something about a cause from its effect, by taking the effect in place of a definition of the cause. In the case of vital force as a concept of s(S)pirit, we take that which has been identified within the African, to which the biblical tradition also attests, as the effect of the Spirit of God and draw from it the implications we have derived under the rubric of theology. If God be, as I have argued above that God is, the subject of science too, vital force or triangulation then leads one to be connected and biased, that is to be faith-based. The argument then is that though not necessarily nailing down the essence of God, vital force points to effects that allude to God's Spirit and which cannot and/or should not be by-passed from the standpoint of faith.

With regard to the second objection, I would contend that whatever other conclusions are reached in theology are comprehended under God, not as parts, species or accidents, but as in some way related to God (Aquinas n.d). In so far as they are related to God, they are theologically apprehended. And in relation to the Spirit, therefore, we arrive at conclusions that relate to God within a pneumatological apprehension of what can be understood about or in reference to God in that regard.

The triangulation is therefore not a quest for Christianity to absorb the other two but for each side to inform the other within the broader understanding of this science. It is a case of reaching out to Christianity to engage it on its own terms. In that regard and compellingly, the 'interdependent coorigination from the pneumatological standpoint of relationality' (Yong, 2012:205) provides that point of engagement. The pneuma-theological understanding that human beings are relationally constituted with other human beings, the environment and the divine, transcends Aristotelian metaphysics with its static implications. Within a pantheistic understanding, this viewpoint upholds a mutual indwelling between Creator and

created, without reducing the divine to a strictly symmetrical relationship with creation. It proceeds from an understanding that their mutual indwelling is qualified by the distinguishing feature that the creator God is not dependent on creation in the same manner that creation is dependent on God as creator and sustainer.

Ngong (2010) evaluates popular African pneumatology in this regard and is critical of its limiting quality. When the spiritualised African cosmology is understood in terms of African ATRs it is upheld ‘to be *the* essential way an African thinks. This pneumatology therefore does not fire the ... imagination as the Holy Spirit is wont to do but rather limits it to what is believed to be the way Africans think’ (Ngong, 2010:2).

The historical baggage that African thinking in relation to the spiritualised African cosmology has accrued is well documented and its limiting value understood, as is the tendency to, on those terms, confine African thought to a simplistic spiritualised realm that is pitted against the Western rationalistic framework. The methodological choice of this study draws back from those historical viewpoints in order not to limit the discussion to such focalised points but rather to emerge from it and offer the African world view as a conversation partner on different terms. We therefore need to extricate the concept of vital force from that muddled historical context and problematize it in order to give it greater explanatory power and hermeneutical potential for an eco-pneumatology.

As already alluded to, in reference to Karl Barth’s view of *ruach* (see 1.3), here we may consider the question of the African woman theologian, Mercy Amba Oduyoye: ‘Is the God of our redemption the same God of our creation?’ (Oduyoye, 2000:75). Oduyoye’s question is inherent in the African quest for identity and an authentic voice. It is intended to bring creation and new creation into dialogue and to bring indigenous wisdom into dialogue within the theological reflection sphere. It problematizes the understanding of redemption and locates it within the broader cosmic view. It probes what continuity there might be between the pre-Christian African belief in the creator God and the Christian understanding of redemption that emerged in Africa following the work of Western missionaries.

Since Christian tradition reveals that the earliest Bible translators used the undistinguishable word and name for the God of our pre-Christian ancestors and the God of Christian assertion, there seems to be some continuity. If such continuity exists, there are grounds for African

intuitions of the divine relationship with nature. However, given the heritage of colonialism in Africa, deep tensions also emerge in that regard (Conradie, 2011).

Ngong (2010:2) highlights those tensions and argues for a wider understanding of the African view, ‘thus expanding what we understand to be the ways the Holy Spirit is manifest ... (and) active in the African imagination in ways that are hardly spoken of in current pneumatological reflections.’ The appropriation of the vital force as a concept of nature and s(S)pirit is understood within the universal scope of the Spirit’s activity in the world. The Spirit who provides the quest for clarity in science; who glorifies God and reveals the truth in biblical wisdom, also glorifies God in the ecological (and other) wisdom traditions within the African context. Christian pneumatology, while remaining rooted in the particularities of Christian teaching and practice, is consistent with and asserts the universal scope of the Spirit. Rather than tend towards homogenisation, that stance takes into account the diversity in theories of knowledge that appeal to a common underlying structure that transcends hierarchical epistemologies. From that, new models of God’s relationship with creation emerge that shed new light on traditional Christian doctrines as we have noted concerning the *filioque* debate.

Vital force lies at the heart of the inner structure of African cosmology with its biocentric (dynamic centre) impulse, which stands to heighten our sensibilities towards the interconnected nature and intrinsic value of all of life. That view is analogical to the cosmic Spirit who is ontologically present in (enfolds) all that is and unfolds herself and flows through the entire cosmos. Thus postulated, the vital-force spirit is in all, through all without homogenising the diversity of life; and in that regard, can be said to be panentheistic – the wholeness and constant flow of being that pervades organic and inorganic modes of being.

Within that African perspective, we discern the *Creator Spiritus*, which provides a basis for natural theology that emphasises and embodies interconnectedness. The pneumatological motif provided by that perspective also stands in stark contrast to the entrenched dualism bequeathed to Christian theology by Western modes of thought, which objectified and enamoured the exploitation of the rest of creation by human beings on account of a binary understanding. A pneumatological view accentuates the Spirit’s relational quality that embodies its healing and reconciling work (Jantzen, 2005).

