

STEWARDS OR SOJOURNERS IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD?

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Abstract

The notion of the 'whole household (oikos) of God' has often been used in recent ecumenical (oikumene) literature to respond to the dialectic between economic (oikos-nomos) injustice and ecological (oikos-logos) degradation. This contribution reflects on the need for an appropriate root metaphor to express and describe the specific place and responsibility of human beings within the household of God. It discusses several important shifts that have taken place in the search for such an appropriate root metaphor. This raises the question whether human beings should be regarded as stewards (oikonomoi) or sojourners (paroikoi) in the household of God? It is argued that this tension can only be resolved through an appreciation of the eschatological dimensions of the household of God. If home is an eschatological concept, the task of human beings is to prepare for the homecoming of all the inhabitants of God's household.

1. Introduction: The quest for eco-justice in the household of God

The dialectic between economic injustice and ecological degradation has often been noted in recent ecumenical literature. This literature includes a substantial corpus of material from economic analysts, theologians, women's movements, indigenous peoples and environmental activists. In many of these contributions the etymological link between economy and ecology, both deriving from the Greek *oikos* (household of life) is mentioned. The discipline of economics reflects on appropriate laws or rules (*nomoi*) for the household, the art of administering the global household. The science of ecology gathers knowledge on the 'logic' (*logos*) of the same household, that is, the incredibly intricate ways in which ecosystems interact to ensure the functioning of the biosphere.¹ The earth, our planet, is indeed a single *oikos*. The term 'eco-justice' captures the need for a comprehensive sense of justice that can respond to both economic injustice and ecological degradation.²

From these observations there has emerged what may now be called an 'oikos'-theology.³ The root metaphor for this theology is the whole household of God. It is primarily concerned with the health of all forms of life in this one household of God. It is thus able to integrate a variety of concerns, including 1) the integrity of the biophysical foundations of this house (the earth's biosphere), 2) the economic management of the household's affairs, 3) the need for peace and reconciliation amidst ethnic, religious and domestic violence within this single household, 4) a concern for issues of health and education, 5) the place of women and children within this household, 6) a 'theology of life', and 7) an ecumenical sense of the unity not only of the church, but also of the human

1. See, i.a. Rasmussen (1994:118).

2. This term was coined by Bill Gibson (see, e.g. 1985, 1989) and popularised by Dieter Hessel (see, e.g. 1985, 1992, 1996).

3. See, especially Cobb (1992:55f), Müller-Fahrenholz (1995), Rasmussen (1994, 1996), Raiser (1997:49-51).

community as a whole and of all of God's creation, the whole inhabited world (*oikoumene*).⁴

One of the unresolved questions within this household of God, is the very place of humanity within a household that can no longer be understood in crudely anthropocentric terms. In theological anthropology in general this has prompted the need to revisit the dialectic between humanity as being created 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:27) and being 'dust from the earth' (Gen 3:19).⁵ This dialectic is beautifully captured in the question of Psalm 8:

Lord, our sovereign, how glorious is your name throughout the world. When I look up at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in place, what is a frail mortal that you should be mindful of him, a human being that you take notice of him? (Ps 8: 1, 3 & 4) (REB)

In ecological theology, more specifically, the place of humanity within nature has become the very focus of ongoing debates.⁶ On the one hand, there is the Biblical affirmation that humans have been created in the image of God, that we are the 'crown of creation' (Psalm 8). All human beings, women and men, are created to reflect the character of God and represent God's interests in the world. As such we ought to share God's attitude toward all God's creatures. On the other hand, there is a recognition that human beings are part of the whole creation, one species in the community of the living. It is not a single species (humanity) that forms the climax of the Biblical creation narrative but the Sabbath, a celebration in which all creatures come together to enjoy God's presence and God's rest (Gen 2:1-4).⁷

In Christian anthropology the dialectic between humanity as being created 'in the image of God' and being 'dust from the earth' is best rooted within the more fundamental contrast between sin and grace, between the fallen creation and God's renewed creation. This soteriological thrust of Christian anthropology is all too often overlooked in the context of ecological theology, diluting it to an all too shallow form of natural theology.⁸

One important aspect of these debates is the need for an appropriate root metaphor to express and describe the specific place and responsibility of human beings within the household of God. What root metaphor could guide and inform us in our quest for eco-justice? Although the metaphor of 'stewardship' remains dominant in many Christian circles, also in South Africa, it has become a highly contested one. The aim of this contribution is to discuss several important shifts that have taken place in this search for an

4. Raiser (1997:49).

5. Hall (1990:29) describes this dialectic eloquently:

... a reader may think that the words and symbols and ideas that these Scriptures use to describe the human condition are terribly confused, even contradictory! For we are one minute 'unprofitable servants' and the next 'friends' of God. Here we appear 'a little lower than the angels,' and there beings whose very righteousness is 'as filthy rags.' Now we are sons and daughters of our heavenly parent, and then - a few pages over - enemies of God, betrayers of God's Anointed, slayers of God's prophets and priests. We are brides; we are harlots. We are lords; we are slaves. We are keepers of earth; we are wastrels and prodigals. We are freedmen and -women; we are prisoners. We are self-righteous boasters, hypocrites; we are little children, innocent and trusting. We are oppressors; we are victims. And all these things about us are true.

6. A range of sophisticated approaches may be identified here, e.g. humanocentric approaches (see Derr 1996), ecocentric or biocentric approaches (see Birch & Cobb 1981, McDaniel 1989, also Ruether 1992) and theocentric approaches (see Gustafson 1994, Northcott 1996).

7. See Moltmann (1985), Conradie (1996).

8. See McFague (1993:99-130) for one attempt to accentuate the doctrine of sin for an ecological anthropology.

appropriate root metaphor. The narrative of these shifts will be constructed according to a theological rather than a chronological plot and will be told here with a specific touch from South Africa's colonial past.

2. From domination to dominion in the household of God

Eers het ons geglo ons is die baas van die plaas. Later het ons besef dat ons eintlik net die voorman op die plaas is. / Once we considered ourselves to be owners and rulers of our own property. Then we realized that we were only stewards (=managers) of God's land.

Douglas John Hall on Genesis 1:27 & 2:15

There has been a long-standing tendency in Christian theology to over-emphasize the unique place of human beings within the created order. It appeared as if human beings were somehow apart from nature,⁹ or even worse, that the universe was created entirely for our purposes.¹⁰ Nature was regarded merely as the 'stage' on which the drama of human salvation is taking place.¹¹ This all too often led to arrogance and a neglect of responsibility.

