

Inequality and injustices in the Anthropocene: Ecotheological perspectives on social justice, restoration, and forgiveness for peaceful coexistence¹

Rudy Denton

Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African
Society, North-West University, South Africa
rudy.denton@nwu.ac.za
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7271-4825>

Abstract

In the Anthropocene, human activities and ecological systems are deeply interconnected and mutually influence each other. However, human activity has become a dominant force, significantly impacting the entire biosphere and altering the balance of the Earth's systems. This highlights the complex relationships between humans and non-human beings, as well as between humans and their diverse environments. Christian ecotheology² has always viewed the ecological, economic, and social aspects of coexistence on Earth as being held together by the entire family of God (*oikos*/household). Exploring ecotheological perspectives on social inequality and injustices in the Anthropocene highlights the importance of social justice, restoration, and forgiveness as fundamental principles for peaceful coexistence among nations, countries, communities, and groups. This article advocates for a holistic

1 The article examines the theoretical, methodological, and conceptual foundations of social justice, restoration and forgiveness in promoting peaceful coexistence among countries, communities, and groups within the ecotheological context of the Anthropocene.

2 Conradie (2020b:2) equated “ecotheology” with “renewed attention to the doctrine of creation, anthropology and environmental ethics”. (It is the reflection on the relationship between “man” and nature, later reformulated as the place and role of humanity within the biophysical environment, or (for some) humanity’s significance in cosmic evolution).

approach to restorative justice and forgiveness that addresses inequality and injustice while fostering peaceful coexistence and promoting accountability, stewardship, sustainability, and care for the Earth.

Keywords

Inequality; injustices; Anthropocene; social justice; restoration; forgiveness; peaceful coexistence; ecotheology

1. Introduction

Humans and biodiverse ecological systems are deeply interconnected in the Anthropocene, where people's attitudes and actions significantly impact the biosphere, contributing to ecological disruptions, environmental challenges, and increasing social inequalities and injustices. Slaughter (2012:119) observes that the *Anthropocene* "represents a new phase in the history of both humankind and the Earth, when natural forces and human forces became intertwined, so that the fate of one determines the fate of the other". Human activities, however, have become a significant force in disrupting the Earth's ecological balance, triggering a cascade of environmental challenges that deepen social inequalities and injustices within communities worldwide (Crutzen 2002:23; Crutzen & Stoermer 2000:17; cf. Slaughter 2012:119).

The *Anthropocene geological* epoch is likely to persist for an extended period, intensely affecting natural systems on a global scale as humans exert a substantial environmental influence on the Earth's climate, ecosystems, and geological changes. Crutzen and Stoermer (2000:17) identify the onset of the Anthropocene as the late 18th century, coinciding with the Industrial Revolution, noting that "during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable". Therefore, Crutzen and Stoermer (2000:18) highlighted in their newsletter article:

Without major catastrophes like an enormous volcanic eruption, an unexpected epidemic, a large-scale nuclear war, an asteroid impact, a new ice age, or continued plundering of Earth's resources by partially still primitive technology (the last four dangers can, however, be prevented in a real functioning noösphere) mankind

will remain a major geological force for many millennia, maybe millions of years, to come.

Ecological disruptions and environmental challenges in the *Anthropocene* highlight the interconnected relationships between humans, non-human beings, and their diverse environments (cf. Trigona 2021:2). Recognising the agency and inherent value of “biodiversity”,³ which is deeply intertwined with human interests, cultures, and lives, necessitates a fundamental shift in moral and ethical orientation, along with a theological interpretation that addresses the realities of the *Anthropocene*. In this context, Miller-McLemore (2020:436) notes that anthropocentrism, which culminates in human hubris, has no boundaries – a reality starkly evident in the complex interrelationship between humans and their various environments. *Anthropocentric* attitudes, exploitative practices, and systemic injustices and inequalities define this heightened awareness of interconnectedness in the *Anthropocene*. Addressing the interwoven crises of social injustice, inequality, and environmental degradation raises the critical question: How can restorative justice, forgiveness, and stewardship, informed by ecotheological insights, restore peaceful coexistence and ecological sustainability amid persistent inequalities, injustices and ecological challenges?