The cross-verification of science, Christian tradition and African thought of the triangulation employed in this study has enabled us to go beyond the dualistic Aristotelian metaphysics of a universe conceived in terms of substance and spirit. The pneuma-theological categories that emerge from each provide an alternative view which does not contradict the mystery of the God who is present and active through Spirit as the *ruach* whose creative breath (word) brought creation into existence in its complexity and variety. In Christian theological terms, according to Polkinghorne (2010), there is continuity between the immanent and economic Trinity. The Triune God is presented in terms of a reciprocally self-emptying and self-donating action within the Godhead (Polkinghorne, 2010).

Vital force, which is derived from an enchanted universe of the African, is firmly grounded on the affirmation of spiritual reality. Spiritual agency and inter-subjectivity imply an epistemology of engagement that we have established in triangulating the vital force, Christian teaching of the Spirit and force field. There is a tendency to hold the idea of an enchanted universe as being counterintuitive to rationality and objectification of being. That need not be the case. Postmodern theologies of space and time have re-introduced the notion of agency in the universe that has questioned the disenchantment of the universe. Their emphasis on an organic universe that transcends mechanistic views have made room for what the vital force as a nature-spirit concept signals, that is, the presence of the life force that signals a univocal ontology that is non-reductionist, but can neither be said to be non-rational nor disregarding diversity of being.

There is a sense of harmony implied by the African belief that all beings are imbued with the life force. Therefore, the flourishing of human life is bound up with the rest of creation. Rivers, trees, mountains, water, and other animals are part of the community that is united and participates in the vital force. The interaction of their vital forces symbiotically intertwines them so that the cosmic well-being is dependent on there being a harmonious relationship among them. In other words, the human person lives in an intimate bond with other vital forces in which the cosmic balance of forces needs to be maintained for all of life to remain viable (Taylor, 2001:45, 48). 'Everything from hunting to healing is a recognition and affirmation of the sacredness of life' (Conradie, 2004:108).

The convergent insight is that of the (inter)relationality within the divine, within creation and the knowing subject who makes this comprehension possible. I undertake this study as part of

that interrelated matrix of creation and as the knowing subject bequeathed with particular knowledge by virtue of the hermeneutical space I occupy and the particular lenses that ensue from that identity. The African philosophical frameworks I have applied in the study imply a presumed relatedness with God and the other (kind) that gives me a hermeneutical posture for interrelatedness. We are not well when there is drought because our livestock, plants and the environment are not well. The health of the community implies the health of the whole environment in that frame of thinking. The lack of health is therefore a call to heal all relationships. Exploitative relationships are thereby challenged.

In that frame of thinking, co-existing in a healthy relationship with the earth begins with an acknowledgment that God created the earth and therefore all that is on it is interrelated in God. Throwing creation out of balance is a disruption of the relatedness with the divine and with the other (kind). Without denying that there is an anthropocentric bias even in this world view, this study retrieves from it the idea of co-existence with the earth which speaks to the ecological crisis we face in the world today. The idea of a relationally constituted universe includes and centres the rights of the earth in ways that critique its commodification.

‘[T]he Matrix of the living God is an encircling that generates freedom, transcendence, and the future of all in the context of the interconnected whole’ (Johnson, 1993:43) and therefore includes the knowing subject. The matrix lies where the Spirit’s encircling indwelling intertwines everything into a genuine solidarity of all creatures. Strands of knowledge from all knowing subjects can be said to converge too and to be interwoven within that matrix. That interrelationship need not be hierarchical, just as God and the world are interrelated in a non-hierarchical mutual indwelling which is reciprocal, albeit in a non-symmetrical way, since God is not dependent on creation the way creation is dependent on God for its being.

The scientifically derived force field increases the persuasiveness of interrelatedness and the notion of a matrix of indwelling. In the works of Pannenberg, Welker and Moltmann, that scientific concept is appropriated to signify the realm of God’s presence, the Spirit as the field (or matrix) encompassing all of creation. Theologically, God is understood to be self-emptying enough (kenotic) to interconnect with creation and allow creation to reflect God’s glory on their terms.

That evocatively, conjures up the image of the Spirit's presence in the ecosystems in a relationship that enables life among them, which, though divinely derived and continuously linked, also reflects the interrelated life within them. Because of the historical anthropocentric focus in Christian creeds and the tradition itself, we cannot take for granted that although the interrelationship is discernible and even self-evident in some respects, Christian confessional traditions would reflect it; yet it is at this very point that we discern the connection between the *Redemptor Spiritus* and *Spiritus Sanctus*.

Ecological consciousness that brings insights together from different disciplines is a hopeful sign that our confessional traditions may be reformed by this understanding of our kinship with all that is in God. The eco-sociological anthropology that emerges from this insight is validated by science (biology, ecology, cosmology, palaeontology and physics) which deal in the empirical sphere. Although theology does not deal with that realm in the same sense, it does deal with human and other characteristics of the world's being that do fossilise and cannot be verified experimentally. It offers an opportunity for interdisciplinary discourse (Van Huyssteen, 2006) in which elusive aspects of being are validated through triangulation as a method of inquiry.