Many Christians concerned with issues of eco-justice have responded to this challenge by calling for a new theology of stewardship.¹² The anthropological thrust of this approach is to move beyond a theology of dominion understood as domination. The notion of 'man' (!) as the master, the lord of creation, which is to be subdued and ruled over, is rejected. For too long this notion has allowed people to plunder and ravage nature for its resources. The command in Gen 1:27 is not interpreted as domination or military conquest but as caring,¹³ protecting, nurturing, gardening (i.e. as suggested in Gen 2:15).¹⁴ Creation is not there

9. Larry Rasmussen refers to the 'apartheid habit' of distinguishing between humanity and non-human nature, leaving the impression that we are an ecologically segregated species. Rasmussen adds that the same 'apartheid habit' is also manifested in the 'great divorce' of nature from (human) history. Human beings and the history of humanity should be regarded as a mere episode in the larger history of the cosmos itself and of life on the cosmos (1996:75-89). Thomas Berry has used the striking metaphor of 'autism' for this alienation of humanity from nature. He says:

In relation to the earth, we have been autistic for centuries. Only now have we begun to listen with some attention and with a willingness to respond to the earth's demands that we cease our industrial assault, that we abandon our inner rage against the conditions of our earthly existence, that we renew our human participation in the grand liturgy of the universe (1988:215).

Sallie McFague (1993:34) comments on the same tendency:

We have lost the sense of belonging in our world and to the God who creates, nurtures, and redeems this world and all its creatures, and we have lost the sense that we are part of a living, changing, dynamic cosmos that has its being in and through God.

10. Nash (1996:8) comments 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.
11. This notion is sharply challenged in the following rhetorical question raised by Sean McDonagh (1986:62-3): '(Is) the twenty billion years of God's creative love simply ... a stage on which the drama of human salvation is worked out?'
12. See especially DeWitt (1998), Hall (1985, 1986, 1990), Osborn (1990, 1993), Wilkinson (1991).
13. See Abraham (1994:69), Hallman (1994) and Oelschlaeger (1994) for the notion of an 'ethics of care'.
14. Despite its environmental thrust this reinterpretation of Genesis 1 remains problematic. The Hebrew words *kabash* and *radah* cannot be completely 'pacified' (Uehlinger 1995:51). The word *kabash* (have dominion) is rooted in the kingship ideology and also has the connotations of 'trample upon', 'conquer' and 'colonise as living space'. The word *radah* means 'rule' or 'triumph over' in the sense of bringing order among other living beings, implying human supremacy (e.g. the domestication of animals) (see Wilkinson 1991:287, Uehlinger 1995:51). How should these exegetical comments be understood? Perhaps Tim Cooper is on the

purely for the sake of human beings. There is a widespread consensus amongst exegetical scholars that the two (still dominant) motifs that 1) human beings have been created in the 'image of God', and 2) that human beings have been given 'dominion' over the earth, cannot be used to legitimise the exploitation of the earth.¹⁵

A theology of stewardship is proposed instead. This suggests a more harmonious and environmentally sensitive relationship between humanity and creation. Human beings should be regarded as the stewards, caretakers, priests, custodians or guardians¹⁶ of creation. Our task is a Benedictine one of 'tending the garden.'¹⁷ This fosters an environmental ethos where emphasis is placed on using resources wisely, remembering that they are not our own but only entrusted to us for our care. Humans retain this dominion only as long as humankind cares for the land properly. If this does not happen the soil itself cries out for justice and humans are expelled from the land (e.g. the expulsion from Eden or the exile).¹⁸

At the same time, an environmental extension and intensification of more traditional notions of stewardship is called for. In popular perceptions the notion of stewardship is often reduced to the acquisition, maintenance and management of church monies and properties. It serves as a means to the 'real' spiritual mission of the church. Stewardship has to be cultivated in congregational life in order that the mission of the church can be carried on. Stewardship is the material means by which the spiritual end is achieved. It therefore comes as little surprise that the notion of stewardship sometimes has the distasteful connotation of the seemingly incessant pursuit in churches for more money. As an ethos for managing one's personal affairs, stewardship is considered in terms of the burden of responsibility or sometimes as something vaguely ascetic.¹⁹ Stewardship is simply a matter of housekeeping and bookkeeping.

Within the context of such a truncated notion of stewardship, a more holistic sense of responsibility for the earth and all its resources is clearly required. This is exactly the agenda adopted by Douglas John Hall in his influential study on stewardship, *The steward, a Biblical symbol come of age*.²⁰ Hall describes a steward as 'one who has been given the responsibility for the management and service of something belonging to another, and his (sic) office presupposes a particular kind of trust on the part of the owner or master.'²¹ The steward is, on the one hand, the rightful representative of the employer - even though he or

right track when he argues that:

For a people at the dawn of creation, subject to the forces of nature and facing the task of establishing agriculture, instructions to take the ground under control in order to produce food would make sense. ... Even in the current age the state of land in the poorest regions makes food difficult to grow and often the land needs treatment before it can be fertile; in these circumstances the strong language of Genesis seems fitting. In the struggle for mere survival, human force against the elements is often necessary. The problems arise when the force used is unwarranted or undisciplined and applied with little foresight (Cooper 1990:51).

See Van de Beek (1996:120) for a similar argument. Uehlinger (1995:51f) argues wisely that the meaning of Gen 1 should therefore not be universalised. It can indeed be used for a criticism of ecological tyranny (in some contexts) but also as a right of subsistence in other (less affluent) contexts.

15. For one helpful discussion of this debate, see Nash (1991:102-3).

16. See Osborn (1993).

17. See the title of the volumes of essays edited by Granberg-Michaelson (1987).

18. For Biblical references, see Gen 3 and 2 Chronicles 36:20f. Also cf. Brueggeman's analysis of the traditions of landedness and landlessness in the Bible (1977:1f).

19. See Hall (1990:12-13).

20. See Hall (1983, revised edition 1990) as well as his two subsequent studies on stewardship (1985, 1986).

21. Hall (1990:32), with specific reference to the Old Testament use of this metaphor.

she may be a servant or even technically a slave. On the other hand, the steward is strictly accountable to the employer and can be deprived of his or her commissioned authority.²² The steward is therefore manager and servant at the same time. The English word steward is a translation of the Greek *oikonomos*. Stewardship therefore requires *oikonomia*, that is, responsibility and accountability for planning and administrating the affairs of the household (*oikos*).²³ For Hall, stewardship implies that we are responsible for the whole earth, that we are together responsible for the whole earth, that this responsibility includes the nonhuman as well as the human world, that this responsibility must seek to express itself in just and merciful political forms and that this responsibility must be exercised in the light not only of the immediate situation but of the near and distant future as well.²⁴ From this assertion, Hall develops the following dimensions of the symbol of stewardship:

- A *theological* dimension: It is God whose affairs the steward is to manage. Against all human presumption, it has to be confessed that all authority is ultimately from God. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.
- A *Christological* dimension: Jesus Christ fulfills the office of steward, redefined as servant. Our stewardship is not only exemplified by Jesus; it is the prior stewardship of Christ into which we are initiated by the Spirit and through faith. It is his stewardship in which, by God's grace, we may participate. A theology of stewardship is one of grace, not only of law. Stewardship can only spring from first receiving the gift of new life.
- An *ecclesiastical* dimension: The church is a stewarding community. As the body of Christ, the community of disciples is being incorporated into the work of the great steward. Disciples thus become servants and followers of the Suffering Servant. Furthermore, the church is not an end-in-itself. Against the pursuit of ecclesiastical power and ambition, the steward community exists to serve the needs of the world.
- An *anthropological* dimension: Not only Christians but all human beings have stewardship as their vocation. The metaphor is therefore applicable to humanity as a whole who are called to serve one another. In this way a 'new humanity' (Col 3:10) may emerge.
- An *eschatological* dimension: The life of a steward is one of being conscious of the coming End. Stewards must be watchful (Luke 12), trustworthy (1 or 4:2) and blameworthy (Titus 1:7). The impending judgement will begin with the household of God (1 Pet 4:17).²⁵