Understanding the *Anthropocene* requires a clear distinction between the *anthropocentric* view of how humans affect the world and the shift away from placing humans and human goals at the centre of the Earth system (cf. McLaren 2018:152). In the *Anthropocene*, principles of equality and social justice are essential for promoting peaceful and thriving coexistence among people across diverse environments, countries, communities,

3 *Biodiversity* is a comprehensive term for the extent of nature’s variety or variation within the natural system and refers to every living organism, including plants, microorganisms, animals, and humans (Rawat & Agarwal, 2015:1; cf. Rubenstein *et al.* 2023). “Biodiversity is the variability of - and among – living organisms from all sources, including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part. It includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems” (World Health Organisation [WHO] 2021:3).

and groups. In this context, ecotheological perspectives are vital for transforming and restoring social inequality, injustices, and biocultural relationships that shape human interactions within societies and the global community. Achieving this requires practical theologians to engage more deeply with practical wisdom (or *phronesis*⁴) – what Moore (2022:4) describes as “deeper understandings of the world as formed in the process of living, relating, and reflecting over time”.

Building on the arguments above, this article takes a closer look at perspectives that address social and ecological challenges in the Anthropocene, highlighting the challenges of inequality and injustice, and aims to encourage positive change. It explores how pastoral care can support individuals and communities, facilitating restorative justice and forgiveness for peaceful coexistence. The article emphasises the integration of restorative justice and forgiveness as a means to address ecological and social injustices and inequalities in the Anthropocene, aiming to transform relationships among humans, communities, and the environment. It also proposes a transformed and restored environment, highlighting stewardship and accountability to establish an equitable and just society while underscoring the complex interplay between environmental and social dynamics.

This article presents a literature review, highlighting the importance of practical theology in addressing environmental and social challenges through the application of pastoral care responses to real-life situations. Browning (1991:9; cf. Ganzevoort 2009:7) describes an interpretive process that emphasises the descriptive, systematic, and strategic perspectives of practical theological reasoning and moral thinking (*phronēsis*) in praxis. Accordingly, the article is structured into the following three key sections: First, the article examines descriptive perspectives on social inequality and injustices in the Anthropocene. It emphasises that equality and justice are

4 Moore (2022:4) referred to *phronesis*’ complex meanings and emphasised the different translations of Aristotle’s *phronesis* by highlighting its diverse emphases as: “most prominently practical wisdom, practical reason, practical virtue, prudence, or moral understanding”. Respectively *phronesis* has unique nuances, but each signifies an extensive worldview.

fundamental principles that pave the way for peaceful coexistence in diverse environments. Secondly, the article explores systemising perspectives on inequality and injustices within God’s creation from a normative and ethical synthesis. Thirdly, the article explores forgiveness as a strategic approach and perspective on equality and justice, aiming to foster peaceful coexistence in the Anthropocene.

2. Descriptive perspectives on inequality and injustices

Humanity has evolved alongside the Earth’s rich biodiversity while simultaneously fostering an exploitative and destructive anthropocentric relationship with it in the Anthropocene era (cf. Denton, 2025:4). This dynamic is evident in widespread environmental degradation, the loss of biodiversity, and the far-reaching impacts of climate change (cf. Crutzen 2002:23). At the same time, the *Anthropocene* has intensified exploitation, marginalisation, and social inequalities and injustices, rooted in historical processes such as colonialism, industrialisation, and the global expansion of capitalism. Addressing the intertwined crises of ecological and social inequalities and injustices – driven by environmental, cultural, economic, and political factors – is essential for fostering a fair and just society.

In their quest to control and manipulate “nature”, humans have developed systems of control designed to gain power over, anticipate, or secure the future. These systems often channel wealth and power into specific regions, creating inequality and injustice by marginalising others. Consequently, some communities thrive and prosper, while others are neglected and face significant social and economic challenges. Trischler (2016:320) highlights the *anthropocentric* impact on the *Anthropocene* by stating that “political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and philosophers suggest that the *Anthropocene*, which has developed since industrialisation, is tightly linked with capitalism”.