6.3 THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE FOR A PNEUMATOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC

The pneumatological hermeneutic imagination that has provided ground for the conversation also raises normative questions. Firstly, do the appropriation of vital force, a non-Christian concept, and the use of scientifically derived insights compromise Christianity's distinctive identity? What is the theological rationale for such engagement?

In African theology, endorsement of pneumatological soteriology is the view that oversimplifies the African, confining it to a spiritualised cosmology (Ngong, 2010:8). That kind of particularisation also characterises the designation of African philosophy as ethno-philosophy. The common thread that runs through these depictions is to set the African in opposition to Western thought or rationality. From a postcolonial standpoint, that characterisation, arguably, plays into colonial discourses about African animism as a quality of sub-par religious consciousness. This study purports to transcend those limitations by appealing to a more complex depiction of the African and, by exemplifying the existence of similar views of spirit in other world views, the discussion set out on a trajectory that puts

such claims aside. Beyond that, I would advance that when a sharp contrast is drawn between the African enchanted universe and Western rationality for the sake of distinguishing African thought, we default to the very dualism and reductionism of the holistic perspective that pneumatological and relational categories discount. The presence of such antireductionist categories does not warrant an uncritical stance towards the African. The juxtaposition in this study enriches the African concept of vital force too and provides correctives that check excesses within this. One may argue, for instance, that the holistic view of life within the African communal paradigm is self-serving and clearly anthropocentric, as it could be plausibly argued that reciprocity in the community and with nature is a case of one good turn deserving another. Bemba proverbs exemplify this: *Mayo mpapa naine nkakupapa* (Mother carry me, and I'll carry you too); *kolwe uwakota asungwa na bana* (An old monkey is cared for by his young); *witipa umushili...* (Do not curse the earth for it is your livelihood).

The convergence of insights from the Christian faith, science and the African worldview on a specifically pneumatological point is a counter to such characterisations and point of mutual enrichment. The pneumatological imagination thus provides a methodological orientation and entry point for the three-way conversation. The pneumatological orientation at a methodological level helps us to go beyond the assertion that '(t)he Spirit can be discerned even within the context of critical and scientific rationalism' (Ngong, 2010:9), for it speaks not only of the functional roles of the Spirit. It affirms the Spirit as the starting point and affirms the Spirit as the entry point. The orientation, therefore, provides an explicit theological rationale for the conversation.

From a Christian standpoint, we have gleaned from the creation narrative and affirmed such a pneumatological view of nature. *Ruach* is the primordial dynamically creative and life-giving energy of the Spirit that hovered over the waters and purposefully ordered creation. That action signifies the creation of all diversity from the one and same breath of life, thereby rendering all things related through their creation. Although distinct, everything in creation is interrelated and held in communion by the divine Spirit who brought them into being. In their difference and complexity, they are held in communion by the creator *Spiritus*.

In the inclusive matrix of the *pneumatosphere*, plants, animals, human beings and inorganic things are helped in the communion of the Spirit in the hope and anticipation of a time when

all things will be made new. It is a foretaste of the eschatological reign of God when, as Boff (1997:173) aptly captures it within theological resonance,

The Spirit uniting everything inside and outside the Trinity will orchestrate the universal symphony. Ecology will be complete, for all will be in their true *oikos* in an infinite bond of sympathy, in their maternal and paternal home where the Spirit has ever been dwelling, now fully illuminated and transfigured by the Spirit's utter self-communication.

The retrieval, therefore, leads to an ecological pneumatological focus on the Spirit as the author of diversity, understood in terms of a healing, reconciling action in the world and who partners in action with creation and (including but not exclusive to) human action. As such, the Spirit, and breath of life manifests as partner, co-creator and co-sustainer with creation as the healing vital force that engenders the flourishing of all.

Furthermore, the biblical wisdom tradition that challenges the narrow anthropocentric notions of creation opens up a cosmic view. It signals that there is still depth to be discovered with regard to the role of the Spirit in creation. The retrieval of vital force is therefore an example of theological engagements that can fire up Christian imagination to borrow from and be inspired by other outlooks that inspire a re-look at its holistic ontological view imbedded within Christian tradition and theology. It is a pneumatological hermeneutic which does not limit the scope of the Spirit within the Christian theological purview.

In African traditional belief, the universe is an en-spirited sphere that brings together the community of the living, the living-dead, future generations and the earth itself as fellow inhabitants of that sphere, all imbued by and immersed in the *pneumatosphere* of the vital force. This view provides an ecological critique of Christianity. We have indicated that such a renewal (or reformation) is necessary in the age of the ecological crisis the world faces. It also calls for a distinctive Christian response to the ecological crisis. In addition, we have indicated that such an ecological reformation is necessary. The dialogue we have undertaken indicates the double-edged critique in which we sought to show the ecological critique of Christianity. In seeking a distinctively Christian response, we engage with other fields of knowledge, namely African traditional thought and science, even as we seek to retrieve ecological wisdom from Christian tradition and theology.

Engaging the traditional African from a Christian theological perspective sheds new light on theology. Ecclesiologically, the church is informed by the interrelatedness, healing and reconciling themes that emerge from engaging with that. The Creator God is understood as transcendent and immanent in the community of God's people. The Spirit, the giver of life, is also the one who heals the earth. The Spirit's presence therefore directs its action against the death-dealing forces of evil pitted against the earth. The Spirit can thus be invoked against actions that isolate the realm of human beings from the whole and whose actions treat the earth as devoid of the divine Spirit.