The pathos of Hall's theology of stewardship is to affirm God's love for the world (*kosmos*) and to counter a form of Christianity that is docetic, idealist, world-denying and retains the abiding Hellenistic suspicion, perhaps even the Manichaean disdain for matter.²⁶ Drawing on Bonhoeffer, he urges that the world must not be prematurely abandoned. He says: 'This world, for all its pain and anguish of spirit, in spite of its injustice and cruelty, the deadly competition of the species and their never wholly successful struggle to survive - this world is the world for which God has offered up his 'only begotten Son'.²⁷

22. Hall (1990:34).

23. Hall (1990:41).

24. Hall (1990:148).

25. Hall (1990:42-48).

26. Hall (1990:255).

27. Hall (1990:120).

3. From stewards (=managers) to stewards (=servants) in the household of God

Eers het ons gedink ons werk is om die plaas oordeekkundig as voorman, plaasbestuurder en rentmeester te bestuur. Later het ons besef dat ons niks meer as bediendes of plaasarbeiders is nie. / Once we thought that our job as stewards called for the responsible management of the property. Then we realized that stewards have to understand themselves as domestic servants and farm labourers (or slaves).

Avery Dulles on Philippians 2:5-7

A theology of stewardship can draw on the Biblical roots of Christianity and is clearly able to emphasise a sense of responsibility.²⁸ Perhaps the majority of Christians concerned with environmental degradation have therefore adopted a theology of stewardship to call for a more responsible management of the earth's resources. Despite its considerable ecclesial influence the metaphor of stewardship *as metaphor* has often come under criticism in ecological theology. Let us note some of the arguments in this regard:

- The notion of stewardship is often regarded as a too managerial and androcentric concept to support the ecological ethos and vision of the place of humanity in creation which is needed today.²⁹ The managerial steward is a sanctified version of the technocrat!³⁰ The notion of stewardship still assumes human supremacy among the species. Even though the emphasis is on responsibility instead of domination, the management model assumes that we as human beings know the best.³¹ It builds on the false assumption that we are skillful enough to manage everything, including ecological systems.³²
- Furthermore, the notion of stewardship assumes a *relationship between* humanity and nature. By contrast, astrophysicists and biological scientists have suggested that humans beings are simply an integral part of nature (and the evolution of natural ecosystems).³³ Natural ecosystems have existed prolifically for billions of years without human assistance.³⁴ To speak of a relationship between humanity and nature (even a harmonious relationship) tends to maintain and not prevent a hierarchy³⁵ and a harmful alienation. I do not quite have a *relationship* with my own body. I *am* my own body. The theology of dominion or stewardship fails to accentuate that we belong to the earth more than it belongs to us, that we are more dependent on it than it is on us, that we are *of* the earth and not living *on* the earth.³⁶ It seems to retain an affinity with a human-centered (i.e. anthropocentric) worldview and ethos.³⁷ An ecological theology

28. See Hall (1990:25-29).

29. See, for example, Granberg-Michaelson (1990:12).

30. See Hall (1990:234f) who acknowledges this danger of overestimating our managerial skills. Hall argues that the symbol of stewardship is nevertheless more appropriate than any other available metaphors.

31. Hallman (1994:6).

32. See Oelschlaeger (1994:44).

33. Boff (1995:69) suggests that this emphasis on nature (especially life on earth) as a single organism (often referred to as Gaia) is perhaps the most basic intuition of the environmental movement.

34. Sallie McFague (1993:106) comments: 'The plants can do very well without us, in fact better, but we would quickly perish without them.'

35. Berry (1991:102) argues that we should universalise hierarchy instead of trying to diminish it. Fish are the best at swimming, birds at flying, trees at creating oxygen and humans at reflective thinking.

36. See Haught (1993:101).

37. Rasmussen (1996:232f).

needs to enhance our understanding of the place of humanity *in* and with nature.³⁸ It must show that creation has a value because it is God's creation and not because of its utility for humanity.

- The rhetoric of the numerous appeals for proper stewardship is primarily aimed at people in positions of authority and responsibility. This assumes considerable social and economic power. The world's poor, landless and marginalised are therefore not the primary interlocutors of a theology of stewardship. Although every person could and should exercise some responsibility for his or her immediate environment, the powerless should not be burdened with an inappropriate sense of guilt in this regard.
- According to the metaphor of stewardship, God seems to be viewed as an absent landlord who has put human beings in charge of the master's property.³⁹ Alternatively, this task to govern and order nature wisely is modeled on that of a benevolent monarch or patriarch. Neither of these two images of God seem appropriate to convey God's loving presence in the world. Instead of this view of God, it may be far more appropriate to argue that it is God, not human beings who are the *oikonomos*.⁴⁰

In the light of these criticisms, David Hallman notes that, perhaps, '... we are in the early stages of a profound conceptual shift in theology that will move us far beyond stewardship theology as a response to human exploitation of God's creation.'⁴¹ The contributions to ecological theology from feminist theology and the insights emerging from indigenous peoples may help us to move beyond the conceptual prison of human supremacy. Douglas Chial also argues that the jubilee ethic, the Sabbath as a day of rest for the whole creation and a Christ-like attitude which seeks to minister and suffer with creation, to heal and liberate creation may signal such a shift.⁴² Can the notion of stewardship still be retrieved in the light of these criticisms?⁴³ Does the imagery of the metaphor of stewardship not assume a bygone feudal dispensation? If there is a need in a democratic dispensation for a thorough reinterpretation of the metaphor of the 'kingdom' of God,⁴⁴ does the same not apply to the metaphor of stewardship?

It has to be remembered that the English term steward has rich connotations that equivalents in other languages do not have. The notion of 'steward' may indeed be understood in a managerial sense. This applies especially to the Afrikaans translation of steward as 'rentmeester'. According to this interpretation of stewardship, the emphasis is on responsibility, a degree of authority, and administrative power. If the financial dimension of the task of such a steward is emphasised, the relative power of this position is increased even further. A steward then becomes the financial adviser, the financial manager of the company. In a globalised market economy this position is one of considerable power. Only the notion of direct ownership is excluded from such a notion of stewardship. It would, of

38. See Hall's (1990:205-214) proposal that the preposition 'with' is more appropriate to express the presence of humanity with nature.

39. See McDonagh (1994:130).

40. See the notion of God the Economist suggested by Meeks (1989).

41. Hallman (1994:6).

42. Chial (1996:59).

43. Despite these criticisms, the value of the notion of stewardship should not be denied. James Nash (1991:107) insists that an ecological commitment is far more important than verbal purity. Larry Rasmussen (1996:236) also senses that there is at least a shared consensus in the debates on the motif of stewardship that 1) human beings do not own the earth, and 2) that 'the earth is the Lord's.'