This connection has driven increased inequalities and social disparities, enabling certain countries to capitalise on their access to resources and technological advancements, often at the expense of ecological stability. Similarly, the *anthropocentric* impacts of the *Anthropocene* have further deepened social inequalities and injustices, as economic and political systems rooted in capitalism continue to foster exploitation and

marginalisation. Conradie (2021:2) argues that the geological epoch might be better described as “the ‘Capitalocene’, marking the impact of capitalism on the earth system”.

In a world marked by economic and political manipulation, ongoing instability continues to fuel insecurity, violence, oppression, and injustice. Across environmental, cultural, economic, and political domains, the global system of control is characterised by exploitative and destructive practices, often rooted in factors such as socioeconomic status, nationality, ethnicity, religion, economic power, and political influence. Parenti (2011:9) highlights global instability, linking inequality and injustice to how the Global North exploits the Global South:

Between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer lies what I call the Tropic of Chaos, a belt of economically and politically battered postcolonial states girding the planet’s mid-latitudes. In this band, around the tropics, climate change is beginning to hit hard. The societies in this belt are also heavily dependent on agriculture and fishing, thus very vulnerable to shifts in weather patterns. This region was also on the front lines of the Cold War and of neoliberal economic restructuring. As a result, in this belt we find clustered most of the failed or semi-failed states of the developing world.

Global systemic networks of competing powers and systems of control protect the economically and politically privileged while relentlessly displacing the less privileged from sustainable living spaces. LaMothe (2019:424) highlights the alliance between neoliberalism and capitalism, elaborating on *neoliberal capitalism’s* exacerbation of adversities already faced by vulnerable populations, including impacts on mental and physical health in the Anthropocene. Neoliberal capitalism has transformed liberal principles – such as individual freedom, rational self-interest, moral autonomy, equal rights, secularism, and the rule of law – into a framework dominated by market exchange, where all human actions are guided by monetary value. This shift, driven by self-interest and the pursuit of economic freedom, has commodified all aspects of existence, prioritising profit over sustainability and resulting in the exploitation and exclusion of people from essential resources and opportunities. LaMothe (2019:424) states that “an entrepreneurial spirit, energy, and innovation seem to

accompany capitalism, but neoliberal capitalism focuses on short-term profits, the expansion of profits, privatisation, and the fostering of greed (self-interest), hubris, and lust for political and economic power”. As a result, neoliberalism has become inseparable from capitalism, with the pursuit of economic equality; however, rather than promoting economic equality, neoliberal capitalism deepens inequalities, injustices, and conflicts among individuals and communities worldwide.

The effects and resulting suffering from *neoliberal capitalism* in the Anthropocene profoundly affect people’s psychological, social, and physical well-being. These impacts also extend to their responsibility inside and outside their society and the global community. LaMothe (2019:424) argues that the formation of neoliberal capitalism leads to psychological and social alienation, explaining that self-centredness erodes social cohesion and stability while exacerbating poverty, insecurity, and social estrangement. This occurs because care and obligation toward others and the environment are no longer prioritised. In a market-driven society, commodification and commercialisation are pervasive, resulting in the extensive objectification or reification⁵ of individuals. The dominance of neoliberal capitalism intensifies social polarisation and psychological alienation, thereby “reducing human beings to an utterly unnatural existence” (Dardot & Laval 2013:98), compelling them to willingly “follow the flow of capital” (Eagleton 2011:118).

It is not simply that some people are angst-ridden or suffering from “pre-traumatic stress”⁶ due to the effects of *neoliberal capitalism*, powerlessness, and alienation. Instead, some suffering societies, cultures, and nation-states are deliberately manipulated, maltreated, ignored, and economically exploited. The psychosocial and material dominance of neoliberal capitalism, designed to secure privileges for a select few, has resulted in immense suffering for the majority. For instance, the concentration of

5 The act of treating a person as a thing.

6 Craps (2020:279) and Kaplan (2016:xix) defined “climate trauma” as “pre-traumatic stress” in which memories of the future, rather than the past, haunt the present – manifesting as an immobilising anticipatory anxiety about what lies ahead.

privileges among the few perpetuates global suffering through escalating economic insecurity, anxiety, distress, and violence. Sassen (2014:12) comments that “we face shrinking economies in much of the world, escalating destruction of the biosphere all over the globe, and the re-emergence of extreme forms of poverty and brutalisation”.