Within a pneumatological theology, the earth and all of creation have their intrinsic worth. The eco-centric hermeneutic that ensues from such a pneumatology affirms that everything was created good. Such an underpinning thought can be seen in the African understanding of land. It was not commodified, but instead, it was held in community for the benefit of all – people, animals and the land itself. The Levitical Sabbath rest for the land could be construed in the same way. The land was allowed to remain fallow for foreigners and the poor in the community to glean from, but also for the land itself to rest. Co-existing with creation, acknowledging it as God-given and endeavouring not to throw it out of balance (as we have done in this age), was part of that co-existence in both the African community and the Old Testament community.

Without romanticising the African, we can appropriate the ecological wisdom of its spirit-enlivened nature and derive from that appropriation actions that move us from theory to praxis in concrete ways. In the African, a disruption in the climate (drought, poor yields, pest infestation, etc.) called for self-interrogation. The signs of imbalance in the climate were read as a disruption of relationship within the interconnected world. Hospitable theologies and community-building ethics understand sin as fundamentally a disruption of relationship within the *pneumatosphere*. In the biblical tradition, healing signifies restoration, which includes restoration of broken relationships at various levels – to self, others, the earth and to God. Forgiveness and reconciliation are what leads to *Shalom*, the Hebrew word which means 'to save' in a holistic sense and within spaciousness, which implies wholeness, fullness and connectedness in and to the power of God.

Centring the rights of creation is an outcome of a pneumatological understanding of creation. The *ruach* who gives life and sustains it, is at once transcended, and is an immanent

empowering action within the realm of today's life and existence. It is an acknowledgement of the Spirit's presence, without the binary, that divorces spirit from embodied reality. Rather the Spirit empowers for an earth-keeping ethos that honours that which the Spirit brought about and continues to sustain. In the words of Leonardo Boff (1997:160):

To say God is Spirit is to seek to give expression to God in the framework of life, of irruption, communication, transcendence of whatever is given, overflowing abundance, passion and fiery love. It means leaving behind a particular kind of metaphysics that takes direction from what is static, ever identified itself, and from the ladder of being rising up to a top occupied by the *summum Ens, unmoved mover*, God. Spirit entails another way of access through energy, utterly open process, a way of thinking that knows no limits or barriers. The spirit-as-cosmic-force and vital energy blows where it wills and energises the entire cosmogenesis. It is the unique *diffusus, transfusus, circumfusus* of the church fathers, that is, that which fills all things and is spread out in all spaces and times.

In the Trinitarian relationship, the Spirit is the 'person' who displays God's presence and action in the world in those limitless dimensions. The Spirit historically has been presented as the enigmatic mystery whose being and action have been signified using various metaphors that capture its overflowing abundance, such as water, sun, light, wind and fire.

To that extent 'the Spirit is the point of light that actually arrives (from God) and affects the earth with warmth and energy' (Johnson, 1993: 41). The Spirit's coming to earth is captured in the imagery of watering the earth. It depicts the outward flow that renews the earth because that very energy flows from the one Spirit who is continuously the creative source of life from whose presence nothing can escape: 'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence' (Psalm 139:7). The universe, as it were, is enchanted with the Spirit's presence, 'spread out in all spaces and times'.

The Nicene Creed characterises the Spirit as *vivificantem*, the vivifier and life-source. The Spirit is not invoked simply as Creator and giver of life in a tenuous sense, but is Spirit as the creator and re-creator, the interminable flow of dynamic creative power that continuously sustains and makes new life possible. In that sense, that same intuition echoes from the primordial intuitions inhabited by the concept of vital force. It is the life-source, the Spirit's movement in, within and among creation that can be said to enable life beyond primal causation to enabling agency within nature itself.

The Creator Spirit, *ruach*, is therefore the Hebrew Bible's naming of God's presence in the universe, the cosmic Spirit who pervades all reality and fills all things. That presence is not only continuous and manifest in the historical context of our world from whom we and other things may not escape. That Spirit is the one whose creative power revitalises life. In a world where damage can occur, as we have seen in the ecological crisis, the Spirit's encircling of all things signals hope for renewal: 'When you send your Spirit, they are created and you renew the earth' (Psalm 104:30).

The Spirit who fell upon the Christ as he proclaimed his mission to the earth echoes the revitalising, renewing Spirit. The Spirit who brings good news is liberator of the oppressed from bondage and restorer of sight to the blind (Luke 4:16-20). The resurrection of Christ (Col. 1:15-20) itself points to the Creator Spirit who gives life and renews it (Johnson, 1993). The new life of glory that the resurrected Christ assumed is an outflow of the creative Spirit who renews all of life. Technically, the Spirit's presence in the entire universe is referred to as panentheism: God is above all things and yet exists in them and they all thereby are understood to dwell within the presence of God. From that mutual indwelling, renewal in numerous ways in creation is possible.

Fusion and distinction, as we perceive it within the panentheistic view, is only possible within a pneumatological framework that seeks balance between the two equally theologically perilous pitfalls of monism and dualism. While respecting the difference between God and creation, we have ventured into a comparison that approximates non-dualism of the African. In Christian terms, we have equated the immanent Spirit with the economic Spirit and concluded that they are one-and-the-same Spirit. The implication is the diminishing of the dichotomy between creation and redemption.