44. See, e.g. the suggestion by Everett (1988) that 'God's federal republic' may function as a heuristic key to reinterpret God's reign.

course, be of little concern to the manager of a company that he or she does not own all the company's shares. The accountability of large multi-national corporations to governments, to the people, to the poor and even to their own shareholders has become notorious.

In response to such a notion of stewardship, a different set of connotations may be emphasised, i.e. the image of the steward as servant or slave. This implies what Avery Dulles has called a servant model of the church.⁴⁵ Dulles identifies three connotations of a 'servant': 1) work done not freely but under orders, 2) work directed to the good of others rather than to the worker's own advantage, and 3) work that is humbling and demeaning (servile).⁴⁶

Furthermore, the servant lives and works in someone else's house, not in his or her own. A servant model of the church itself would imply that the house (oikos) of God in which the church has to work is not the church itself but the world. The world is the house of God.⁴⁷ The church is there to serve the needs of the world. The church is the church only when it exists for others, for the sake of the world (Bonhoeffer).⁴⁸ It should provide service (*diakonia*) to the world instead of serving its own needs or expansionist interests. Christians have to be disciples of Jesus Christ who came to serve, to heal, to reconcile, to bind up wounds, to be alongside us in our sorrows, to die so that we may live. Jesus emptied himself (*kenosis*), taking the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). Likewise, the church has to renounce all claims to power and honour. It must not rule by power but attract through love.⁴⁹

This servant model of stewardship has important ecological implications. Uko Zylstra observes that it de-emphasizes the hierarchical view that humans are above creation. Instead, it stresses the responsibility that humans have in caring for their immediate environment as servants rather than lords. The goal of this service is to seek the comprehensive well-being (*shalom*) for all of creation.⁵⁰

4. From stewards (=servants) to members in and heirs of God's household

Eers was ons niks meer as bediendes, eintlik slawe, op die baas se plaas nie. Toe hoor ons dat ons inderwaarheid volwaardige lede van die huisgesin is. Ons is as kinders aangeneem en is daarom nou mede-erfgename van die eiendom. / Once we were slaves in the master's household. Then we heard that we are equal members of the household. We were adopted as children in the house and now we are heirs of the property.

Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz on Ephesians 2:19-22

The notion of the steward as servant or slave is also open to abuse and criticism. Obviously, it may be abused to further enslave a group of people, to keep them servile. On the other hand, servants may also assume positions of relative authority in the household of the landlord or landlady. They may become the renowned butlers in charge of their own domains and a host of junior servants. Then there remains little difference between a steward as manager and as servant.

45. Dulles (1987:89-102).

46. Dulles (1987:99-100).

47. Dulles (1987:96), with reference to J.A.T. Robinson.

48. Bonhoeffer (1995:296) argues that the Christian community can be the centre of God's dealing with the world only when it is willing to be merely an instrument for the proclamation of the lordship of Christ in the world.

49. Dulles (1987:94-7).

50. Zylstra (1998:46). Zylstra distinguishes this notion of servant stewardship from those of 'wise use' and of 'caring management'.

The same ambiguity also pertains to the originally revolutionary suggestion of Jesus that the one who wishes to rule needs to become a servant of others. For the son of man did not come to be served but to serve (Matt 20:26-28). One of the ironies of history is that contemporary politicians can ill afford not to convey to the electorate that they will 'serve' the interests of the people wholeheartedly. The same connotation is also prevalent in the notion of civil 'service'. The popularisation of the notion of service has robbed it of its critical power. To serve is to rule and to rule is to serve.

The rhetoric of the notion of stewardship as service should also be investigated critically. It is, again, aimed primarily at those in positions of relative power of authority. No one would call on the poor, powerless and marginalised to become servants. They are the enslaved servants of the present global economic order. This indicates the restricted applicability and validity of a theology of stewardship - both in terms of the steward as manager and as servant. A more inclusive root metaphor is therefore required.

The impetus behind the emergence of an 'oikos'-theology is precisely that of *inclusion* in the household of God. The dominant rhetoric of liberation theology, black theology and of a culture of human rights is that every human being has an equal dignity and integrity before God. In South Africa no one has done more than Desmond Tutu to proclaim and reiterate this liberating message. We are no longer slaves in the household of God; we are adopted as children. As children we may call God 'Abba'. And because we are God's children, we are also rightful heirs of the riches of the household (Gal 4:6-7). Although we were (as gentiles) alienated from the common wealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and being without God in the world, we have now been brought near to Christ. The walls of separation were broken down so that everyone may now participate in the one humanity. We are no longer far from God. We are no longer sojourners but full citizens and members of the household of God (Eph 2:12-19). The slaves, servants and stewards have now become participating members of the household of God.⁵¹

Ecological theology, especially in the form of 'oikos'-theology, has called for an important corrective to this emphasis on the integrity and dignity of human beings. It has emphasised that the household of God cannot be conceived in crudely anthropocentric terms as a communion of human beings. The household includes not only family members, friends, neighbours, visitors, and foreigners, but also domestic animals, livestock, food supplies, clothing, furniture, appliances, energy supplies, water supplies, gardens, trees, flowers, soil, and all the building materials of the house itself. The earth itself is ultimately the larger house which human beings inhabit together with multiple other forms of life.

In his stimulating study, *God's Spirit. Transforming a world in crisis*, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz has developed these insights through the notion of 'ecodomy', derived from the Greek word *oikodomé*. Ecodomy is the art of inhabiting instead of dominating the earth, our house. Müller-Fahrenholz explains:

In its literal sense this term refers to the building of the house, but its meaning can be extended to any constructive process. So the apostle Paul uses the word for the building up of Christian communities. He calls his apostolic mission a service to the *oikodomé* of Christ (2 Cor. 13:10). He reminds members of Christian communities that they should behave towards each other in the spirit of *oikodomé* (Rom. 14:19). They are called to use their

51. See Hall (1990:37-38) for a similar emphasis.

specific gifts and talents (charisms) for the *oikodomé* of the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:21), just as they are reinforced and strengthened by the pneumatic energy of this body.⁵²

Müller-Fahrenheit calls on Christian congregations to become ecodominical centres and to form ecodominical networks and covenants that can respond to the demands of the contemporary world. The calling of the church is to become partners in God's ecodominity. To concretise this calling of the church, Müller-Fahrenheit draws on the conciliar process initiated by the World Council of Churches towards 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.' This ecodominical agenda requires the virtues of wisdom, endurance, patience and solidarity. In all this, the church is dependent on the life-sustaining breath of God's *pneuma*.⁵³

Müller-Fahrenheit concludes that the ecodominical task is one of finding appropriate forms of habitation. The challenge before us is to create cultures which are compatible with the way nature works or are at least safely within the carrying capacities of the various ecosystems.⁵⁴

5. From inhabitants to sojourners in God's household

Eers het ons al te lekker by die huis gebly. Ons het alles as vanselfsprekend begin aanvaar. Later het ons besef dat alles in die huis nie heeltemal pluus is nie. Dit het van ons vreemdelinge en bywoners op die plaas gemaak. / Once we enjoyed all the comforts of the house. Everything was taken for granted. Then we realized that everything in the house is not quite in order. As a result we became outsiders and sojourners.