Humanity’s exploitative relationship with the biosphere highlights a broad framework of inequalities and injustices, where human-centred needs are prioritised at the expense of the ecological balance of the biosphere. The security, health, dignity, flourishing, and survival of biodiversity are increasingly threatened by the global and planetary-scale challenges, including political instability, violent conflicts, newly erupting wars, famine, climate change, and extinction crises. Focusing on anthropocentrism not only weakens biodiversity but also disrupts the intricate systems that sustain life on Earth, emphasising the need for theological reasoning and morality in balancing the interconnected relationship between humans and their environment (cf. Conradie 2020b:5). Detaching moral obligations from environmental concerns risks eroding people’s commitment to ecological accountability and stewardship, thereby compromising the protection and preservation of the environment.

3. Systemising perspectives on inequality and injustices in God’s creation

3.1 A normative reflection on inequality and injustices

When searching for an ecotheological normative reflection and an ethical synthesis of human dignity, both the Old and the New Testaments contain numerous references to vulnerable individuals in biblical times. The richness of human dignity lies in relationships, which enable humans to fulfil their calling to be stewards and representatives in caring for God’s creation (cf. Vorster 2007:19; Vorster 2010:200). The emphasis that all people should be included in a universal principle of human dignity seems to resonate across cultures. Those with greater privileges and resources should be reminded of their obligation to care for those in need (cf. Potgieter 2019:81). Conradie (2020a:45) highlights three core convictions underlying the essence of a humane society, grounded in the assumption of human distinctiveness:

“an emphasis on human dignity, on human rights and on human (moral) responsibilities”.

God created humans in his image (*imago Dei*) as a gift to humankind, and this creational principle emphasises the worth of human beings within creation (Vorster 2010:199). When God created people, he endowed each person with a distinctive ability to relate to and interact with others, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, economic status, political beliefs, or other circumstances that could lead to inequality and injustice. However, individuals often struggle to reconcile God’s goodness and love with the traumatic experiences of inequality and injustice they encounter (cf. Worthington, Greer, & Lin 2011:134). One aspect of coping with inequality and injustice is providing hope. When read in the context of Paul’s understanding of God (i.e., God’s justice) and human sin (including its active and passive elements), Romans 8:20–21 addresses the reality of the suffering and future of creation and humankind in the world. According to Paul, the condition of creation is characterised by frustration, bondage to decay, and an eager longing for liberation from its current state (cf. Denton 2025:4). He asserts that creation suffers not because of what it has brought upon itself, but because of the consequences of human actions imposed upon it (cf. Onwuka 2024:99–100; Solon 2016:154):

- a. Creation’s suffering and futility: Creation (κτίσις, referring to both human and non-human) experiences suffering through subjection to futility (ματαιότητι ἢ κτίσις ὑπετάγη).
- b. Involuntary suffering: Creation’s suffering is involuntary (οὐχ ἑκούσα), not a result of its own guilt or actions.
- c. External cause of subjection: An unnamed external agent is identified as the cause of creation’s subjection/subjugation (ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα). Paul suggests that creation was subjected to futility because of human disobedience, which strained relations with God and the rest of creation.
- d. Hope of future liberation: Since humans are reconciled with God through Christ, all of creation should also benefit from this new status, filled “in hope” (ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι), indicating that suffering is temporary. This suggests that a time will come when creation itself

will be liberated from its current subjection to frustration and bondage to decay (ἡ κτίσις ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς) and brought into sharing the freedom and glory of the children of God (εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ).

Paul emphasises that the whole of creation has been groaning in anticipation, filled with hope as it eagerly awaits transformation and renewal. It longs to be liberated from its current frustration and bondage to decay (cf. Rom 8:22). While Christians live in this eschatological period, marked by Christ's redemptive work and the expectation of his second coming, they are eagerly awaiting the ultimate fulfilment of their identity, as children of God, alongside the rest of creation (cf. Denton 2025:6). In anticipation, Christians are called to let their lives and relationships with others, as well as their relationship with the rest of creation, to bear witness to their status as children of God. As they experience the grace of God's redemption through Jesus Christ, they are encouraged to embody this grace in their relationships with fellow humans and in their stewardship of the rest of creation.