When the Spirit is understood only in correlational terms of the different attributes within the Trinity, locating divine love is problematic. It cannot be otherwise construed, except as that which is bestowed within the exchange of the triune relationship. But understood as an equally encompassing divine love that brought about creation, we arrive at a unitary view of this love as the same love that is extended outside the perichoretic relationship. Creation in that view exists because God lovingly gives it its own authentic life with its own intrinsic value. The point of convergence does not betray Christian orthodox teaching about the Spirit, not does it place creation and redemption in contention.

Despite arriving at the same insight concerning relationality and interdependence in nature, science, Christianity and African thought differ. The hermeneutical issue of the scientific, Christian and African understanding sharing a common pneumatological basis for relationality in nature serves as an entry point. Methodologically, we cannot relate the three perspectives to the divine on the same ground because science is agnostic at best, while the Christian view is anchored in the person of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity. This stance is what gives it orientation to the understanding of the Spirit while the African view derives from a holistic ontology, with or without a Supreme Being implied. The retrieval, in terms of the *tria* in this study, converges on a pneumatological quality in nature that, teleologically, is suggestive of the Spirit as the creator-vital-force on one level, and as vital force that emanates from the interpenetration and ‘co-partnership of creatures of another’ (Yong, 2012:227). From the convergence, we can plausibly argue that it is possible to be distinctively Christian while respecting the findings from science and the African cultural and intellectual infrastructure.

6.4 INSIGHTS FROM THE TRIANGULATION

A Christian pneumatology is informed by vital force as a concept of nature and s(S)pirit. Here, ‘informed by’ signifies taking on board insights while crossing over and being transformed as a result of the interaction. Since we have considered force field and its theological appropriation as a model, we will sidestep that part of the *tria* and proceed to sum up Christian and African perspectives on the natural world mediated through a pneumatological lens that we have assembled thus far before attempting an exploratory synthesis of the three perspectives.

Creaturely agency is implied in the African notion of vital force. The example of the ritual of God’s water, as the incubating water of the womb that a woman keeps in anticipation of conception is an example of such agency. The implied co-operative act of bringing about conception, preservation and nurturing of that life between the divine and the water permits the water creaturely freedom. For Christians, God permits creaturely freedom. Based on the first Genesis creation account of the Creation, we have discerned a thread of interrelationship of creatures as well as their en-spirited generative qualities or emergent properties. As a result, each individual creature as a part of the whole is valued. ‘To be and to bring forth’ is the blessing of all creatures. From that pneumatological and relational perspective, we can account for the evil of the ecological crises, among others. From a Christian perspective, the

participative potential ‘to be and to bring forth’ also accounts for evil outcomes like the endangering of ecosystems that the anthropocentric focus on human beings has yielded. The Christian meta-narrative allows for the (creational) *ruach*-life who enables creatures to come to be by giving them life and the (Pentecostal) empowering Spirit who makes it possible for God’s creatures to conform and act for the common good. The Spirit is also the guarantee of renewal and newness of the entire cosmos. The Spirit prompts and enables Christians to work towards that eschatological future (Yong, 2012:237). The implication of the link between pneumatology and eschatology in Christian theology is that it constitutes a resounding call to ethical conduct and responsibility in the present that approximates the hope of the coming reign of God.

6.5 VITAL FORCE: AN ADEQUATE ECO-PNEUMATOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF NATURE AND s(S)PIRIT?

What this study proposes is not the uncritical syncretism of Christian and African philosophical ideas. Neither is it a valorisation of those ideas without regard to what might be counter to the very argument we make. The attempt is to present an unapologetically Christian eco-pneumatological theology and earth-care ethic informed by the African idea of vital force. The constant return to Scripture and appeal to the Christian theological tradition make that clear. The nature of the global ecological crisis the world faces invites us to test our beliefs and to dialogue with other perspectives. Over the centuries, Christianity has proved that it can survive such a discursive context. Hence, within that context, I propose that vital force is an adequate concept of Spirit and nature and demonstrate that a few parallels arise from both.

There are methodologies and conceptual frameworks available to adequately appropriate these insights. Eco-theologian, Delia Deane-Drummond has sounded a caution worth noting for the theological project of appropriating insights from indigenous peoples (mainly from the southern hemisphere). In her own words, she says,

It is also possible to learn from ... historical work that there are resources buried in the Western tradition that are more than the caricature of exploitation, capitalism and aggression implied by all liberation theologies. An idolisation of nature in its native wildness is also dangerous in as much as it fosters the belief that human beings have little or no hope of creating solutions to environmental problems. In addition, a simple appropriation of, for example, spiritual traditions from indigenous cultures in a piecemeal way may have good intentions, but it can also lead to

further marginalisation by exclusion from an equal place in socio-economic sphere. This is the mirror image of the problems with much of liberation theology, where inclusion in of one group or ‘class’ in socio-economic processes undermined other aspects of indigenous culture (Deane-Drummond, 2008:53)

If the insights derived from indigenous knowledge are to make a credible contribution to a theology derived from various dimensions of knowledge, there can be no place for caricatures of cultures – a reductionist understanding of any cultural attributes distorts and misrepresents. To achieve an articulate theology we do not need to make the work of appropriating insights a merely a syncretistic task of assimilating African Traditional Religions⁴⁷.

A Christian eco-pneumatological theology of nature and African vital force as a concept of nature and spirit could therefore converge at various levels. Firstly, the Spirit as the mediator of life and relational symbol in Christianity is parallel to the vital force that imbues and sustains all of life, which indicates the interrelatedness and interdependence of all things. That provides grounds for the theological and philosophical rationale for favouring the metaphysics of an interconnected reality against one of essentialist substance.