Flip Theron on 1 Peter 2:11

The metaphor of 'building up' (*oikodomé*) is used in the New Testament primarily with reference to Christian communities. By contrast, the position of Christian communities in society is described, especially in 1 Peter, by another concept also derived from the word *oikos*, that is *paroikia*. This word literally means 'living away from home'.⁵⁵ The church is a community of 'aliens and strangers' (*paroikoi* and *parepidemioi*) in the world (1 Pet 2:11). The congregation is a 'Gemeinschaft der gemeinsam Fremden'.⁵⁶ God's elect people are strangers in the world (1 Pet 1:1) who are called to live their lives as strangers in reverent fear (1:17).

Müller-Fahrenheit also recognises the need for an emphasis on the church as *paroikia* in society. He argues that,

It is understandable that some of the small and persecuted Christian groups began to see themselves as communities of aliens and exiles in a hostile world, whose true homeland was in the heavens (cf. 1 Pet. 2:11). Eventually each local Christian church came to be called a *paroikia*, a home away from home, as it were, a place of refuge.⁵⁷

However, Müller-Fahrenheit regards this emphasis on the *paroikia* character of the church merely as an important corrective which becomes necessary whenever the primary ecodominical task of the church is threatened.

There is an undeniable tension between *oikodomé* and *paroikia*. Whereas the former implies purpose and creativity, the latter tends towards separation of earth and heaven and

52. Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:109).

53. Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:110-123).

54. Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:147).

55. Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:109).

56. See Theron (1997:261) with reference to the study by Reinhard Feldmeier (1992:183).

57. Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:109).

fosters an escapist spirituality. But this need not be the case. The notion of *paroikia* is useful in underscoring that the followers of Christ can only be strangers in a world that rejects them. ... Ecodomical communities cannot be at peace with the violent powers that threaten to throw the world into chaos; rather they must seek to correct and transform a world in crisis.⁵⁸

In a recent contribution, Flip Theron acknowledges, with specific reference to Müller-Fahrenheit, that the emphasis on the *paroikia* character of the church may foster an escapist spirituality, but simply adds that this does not need not happen.⁵⁹ By contrast, Theron insists that the metaphor of the church as *paroikia* in society is of fundamental (instead of corrective) importance since it is (for him) a function of the eschatological character of the church. He thus recalls that ...

The English 'parish', the Dutch 'parogie' and the German 'Pfarrer' which derive from this word (*paroikia*), still remind us that the church consists of 'resident aliens'. Training a 'Pfarrer' involves training a 'foreigner.' The education of a parson, implies training for a *paroikia*.⁶⁰

The emphasis on the church as *paroikia* is a recurring theme in many of Theron's contributions. In *Die ekklesia as kosmies-eskatologiese teken*, he argued that the unity of the church is a concrete sign of the eschaton for the cosmos, towards the healing of the whole cosmos.⁶¹ In three volumes of meditations, *Vreemde geregtigheid*, *Vreemde gemeenskap* and *Vreemde bevyding*, Theron and Willie Jonker recognise the strangeness, the otherness of sinners being declared righteous before God, of the Christian community and of God's acts of liberation.⁶² In a response to the 1982 open letter to the Dutch Reformed Church, Theron again stressed the strangeness, the otherness, the uniqueness of the church in society. The church as unique prefiguration (*vóór-beeld*) of the eschaton scarcely provides an example (*voorbeeld*) that can be simulated elsewhere in society. This can only lead to a reduction of the unique eschatological nature of the church.⁶³ And in an important recent article on theological education, Theron argues that a *theologia viatorum* shares the *paroikia* character of an *ecclesia perigrinans*.⁶⁴

In this emphasis on the church as *paroikia*, Theron draws consistently on the 'critical' theology of the cross of Oepke Noordmans, i.e. the gracious judgement of God on a perverted world in the cross of Jesus Christ. The proclaiming of the message of the cross 'calls a new creation, a *paroikia* out of the chaotic darkness of this world into his wonderful light (1 Pet 1:9).'⁶⁵ Although the cross is considered to be foolishness by some (1 Cor 1:18-25), it retains its critical edge of human wisdom and of whatever is fashionable in society.

This critical theology of the cross has important implications for the always uneasy position of Christian communities in society. Theron eloquently explains its deepest pathos:

Quite understandably the church is always tempted to lay another foundation than the 'one already laid' namely the crucified Christ (1 Cor 3:11). That happens when it becomes fascinated by the isolated form of creation in stead of focusing on the *trans*-forming and therefore critical character of the creative Word of the cross. It then loses its *paroikia*

58. Müller-Fahrenheit (1995:110).

59. Theron (1997:257).

60. Theron (1997).

61. Theron (1978).

62. See Jonker & Theron (1981, 1983, 1989).

63. Theron (1982:125f).

64. Theron (1997:257).

65. Theron (1997:260-261).

character and becomes nothing more than a reflection of society. The salt has lost its saltiness. 'It is no longer good for anything, except to be throw out and trampled by men' (Matt 5:13).⁶⁶

Indeed, if the church loses the critical edge of this theology of the cross it will have devastating consequences not only for the church and for theology⁶⁷ but also for the world. The world very much needs something the church alone can give, i.e. hope in the ultimate coming of God's reign - as Avery Dulles also argues.⁶⁸ One may be entitled to add that a theology of ecomomy, or perhaps one of reconstruction and development, *can* all too soon become a theology of newly acquired power if the message of the church becomes a mere repetition of the message of concerned politicians and economists. Then an 'oikos'-theology can, against its own intentions, only domesticate (!) the 'strange new world' of the Bible (Barth). Then the church and its message will, curiously enough, become purely provincial, purely parochial (!).

Instead, as Hauerwas & Willimon argues, followers of Jesus Christ can only be 'resident aliens' in a post-Constantinian world. The story of Israel is one of a wandering people, of an adventurous journey, of departing from the house of slavery towards a promised land. Christian faith implies a being on the road again. This journey of faith implies a testing of the traveller's character and courage (Christian virtues) and requires trustworthy companions (Christian communities) and a vision of the final destiny (friendship with God).⁶⁹

6. From sojourners to pilgrims in the homeless journey of the cosmos

Toe ons nog as bywoners op die plaas gelewe het, is ons uitgenooi om deel te neem aan 'n lang reis, 'n soort pelgrimstog waarby, so word ons vertel, die hele geskiedenis van die kosmos betrokke is. Nou begin ons besef dat hierdie huis nie ons finale bestemming kan wees nie. / When we lived as sojourners we were invited to join a long journey, a kind of pilgrimage in which, so we are told, the whole history of the cosmos is participating. Now we started realizing that this house cannot be our final destination.

John Haught on Hebrews 13:14

If an emphasis on homelessness may tempt the church into otherworldliness, John Haught, in a crafty Catholic synthesis, universalises homelessness to become a typical feature of the history of the cosmos itself (i.e. a sense of cosmic homelessness).