Christ's redemptive work encompasses the entire creation and is not limited to humans, as everything in creation derives its existence, sustenance, and ultimate purpose from Him (Jn 1:3; Eph 1:10; Col 1:15–17). The redemption and salvation of humans heighten the hope for the liberation of all creation. Just as humans are implicated in the degradation of creation, they are also connected to the liberation of the entire created order. While Christians are already recognised as God's children and beneficiaries of His redemptive work, the expectation is that all creation will share in the redemption and salvation brought by Christ (Onwuka 2024:101). Although Paul does not state this explicitly, it is implied that all creation should experience a foretaste of the fullness it will one day realise, mirroring the current blessings enjoyed by the children of God.

As Paul pointed out, creation was subjected to futility and suffered because of the consequences of human disobedience. This challenges readers to reflect on the significance of suffering resulting from human sin (cf. Ward 2023:4). In Paul's understanding, God's passion lies in creating and sustaining life, not in generating despair (Solon 2016:157). Similarly, Moltmann's (1994) *Christology of trauma and suffering* asserts that God is present in

humanity's suffering. God not only understands suffering, inequality, and injustice but is actively involved in the world, offering hope through the death and resurrection of his Son (cf. Moltmann 1994:42-43; 2010:38-39). The theology of the cross makes it possible to equate the suffering of humanity with the suffering of creation, offering hope amid profound sorrow and pain (cf. Moltmann 1994:37–41; 2010:107). Moltmann speaks from personal experience, shaped by the trauma he endured as a prisoner of war during World War II. He deeply understands the interconnection between suffering and hope, recognising that hope enables individuals to confront suffering without negating the reality of pain (Moltmann 2004:10). For Moltmann (1994:40), “the God of Jesus Christ is the God who is on the side of the victims and the sufferers, in solidarity with them”. God suffered for humanity in Christ, which means that “Christ’s suffering is the passion of the passionate God” (Moltmann 1994:44). God expresses his passion for human beings through the crucifixion of Jesus, which serves as the foundation of Christian theology (*theologia crucis*). God does not suffer for humanity in Christ due to a lack of power or some deficiency, but rather because of his love, compassion, and forgiveness. Recognising that, despite human transgressions, reconciliation with God and receiving forgiveness involve expressing gratitude within the framework of restoration and forgiveness.

3.2 Ecotheological perspectives on equality and justice for peaceful coexistence

Human activities continue to reshape the environment, while the prevalence of conflicts and violence threatens peaceful and thriving coexistence. Given that moral dilemmas are fundamental components of the social and ethical realities of inequality and injustice, their psychological and moral impacts may have long-term negative consequences (cf. Bash 2011:loc 134). People who have experienced, or continue to experience, inequality and injustice may struggle to express anger or resentment without being overwhelmed by it (cf. Bash 2007:70). Those who have experienced inequality and injustice are often more inclined to adopt a culture of conflict and self-defence to survive (cf. Makhulu 2001:377). Vorster (2007:40) aptly described conflicts and violence as a “disease that affects God’s whole creation”. Navigating an exhausting and hostile environment tests human vulnerability and

survival strategies in the face of global calamities. When approaching people's *modus operandi* and accountability in the Anthropocene, "any attempt to explain or predict the behaviour of large biophysical systems can no longer succeed without addressing human actions as a central concern" (Kotchen & Young 2007:149). Only by embracing humans' role as stewards, along with the profound responsibility it entails, can we address the epoch-defining question: How can we use our responsibility and stewardship to nurture, preserve and protect the Earth rather than destroy it?

On the one hand, reviewing the methodological, theological, and practical implications of shifting from *human-centredness* to *earth-centredness* can be both challenging and overwhelming (cf. McCarroll 2020:30; McCarroll & Kim-Cragg 2022:1). On the other hand, Christian *ecotheology* has always viewed the ecological, economic, and social aspects of coexisting with others on earth as being held together by the entire family of God (*oikos* / household). This perspective underscores the interconnectedness of all creation and advocates for a holistic approach to stewardship (cf. Conradie 2020b:2; 2022:18). Such stewardship calls for humans to make the most of their social, economic, and technical powers to improve human accountability, maintain climatic stability, and safeguard the environment.