Secondly, the Spirit as the milieu of relationality (communion) within the Godhead and among human beings parallels the idea of the vital force as the ‘energy’ that penetrates all things. Potentially, this convergence highlights a transcendence of relationality beyond humans to include relationships from which could ensue earth-care and practical ecological responsible activity. To the extent that they focus on community, spirituality, ethical values and the flourishing of life, they provide grounds for the Spirit to be understood as the matrix that caters to the inter-subjective relationality of human beings among themselves, and of human beings and the environment.

Thirdly, the Spirit in Christian theology is not only the source of life but also the source of gifts (*charismata*) that suit creatures for the participative process that relationality entails. This convergence recalls the vital force as the enabler of activity in all things and through which creatures are nurtured for their participatory role in the community of life. This also

⁴⁷ That would easily be the case because the sacredness of life that pervades the African world view entails that every aspect of life is imbued with religious significance.

echoes the force field as field of participatory action. *Ruach*-Spirit and vital force can therefore be plausibly offered as invested in the flourishing of the community of life.

Fourthly, from a pneumatological perspective, the participative relationship between human beings and the environment is such, that their longing for renewal is simultaneously echoed (Rom. 8:18-27). For the African, co-existence in a healthy relationship with nature acknowledges the goodness of the earth as a divine gift. Disruption in the climate, crop-failure or drought invited self-interrogation on the part of the human community in order to redress and/or mend the broken relationship that caused nature to be thrown out of balance and to ‘cry out’ with devastating effect on the entire life community. The community-building ethic that arises is a frame of thinking that judges humanity (*Ubuntu*) by how they tend to community building. In that holistic sense, the well-being of a single community includes the well-being and flourishing of the entire community of life.

A hospitable eco-pneumatological theology of nature arises from the conversation between Christian theology and the African vital force. We can exploit the emphasis on the entire community of life that is part of the African to resist dualistic, reductionist and materialistic views of nature. The pneumatological theology of nature that emerges does not pit the Spirit against nature, as we have made clear in the preceding discussion. Instead, nature is understood in terms of being en-spirited by/with the divine breath of life. From that perspective, nature is not constituted by inert matter but in a fundamental way vital force tends towards the rapprochement of an enchanted world. We understand enchanted, not in the sense of seeing spirits in everything, but rather emphasising the interconnectedness of all of life, rather than being ‘distinct from’.

The interdependence between human beings, the environment, all living creatures and the Spirit’s presence and activity in the world, is apparent. A pneumatological focus would therefore inspire ethics of responsibility that do not sidestep embodiment, participation and inter-subjectivity in the community of life. The prophet Isaiah (32:15-20) aptly captures that essence in terms that could be construed as relevant to the current ecological crisis we face. The presence of the Spirit entails connections and interrelationships that result in a resounding symphony of well-being of the whole:

till the Spirit is poured from us from on high,
and the desert becomes a fertile field,

and the fertile field seems like a forest.
The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert,
his (sic) righteousness live in the fertile field.
The fruit of that righteousness will be peace;
its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.
My people will live in peaceful dwelling places,
in secure homes,
in undisturbed places of rest.
Though hail flattens the forest
and the city is levelled completely,
how blessed you will be,
sowing your seed by every stream,
and letting your cattle and donkeys range free.

An eco-pneuma-theology of nature places emphasis therefore on human responsibility to work towards the renewal and restoration of the earth. All instrumental use of nature entails such human participation in the life of the Spirit to renew and restore what is taken out of nature. To that effect, Christian sanctification is not a private interior process alone, but is one that includes embodied activities that pertain to such as judiciously disposing of waste. Because by implication the life of the Spirit encompasses all of life, as a result, sin is not spiritual but also pertains to earth-care within our living environment. Those acts in the present have ramifications for the future. They are interwoven and within an eschatological frame; they behove us to ethical responsibility that providently acts for the benefit of posterity and to the glory of God.

The universal Spirit who indwells everything in creation deconstructs dualism and advances the mutuality, interdependence and interrelatedness of all things in an inclusive realm of the Spirit. The cosmic community is given life, indwelt by and renewed by the Vital-Force-Creator-Spirit. Human beings are understood to constitute the same elements of the divine and constitute 'other' beings. Hence, the earth is a sacred living being to be revered and cherished. Life depends on it as an integrated life-web.

Eschatologically, a cosmic eco-pneuma-theology ultimately recognises that the ultimate goal of the Spirit's work is primarily to glorify God rather than human redemption.

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Appendix I: Copper mining and environmental degradation in Zambia: Water pollution

Lusaka Times reported KCM mine's pollution of the Kafue river, the main source of water for the entire city of Chingola.⁴⁸ Apart from depriving the city of water, the livelihood of many poor people was cut off. And marine life was at stake in the river. The article reports, 'that even marine life was found dead prompted his technicians to shut down the in-take plant... The areas affected were Kabundi East and South, Riverside, Chiwempala and Town Centre... peasant farmers living along the river (were) picking the dead fish for consumption... (that) (t)he fish and other marine life was also found dead along the banks of Kafue River, (means) the river poisoning levels were very high.'⁴⁹ The likely long term⁵⁰ impacts of the spill may include lung and heart problems, respiratory diseases and liver and kidney damage.