Haught notes the ecological danger of inherited ways of thinking that have fostered a feeling in us that we are not really at home in the universe. He says: 'As long as we fail to experience how intimately we belong to the earth and the universe as our appropriate habitat, we will probably not care deeply for our natural environment.'⁷⁰ In response, numerous ecological theologies have advocated ways of thinking that regard the earth and the universe as our true 'home' as environmentally wholesome. Haught wonders how this form of theology can be reconciled with the Christian affirmation that we have no lasting

66. Theron (1997:261-262).

67. In an article on theological education, Theron (1997:257, 263) warns of the temptation that theology will exchange its primary context (the church) for its more attractive, perhaps more comfortable secondary context in academia in order to escape from the counter-cultural paroikia character of the church and its confession of the crucified Christ.

68. Dulles (1987:98). See also Hauerwas & Willimon (1989).

69. Hauerwas & Willimon (1989:49-68).

70. Haught (1990:160).

home in this world (Heb 13:14); that we are only pilgrims here on earth. He then argues that a sense of religious homelessness can actually foster a sense of being at home in the natural world if the history of the cosmos itself can be interpreted in terms of cosmic homelessness, i.e. as an ongoing adventure into mystery, as a cosmic pilgrimage.

Haught argues that a new awareness of the dynamic, ever-changing history of the universe is emerging from contemporary science.⁷¹ This has been illustrated dramatically in the biological sciences (since the days of Darwin) and in the discovery of an expanding universe in astrophysics in this century. This awareness that nature (not only humanity) is inherently historical, constitutes one of the most significant discoveries of modern science.⁷² In fact, as Brian Swimme argues,

The laws that govern the physical universe today, and that were thought to be immutable are themselves the result of developments over time. We had assumed that the laws were fixed, absolute, eternal. Now we discover that even the laws tell their own story of the universe. That is, the Cosmic Story, rather than being simply governed by fixed underlying laws, draws these laws into its drama.⁷³

Swimme therefore states that the universe, at its most basic level, is not so much matter or energy but *story*. Nature has the character of a narrative and scientists have become storytellers. Picking up Swimme's argument on the narrative character of the universe, Haught comments that:

Science has increasingly and almost in spite of itself taken on the lineaments of a story of the cosmos. The cosmos itself increasingly becomes a narrative, a great adventure ... The most expressive metaphor for what science finds in nature is no longer *law*, but *story*.⁷⁴

And further:

... as a result of developments in physics and astronomy, we discern the inherently narrative character of all physical reality. Scientists, in spite of much initial resistance to their new task, have now become story-tellers. The cosmos they describe is no longer just a set of laws, but a narrative the quest for whose outcome is perhaps the major intellectual and spiritual inquiry of our time.⁷⁵

Haught suggests that the story of the universe may further be characterised by the notion of a 'cosmic adventure', filled with restlessness, suspense and mystery. The restlessness that impelled matter toward complexity, beginning with the big bang, has not yet been stilled.⁷⁶ The story's plot is full of dramatic and surprising developments. Anyone who might have witnessed the Primordial Flaring Forth (to use Berry's poetic phrase for the 'Big Bang') or the formation of the earth would never have anticipated the arrival of life or the emergence of self-consciousness billions of years later.⁷⁷

71. Von Weizsäcker calls the realization that nature is inherently historical the most significant discovery of modern science. See Haught (1996:57).

72. Haught (1996:57). Thomas Berry (1991:54) argues that the recent reconstruction of the story of the cosmos constitutes a new revelatory event (analogous to the incarnation of Jesus Christ) which will challenge our Ptolemaic understanding of the cosmos and the place of humanity in the cosmos. It will awaken in us a new ecological sense of community with all living things. It also illustrates the cosmic scope of revelation. In fact, for Berry (1988:195), the universe itself is the primary revelation.

73. Swimme (1988:50). Haught (1993b:63-4) quotes and develops Swimme's metaphor of the cosmic story by the notion of a 'cosmic adventure'.

74. Haught (1990:173, also 1993b:62f), Rolston (1987:119).

75. Haught (1993b:122).

76. Haught (1993a:151).

77. Haught (1993b:124).

The story of the universe is also a lengthy 'saga' with vast epoches of redundancy and mere repetition but, with great patience, also of continual experimentation with novel forms of order. Nature itself is inherently restless refusing to acquiesce in trivial forms of (sacramental) harmony.⁷⁸

It is an ongoing adventure story which is still unfolding before our eyes, still keeping us in suspense about its final outcome. As new scientific discoveries unfold, one cannot suppress the question that readers of any great story would ask. How is the story going to end?⁷⁹ For Haught, the direction that the story is taking towards increasing consciousness (Teilhard) and an intensification of beauty (Whitehead) can only be interpreted through the eyes of faith as an enormous promise.⁸⁰ If the history of the cosmos resembles an adventure story more than a set of eternal laws, Haught feels justified in speaking of the 'promise of nature' itself. Nature and reality itself has its own inherent teleology; it is 'seeded', 'pregnant' and 'saturated' with promise.⁸¹

If the history of the cosmos may be described as a restless adventure story, a cosmic pilgrimage, the Christian themes of homelessness, wandering, alienation and exile may be regarded as expressions of the primary revelation of adventure, i.e. the adventure into mystery of the universe itself.⁸²

7. This earthly house is not our home yet: Home is an eschatological concept

Aan die einde van ons pelgrimstog het ons toe weer by ons ou huis uitgekom. Toe het ons besef dat die huis nog nie vir almal 'n tuiste bied nie. Ons taak is om in hierdie aardse huis 'n tuiste vir almal voor te berei. / At the end of pilgrimage we came to our old house. Then we realized that this house still has to be made home for all creatures. Our responsibility is to prepare a home for all in this earthly house.

A meditation on Psalm 23:5-6

If a theology of stewardship requires responsibility, if a servant model of the church requires a willingness to serve, if an ecodominical covenant requires an inclusiveness and solidarity to the earth as our house, if the church as a new creation may require Christians to become aliens in this world, and if this finite earth is part of a cosmic pilgrimage, what root metaphor for the role of humanity should guide and inform an 'oikos'-theology in the quest for eco-justice?

In the search for an appropriate root metaphor, the eschatological tension between this earth and the Christian hope for a new earth should not be domesticated. This earth is not yet the new earth. This house does not yet provide a home for all its creatures. The earth is not our home yet. We therefore need to maintain the typical eschatological tension between the already and the not yet of God's acts of salvation from sin, liberation from oppression and victory of evil.