The Christian theology of creation describes God as creative and merciful, possessing a close relationship with his creation. God created the world, and everything, including the maintenance of biodiverse ecological systems, was established within a specific order (cf. Conradie 2020b:3; Van Genderen & Velema 2008:300). Humanity's stewardship and responsibility to govern the earth stem from their central role in creation as God's representatives (Van Genderen & Velema 2008:430). Bavinck (2003:607–608) emphasised that "what happens to things because of creation is one thing; what happens with them because of preservation is another. Creation yields existence, while preservation is persistence in existence".

Genesis 1:28 and 9:2 highlight humanity's responsibility for God's creation. Despite living in the so-called "Age of Humans", stewardship involves a commitment to caring for and preserving the environment rather than exercising dominance over it. To ensure equitable access to the *Anthropocene*, which is vital for the survival of a civilised society, neglecting the moral implications of equal access to the *Anthropocene* could be

detrimental to human civilisation, particularly considering the crises that humans continuously bring upon themselves through their unwarranted and unjustified actions. While the inter- and intrapersonal processes of human identity are significant, the ongoing endeavour to understand the task of being or becoming human in the *Anthropocene* is vital. Conradie (2021:9) emphasises: “The advent of the *Anthropocene* marks a crucial stage in this process where the death of individuals, of civilisations, of species, and perhaps even of the human species is at stake”.

3.3 An ethical synthesis for peaceful coexistence in the Anthropocene

Human and ecological systems are deeply interconnected, continuously shaping one another. The transformation and restoration of equality and social justice in the Anthropocene are essential for fostering peaceful coexistence and viable life. It is argued that people’s *biocultural* relationships and the pursuit of equality and justice serve as guiding principles for an ethical synthesis that upholds universal human dignity, fosters well-being, and strengthens responsibility and connection within the Anthropocene. In this context, Christianity’s message of restoration and forgiveness is inherently tied to the well-being of both God’s creation and God’s people. This message calls for revitalising interactive socio-cultural and *biocultural* relations, while embracing God’s indispensable mercy as a global community (cf. Conradie 2020:41).

When addressing the causes of global distress, LaMothe (2019:424) indicated a close connection between personal suffering, neoliberal capitalism, and the Anthropocene epoch. The challenge, however, is figuring out how to use this connection effectively for the benefit of the other. A peaceful world and coexistence in the *Anthropocene* require societies where the dignity, equality, and social justice of every human being are respected and upheld. Christianity offers restoration and forgiveness as a normative reflection that transcends *anthropocentrism* and environmental crises, aiming to overcome hostility and mutual distrust within a social context.

Restoration and forgiveness provide comfort and assurance of God’s unconditional love, exemplified in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, bringing inner healing and peace (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14). Forgiveness, as understood through Jesus Christ, facilitates restoration and fosters hope, offering

relief from present suffering and despair (Denton 2018:4). The significance of restoration and forgiveness becomes especially complex within the interconnectedness of human communities and environmental challenges, viewed through the lens of Anthropocene interactions. In this context, restorative justice emerges as a powerful approach to addressing social and ecological injustices. By focusing on accountability and healing, restorative justice seeks to rebuild relationships and restore balance in the Anthropocene, acknowledging the interdependence of all creation. This approach highlights the importance of fostering renewed relationships among humans, communities, and the environment. It facilitates repairing social bonds, holding individuals accountable for actions that harm the biosphere, and promoting practices rooted in sustainability, justice, and equity.

Overwhelming experiences of inequality and injustices can cause significant discomfort and impair viable life in the Anthropocene. It exerts a profound and holistic impact on people within the interconnected global and local (*glocal*) world, extending across psychological, physical, and spiritual dimensions, and is deeply embedded within the framework of *biocultural* relations. Hudson (2012) identifies various ways societies and individuals respond to the trauma of inequality and social injustices. According to Hudson (2012:171), victims may react “by becoming defeated or embittered; by using suffering as a spur to achievement; by making a positive out of suffering as a path to transcendence; or by providing help and support”.