⁴⁸ See, <http://www.lusakatimes.com/2010/11/01/kafue-river-pollution-leaves-chingola-taps-dry/> (assessed 22/09/2014)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Dobson, AW et al, 2004. 'Manganese neurotoxicity'. *Mar*; 1012:115-28.



Appendix II: ‘Approved’ construction of Kangaluwi Mine in National Park raises dust



Pitted differences between 100 Civil Society Groups and the Zambian Government have arisen following an approval for the construction of a **new copper mine in Lower Zambezi National Park**.

Recently the Government approved the construction of **Kangaluwi copper mine** in lower Zambezi national part, a decision the civil society groups have described a national tragedy. Lands and environment minister Harry Kalaba says the copper mining project in the Lower Zambezi National Park will proceed unless there is ‘very huge’ tangible evidence that will go against the government’s interests adding that the government had made a decision on the issue of mining in the national park.

“I think government has made a position and unless there is very huge tangible evidence that will go against government’s interests... in fact, the matter is that whatever the government does, it does it for the greater good of the people and we’ll not be irresponsible really to begin doing things that will be outside the people’s interests,” Kalaba told reporters in Lusaka recently.

The Lower Zambezi National Park is a massive breeding ground for elephants, lions, leopards and large herds of buffalo roaming the floodplains.

In 2011, the Australian Stock Exchange-listed mining company Zambezi Resources was granted a 25-year mining licence by the Zambian government (MMD) to begin plans for an open-pit mine right on the Zambezi Escarpment in the centre of the protected reserve.

However, approval by the Government has raised an uproar among the civil society groups concerned with the welfare of animals and other habitants of the national parks, being a preserve.

In statement on behalf of the over 100 CSOs, the **Zambia Community Natural Resources Management Forum(ZCBNRM)**, noted with regretted that the approval of the proposed Kangaluwi Large Scale Copper Mining Project of Mwembeshi Resources Limited in the Lower Zambezi National Park by Minister is a national tragedy.

ZCBNRM spokesperson Vincent Ziba stated that despite protests against the government's unilateral decision to approve the project on 17 January, 2014, the Government has remained adamant with due disregard for various factors at play.

The ZCBRM on behalf of the other concerned parties added its disappointment over the decision made by Government 17 January 2014, to approve the **Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)** of the Kanguwini Mining Project license 15547-HQ-LML by Mwembeshi Resources Limited. It claimed the EIS had earlier been rejected by many stakeholders. The civil rights groups noted that on 5 September 2012 **Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA)** had rejected the proposed large-scale mining activities in Lower Zambezi National Park based on solid technical grounds. The previous minister did not approve this EIS because he wanted to subject the matter to Cabinet for further guidance.

As civil society organisations they are now seeking to re-engage Government using all available avenues as provided by the Laws of Zambia to find a sustainable solution to the issue because the **Environmental Impact Assessment report did not meet the required standards**. However, the Government has remained defiant and maintained the copper mining project in the Lower Zambezi National Park will proceed unless there is 'very huge' tangible evidence that will go against the government's interests, Kalaba stated, adding that the government had made a decision on the issue of mining in the national park. "I think government has made a position and unless there is very huge tangible evidence that will go against government's interests... in fact, the matter is that whatever the government does, it does it for the greater good of the people and we'll not be irresponsible really to begin doing things that will be outside the people's interests."

According to data, Mwembeshi Resources Limited seeks to develop a large-scale open pit mine valued at US\$494.6 million in the Chongwe district of Zambia. Mwembeshi Resources is a subsidiary of Zambezi Resources Limited.

The company recently announced that the copper project would be located on a greenfield site at the Kanguwini mine. 15 million tonnes of copper per annum will be produced when the mine is fully operational.

According to a final environment impact statement (EIS) submitted to the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) for review, the funds are expected to be used for exploration, feasibility studies, mine development, equipment, mill infrastructure, tailings, power supply, working capital and reclamation.

In its initial report, the company had proposed to employ 250 people at the mine. The proposed Kanguwini copper project will involve large-scale open pit mining of the rock that hosts copper mineralisation.

Apart from the Kanguwini project, open pit operation will also take place at Kalulu, Chisawa and Imboo. The open pit mines will be treated as satellite pits to the Kanguwini open pit.

Last year the firm spent \$12 million on the project since granting of a licence in 2003. The investment was put mainly into exclusive geophysical and geochemical reconnaissance studies leading to the other three prospected areas, the company said on its website.

Zambia Mining Magazine: <http://www.miningnewszambia.com/approved-construction-of-kanguwini-mine-in-national-park-raises-dust/> (retrieved, 10 October 2015).

Appendix III: Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth “Accra Confession”

Introduction

1. In response to the urgent call of the Southern African constituency which met in Kitwe in 1995 and in recognition of the increasing urgency of global economic injustice and ecological destruction, the 23rd General Council (Debrecen, Hungary, 1997) invited the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into a process of “recognition, education, and confession (*processus confessionis*)”. The churches reflected on the text of Isaiah 58.6 “...break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free”, as they heard the cries of brothers and sisters around the world and witnessed God’s gift of creation under threat.
2. Since then, nine member churches have committed themselves to a faith stance; some are in the process of covenanting; and others have studied the issues and come to a recognition of the depth of the crisis. Further, in partnership with the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and regional ecumenical organizations, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has engaged in consultations in all regions of the world, from Seoul/Bangkok (1999) to Stony Point (2004). Additional consultations took place with churches from the South in Buenos Aires (2003) and with churches from South and North in London Colney (2004).
3. Gathered in Accra, Ghana, for the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we visited the slave dungeons of Elmina and Cape Coast where millions of Africans were commodified, sold and subjected to the horrors of repression and death. The cries of “never again” are put to the lie by the ongoing realities of human trafficking and the oppression of the global economic system.
4. Today we come to take a decision of faith commitment.