Moreover, this finite earth cannot provide an everlasting house for its inhabitants. The inhabitants will one by one wither away and die and the house (the earth) itself will eventually crumble (if only after another 5 billion years). The realisation of the transitoriness of all creation requires of us to maintain another typical eschatological

78. Haught (1998:8).

79. Haught (1993:122).

80. Haught (1993b:122).

81. Haught (1993b:102).

82. Haught (1990:178).

tension, i.e. between the continuity and the discontinuity of this earth and the new earth. The new earth that Christians hope for cannot simply be a final restoration of this earth.⁸³

The emphasis on the church as *paroikia* is born from an acknowledgment of such eschatological tensions. More specifically, it tends to emphasise that this world is not yet the eschaton. The new South Africa is not yet God's new creation. There is a discontinuity between the house (the earth) that we inhabit now and the home which Christ is preparing for us. The church is a *paroikia* because it already participates in the eschaton. The church provides a concrete symbol of the new earth amidst the signs of destruction, decay and death of the present earth.⁸⁴ Christians are also called to establish preliminary and penultimate signs of the new creation in contemporary society. As John de Gruchy puts it,

The eschaton judges our clinging to the past, our attachment to the present status quo, making us dissatisfied with anything less than God's righteousness, justice and peace in the world. It lures us into the future, making us restless with things as they are, it stimulates hope for the fulfillment of God's purpose for the universe.⁸⁵

Such a legitimate emphasis on the not-yet of the coming of God's reign, on the discontinuity between this earth and the new earth, remains vulnerable to the danger of a docetic radicalisation of such insights. How, then, can the continuity between creation and eschaton be ensured? How can an appreciation of the eschatological nature of Christ's resurrection retain its historical impact? How can an appreciation of the eschatological nature of the church retain something of the concrete, visible presence of the church in the world? Where, if anywhere, can it really be found? Or does the church as a concrete sign become ephemeral the moment one tries to indicate it in the world? How can an appreciation of the eschatological, not-yet character of sanctification in the lives of believers and in society retain its commitment to the need for liberation from the devastating effects of sin in this world, to the need to establish victory over evil, to the need for reconstruction and development? How can an awareness of the discontinuity of the new earth ensure an appreciation for this earth?

My impression is that the necessary balance in the legitimate eschatological tension between the continuity and discontinuity of creation and eschaton is exceptionally difficult to maintain.⁸⁶ Van Ruler's proposal that the term *recreatio* suggests continuity and discontinuity as long as the 're' and the 'creatio' are equally emphasised, remains suggestive in this regard.⁸⁷

However, the charge of docetism is perhaps not so much at a theoretical level but at a practical level. This is reinforced by the choice of the metaphor of *paroikia* which may easily create the impression that the uniqueness of the eschaton implies something strange,

83. See Conradie (1999) for a more detailed discussion of the distinctness of the human predicaments of sin (and its evil effects) and finitude (both temporal and spatial).

84. See Theron (1978) for a discussion of the notion of the church as a 'sign' of the eschaton.

85. De Gruchy (1979:199).

86. See Conradie (1999) for a more detailed discussion in this regard.

87. Van Ruler (1969:168, 1971:222). See also Theron (1978:8f) who concurs with Van Ruler's rejection of a *nova creatio*. The continuity suggested in the notion of *recreatio* refers to the continuation of a relationship with God. Salvation in Christ implies a reparation of a relationship devastated through sin. The eschaton implies a continuation of this relationship even beyond death. Death as the final judgement of God on sin is itself understood relationally. However, the reality of death requires an equal emphasis on an eschatological discontinuity. Recreation is recreation out of death (not out of nothing). This ensures that the continuity is not limited to the idea of relationship (*relatio*) but also applies to the related elements (*relata*). Theron concludes in a concise formulation that recreation passes through death (thus discontinuity) but at the same times passes through death (thus continuity).

alternative, alien, unearthly, otherworldly. This false impression can only be countered if the difference between creation and eschaton is understood in terms of the *newness* of the eschaton. The eschaton implies a new earth, or better, a renewed earth. This newness may, at times, create tension between church and society, but this tension is not a necessary one and will emerge only as a result of a negative reaction from society.

The danger of ecclesiological docetism is also raised by David Bosch in his response to Theron's comments on the Open Letter of 1982. He asks whether Theron does not put a one-sided emphasis on the otherness of the church. As a result, the church can scarcely have some significant influence in society any longer. There remains only a very vague dotted line between church and society if the eschatological nature of the church is radicalised in this way. The church then becomes purely religious instead of an *ekklesia*, a concept derived from civil society.⁸⁸ Then the church may still proclaim liberation and justice but can make little contribution towards the realisation of such justice and peace, towards the task of reconstruction and development. The charge is therefore that the choice of *paroikia* as a theological root metaphor may not so much theoretically but practically, if unintentionally, have docetic consequences.

Interestingly enough, the charge of docetism is also one that Van Ruler has raised in conversation with Noordmans. Van Ruler argued that Noordmans' view on salvation as recreation ('herscheping') leads to a certain dualism where creation is actually replaced by the reign of God. This is the result of an eagerness to emphasise the qualitative newness of the eschaton so much that no trait of the eschaton can be detected in history, not even in the history of salvation (except within a very narrow Christological focus). Against Noordmans' own intentions, this may easily lead to a form of eschatological docetism.⁸⁹ Similar questions about eschatological docetism have also been raised in connection with Moltmann's use of the term *nova creatio* to characterise the newness of the eschaton. Moltmann suggests that: 'What is new announces itself in the judgment of what is old. It does not emerge from the old; it makes the old obsolete. It is not simply the old in a new form. It is also a new creation.'⁹⁰ Rubem Alves argued many years ago that Moltmann's understanding of the dialectic between future and present becomes docetist because the future is no longer mediated by the present.⁹¹

Finally, the pathos of Douglas John Hall's theology of stewardship is also to counter the threat of docetism. He is concerned that Christians have been less than affirmative of their creaturely existence. He is concerned that the legitimate emphasis on the homelessness of the church as *paroikia* may tempt the church into otherworldliness. Then we can no longer pray: 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'⁹² Hall repeatedly calls for an end to Christian docetism⁹³ and emphasises that it is this world that God loves:

88. Bosch (1982:138-9).

89. See Berkouwer & Van der Woude (1969:18) in conversation with Van Ruler.

90. Moltmann (1996:27).

91. Alves (1969:94-97, 152). Alves says:

The pure futurity of God is a new form of Docetism in which God loses the present dimension and therefore becomes ahistorical. ... A God who is always future is a God who does not become historical in terms of power but who remains ahead, attracting history to himself by means of eros. The biblical communities, however, had a hope for the future because God was present, and in his present, through the exercise of power, which was historical through and through, he negated historically and presently the power of 'what was,' thereby making man and history open for a new tomorrow (1969:94).

92. See Hall (1990:228-229).

93. See, especially, Hall (1990:59, 228, 230f).

The Christian is a stranger in the world, never quite at home in it, because he or she remembers - and hopes for - a righteousness, justice and peace that the world does not know, though it is of its essence and the very thing towards which it is daily beckoned. Yet this homelessness must not tempt the Christian into otherworldliness, whether of the religious or the secular utopian variety; *this* is the world God loves, and it must not be substituted for by some other, no matter how desirable.⁹⁴

This quotation clearly illustrates the pathos behind what I earlier called an 'oikos'-theology. This world, this earth is the household of God. It is here, on this earth, that we have to build a home for all.⁹⁵ However, if the eschatological tension between this earth and the new earth is not to be domesticated prematurely, it has to be emphasised that this earth is not our home yet. *Home is an eschatological concept.*

This is also the tenor of some of the most beloved Biblical texts. God will receive us as guests of honour at the abundant eschatological feast. I will be at home in God's house for evermore (Psalm 23:5-6). God will come to settle in Zion amidst God's people (Eze 37:27, Zach 2:10-11). The Word became flesh and dwelled amongst us (John 1:14). Christ comes to live in the heart of believers (Eph 3:17). The Holy Spirit lives amongst us, in our own earthly bodies (2 Tim 1:14, 1 Cor 6:19). The house of the father only becomes a festive home when the prodigal son returns from his wandering (Luke 15:32). Indeed, in God's house everyone and everything will be able to find a home (Joh 14:1). Then, God's own home will be amongst God's people on the new earth (Rev 21:3).

If home is an eschatological concept, one may well ask whether the metaphor of being 'stewards' in the household of God is not too domesticated a concept to describe the activities and responsibilities of the inhabitants of God's household? This observation calls for the task of finding other more appropriate metaphors. This is by no means easy since, as Tillich recognised, symbols, unlike signs, cannot be invented at will. They belong to us or they do not belong to us. They happen. They are born and they die; but they cannot be produced or extinguished by us.⁹⁶

Perhaps the classic Christian category of *preparation*, of 'preparing for the way of the Lord', may provide the heuristic key for an adequate ethical response to the eschatological tension between the earth as our house and the new earth as God's home. But then one has to add immediately that it is this earth that must be prepared for God's coming glory.⁹⁷

The notion of preparation should be understood as preparation for God's eternal glory.⁹⁸ This life is a preparation for the homecoming banquet.⁹⁹ This gives an ethical sense of urgency to *this* life. It also requires the classic virtues of patience, vigilance, perseverance, and courage. Each and every moment in the cosmic pilgrimage is important. The journey is as important as the destination. Every moment of the journey prepares us to reach the destination. At the same time, the winking destination incites us to prepare for (the remaining leg of) the journey. This notion of preparation may be deepened by an

94. Hall (1990:112).

95. This would call for an environmental extension of Kinghorn's notion of *'n Tuiste vir almal* (1990).

96. See Hall (1990:49) with reference to Paul Tillich, *The dynamics of faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 41f.

97. This notion of preparation may be contrasted with the classic position of *gratia not destruit, sed praesupponit et perfecit naturam*. See Moltmann's (1985:7) similar suggestion, also using the category of 'preparation': *gratia non perfecit, sed praeparat naturam ad gloriam aeternum*.

98. See also Bonhoeffer's (1995:133f) notion of 'the preparing of the way', more specifically, preparing the way for the word.'

99. See Barth (1956:98f) on this motif of preparation for and anticipation of the wedding banquet of the coming bridegroom.

understanding of the relationship between time and eternity where eternity is not simply (but indeed *also*) a continuation of time. The significance of every moment in this life only becomes evident within the context of the dimensions of eternity.¹⁰⁰

The notion of preparation incorporates many of the classic features associated with eschatological proclamation. An eschatological vision calls for repentance, conversion, existential decision (Bultmann), a moment of truth (*kairos*). The radical otherness of the eschaton provides both consolation and a stern warning. It calls on us to prepare ourselves to meet our God! And since the earth is the venue for this meeting, it has to be prepared and sanctified for God's coming glory. More specifically, in a time of environmental degradation, *preparation* clearly also requires *reparation* and, in a context of economic injustice, also restitution.

The conceptual language of preparation does not yet yield an appropriate root metaphor to guide and inform us in the quest for eco-justice. For now, we will have to use the available metaphors critically and creatively, balancing them with one another. We are rulers. We are stewards. We are servants. We are inhabitants. We are sojourners. We are pilgrims. But perhaps one may imagine the conceptual language of preparation in terms of preparing for a joyous banquet, a wedding feast, or even better, preparing for the festive celebration of the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee in anticipation of the wedding banquet of the Lamb that was slain, of the eschatological feast that we do not need to prepare because God has prepared it for us.¹⁰¹

More specifically, one may focus on the preparations for a coming celebration amongst poor communities and amidst scarcity, suffering, and degradation. Happiness, fun and games is not the prerogative of only those who can afford it. The festivities of the affluent will always be undermined by the suffering, starvation, and conflict surrounding it. The celebration of life is not only prevalent amongst the affluent but also in many poorer communities who engage in joyful celebrations precisely in the midst of deprivation.¹⁰² Such celebrations call for a festive meal. In the midst of scarcity, food and drink are saved for the occasion. As Konrad Raiser observes:

In celebration, human beings are able to transcend the scarcities and limitations of everyday life. Joy is the emotion which expresses the experience of overflowing abundance and gratuity of life. Anniversaries and seasonal festivals mark the rhythmic flow of time. They break the dominance of the linear, goal-directed progression of time, and provide moments for recreation and re-generation.¹⁰³

We have to prepare for the time when the whole household will gather to celebrate God's presence in joyful anticipation, with much laughter, singing and dancing - precisely in the face of scarcity, poverty, suffering, and degradation.¹⁰⁴ Jesus Christ will be the host

100. I have defended this dimensional notion of the relationship between time and eternity in more detail in chapter 18 of an unpublished manuscript entitled 'Hope for the earth - Vistas on a new century'.

101. See Bonhoeffer's (1995:140) incisive comments in this regard:

The end of all preparation of the way for Christ must lie precisely in perceiving that we ourselves can never prepare the way ... Preparation of the way is a way from the ultimate to the penultimate. Christ is coming of His own will, by His own strength, and out of His own love ... He is the preparer of His own way; it is this, and really only this, that makes us the preparers of His way ... We await Christ; we know that He is coming; that alone is why we prepare His way.

102. Raiser (1997:70).

103. Raiser (1997:69).

104. See also Bonhoeffer's description of the task of 'preparing the way'. This implies immense responsibilities for all those who know of the coming of Christ: 'The hungry man needs bread and the homeless man needs a roof; the dispossessed need justice and the lonely needs fellowship; the undisciplined need order and the slave

for this gathering and the invitation is open for all. This calls for several immediate responsibilities that we have to attend to in the power of God's Spirit: planting and harvesting sufficient food, using the available resources frugally, helping the needy, ensuring everyone's good health, fixing the roof, adding more 'houses' (rooms) to the father's home ('ikhaya'¹⁰⁵), cleaning the house, doing the dirty laundry, sending out invitations, setting the table, cooking and sampling the food, and enjoying all the aromas that are beginning to fill the house. The guests are coming!

need freedom.' (Bonhoeffer 1995:136). This is not ultimately a question of the reform of earthly conditions but of preparing for the coming of Christ (Bonhoeffer 1995:137).

105. This is a rich Xhosa expression for 'home'. In traditional villages (the father's home) there are sufficient houses (smaller huts) for everyone to stay in and to enjoy the company and hospitality of the extended family. The extended family may be extended even further to include the company of livestock, pets, birds, vegetation, soil, air, all our non-human brothers and sisters.

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