Reading the signs of the times

5. We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8.22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.
6. The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death.
7. We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all. The annual income of the richest 1 per cent is equal to that of the poorest 57 per cent, and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. The debt of poor countries continues to increase despite paying back their original borrowing many times over. Resource-driven wars claim the lives of millions, while millions more die of preventable diseases. The HIV and AIDS global pandemic afflicts life in all parts of the world, affecting the poorest where generic drugs are not available. The majority of those in poverty are women and children and the number of people living in absolute poverty on less than one US dollar per day continues to increase.
8. The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment. In 1989, one species disappeared each day and by 2000 it was one every hour. Climate change, the depletion of fish stocks, deforestation, soil erosion, and threats to fresh water are among the devastating consequences. Communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost, coastal regions and Pacific islands are threatened with inundation, and storms increase. High levels of radioactivity threaten health and ecology. Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gain.
9. This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, which is based on the following beliefs:

- unrestrained competition, consumerism and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth are the best for the whole world;
- the ownership of private property has no social obligation;
- capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;
- social obligations, protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people, are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.

10. This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance, which amounts to idolatry.

11. We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term “empire” we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.

12. In classical liberal economics, the state exists to protect private property and contracts in the competitive market. Through the struggles of the labour movement, states began to regulate markets and provide for the welfare of people. Since the 1980s, through the transnationalization of capital, neoliberalism has set out to dismantle the welfare functions of the state. Under neoliberalism the purpose of the economy is to increase profits and return for the owners of production and financial capital, while excluding the majority of the people and treating nature as a commodity.

13. As markets have become global so have the political and legal institutions which protect them.

The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) use political, economic or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners.

14. We see the dramatic convergence of the economic crisis with the integration of economic globalization and geopolitics backed by neoliberal ideology. This is a global system that defends and protects the interests of the powerful. It affects and captivates us all. Further, in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16.13).

Confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction

15. Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God. We choose confession, not meaning a classical doctrinal confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debrecen. We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.

16. Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore we confess before God and one another.

17. We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (Jn 10.10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.
18. We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof’ (Ps 24.1).
19. Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.
20. We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Gen 9.8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners and calls us to put justice for the “least of these” (Mt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2.18ff).
21. Therefore we reject the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system or any other system which claims there is no alternative.
22. We believe that any economy of the household of life given to us by God’s covenant to sustain life is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.
23. Therefore we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God’s creation.
24. We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Ps 146.7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.
25. Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.
26. We believe that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice. We know what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk in God’s way (Mic 6.8). We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment, “so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Am 5.24).
27. Therefore we reject any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations – gender, race, class, disability, or caste. We reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.
28. We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (Jn 10.10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Lk 4.18); he supports and protects the downtrodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.
29. Therefore we reject any church practice or teaching which excludes the poor and care for creation, in its mission; giving comfort to those who come to “steal, kill and destroy” (Jn 10.10) rather than following the “Good Shepherd” who has come for life for all (Jn 10.11).

30. We believe that God calls men, women and children from every place together, rich and poor, to uphold the unity of the church and its mission so that the reconciliation to which Christ calls can become visible.

31. Therefore, we reject any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity.

32. We believe that we are called in the Spirit to account for the hope that is within us through Jesus Christ and believe that justice shall prevail and peace shall reign.

33. We commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God.

34. We humbly confess this hope, knowing that we, too, stand under the judgement of God's justice.

- We acknowledge the complicity and guilt of those who consciously or unconsciously benefit from the current neoliberal economic global system; we recognize that this includes both churches and members of our own Reformed family and therefore we call for confession of sin.

- We acknowledge that we have become captivated by the culture of consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the current economic system. This has all too often permeated our very spirituality.

- We confess our sin in misusing creation and failing to play our role as stewards and companions of nature.

- We confess our sin that our disunity within the Reformed family has impaired our ability to serve God's mission in fullness.

35. We believe in obedience to Jesus Christ, that the church is called to confess, witness and act, even though the authorities and human law might forbid them, and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Acts 4.18ff). Jesus is Lord.

36. We join in praise to God, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, who has "brought down the mighty from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands" (Lk 1.52f).

Covenanting for Justice

37. By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.

38. On this common journey, some churches have already expressed their commitment in a confession of faith. We urge them to continue to translate this confession into concrete actions both regionally and locally. Other churches have already begun to engage in this process, including taking actions and we urge them to engage further, through education, confession and action. To those other churches, which are still in the process of recognition, we urge them on the basis of our mutual covenanting accountability, to deepen their education and move forward towards confession.

39. The General Council calls upon member churches, on the basis of this covenanting relationship, to undertake the difficult and prophetic task of interpreting this confession to their local congregations.

40. The General Council urges member churches to implement this confession by following up the

Public Issues Committee's recommendations on economic justice and ecological issues (see Appendix 18).

41. The General Council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same.

42. Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deut 30.19).