Following deductive reasoning, it can be argued that promoting restorative justice and forgiveness serves as an effective praxis of help and support in breaking cycles of inequality and injustice. Restorative justice and forgiveness concepts are not merely a call from the Global South; nations in the Global North should also adopt restorative justice practices. These include innovative strategies for fostering dialogue between cultures, addressing inequality, resolving conflicts, facilitating post-conflict healing, promoting reconciliation, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Beyond its practical implications, promoting restoration and forgiveness is fundamentally a moral decision, as it affirms and upholds human dignity.

4. Strategic perspectives to respond to inequality and injustices for peaceful coexistence in the Anthropocene

Practical theology and pastoral care, acting as compassionate and caring guides, aim to identify and understand the sources of distress, alleviate pain and suffering, foster agency, and encourage proactive responses to the various causes of suffering. Caring for a suffering environment should be an integral part of pastoral caregiving, as the victims of the ecological crisis – including social inequality and injustice – extend beyond humans to all forms of life. The concept of peaceful coexistence, illustrated by the example of inequality and injustice in the way the Global North exploits the Global South (cf. Parenti 2011:9), serves as a call for restorative justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, and cohesion between the North and the South. This involves restoring relationships and transforming the imbalances of inequality, social justice, and *biocultural* relationships between the wealthy and the poor, as well as between humanity and the environment.

Promoting restoration and forgiveness does not mean forgetting, justifying, obligating, or abandoning the pursuit of equality and justice. Instead, restoration and forgiveness represent a gift – a conscious choice to release resentment, let go of the past, and act with moral kindness. It involves passing on the gift of forgiveness that we have received from God through Jesus Christ. Baskin and Enright (2004:2) define forgiveness as “the wilful giving up of resentment in the face of another’s (or others’) considerable injustice and responding with beneficence to the offender even though that offender has no right to the forgiver’s moral goodness”.

In the Anthropocene, forgiveness and restoration play a crucial role in addressing historical inequalities and injustices while fostering reconciliation. Forgiveness not only liberates people from the painful inequalities and injustices of the past but also opens the door to renewed restoration of the future (Grey 2019:50). By restoring relationships and reconstructing post-conflict communities, forgiveness mitigates the lasting effects of *anthropocentric neoliberal capitalism*, which has often fuelled conflict and violence (cf. Denton 2021:6). The interconnectedness of forgiveness and restoration offers a turning point to embrace a new perspective of thinking about trauma and its associated emotions (Gobodo-Madikizela 2002:15). For example, relationships mired by inequality

and injustice can be transformed through forgiveness and restoration, empowering communities to move beyond resentment and collaborate toward a shared future. Furthermore, forgiveness and restoration could foster dialogue and cooperation between the Global North and the Global South, addressing the inequalities and injustices that underlie global instability. This process requires acknowledging past wrongs, taking responsibility for their consequences, and making amends through restorative actions.

By drawing on the values of the Christian religion and the guiding principles and theory of forgiveness, restorative justice provides a roadmap for restoring the equilibrium between social justice and “biocultural” relationships. Restorative justice assumes that those most affected should have the opportunity to become actively involved in resolving the conflict. By adopting the guiding principles of restorative justice, as explained by Umbreit’s victim-offender mediation (Umbreit 1998), a pastoral care praxis can contribute to restoring the balance of equality and justice in “biocultural” relations, focusing on accountability, healing, and closure in the restoration and forgiveness process (cf. Umbreit, Coates & Kalanj 1994:3):

- a. The manifestations of inequality and injustice within the Anthropocene are evident in two primary ways: *first*, as conflicts among humans and their detrimental effects on the biodiverse ecological system; and *second*, as the anthropocentric impacts, actions, engagements, and attitudes stemming from a human-centred life.
- b. Human accountability for the environmental impact on non-human species and ecological systems, as well as for social justice and *biocultural* relationships, holds greater significance than their *anthropocentric* impact on the Anthropocene.
- c. The interconnectedness of humans with the environment must be understood through the lens of “ecological” interfaces.
- d. To foster constructive dialogue and address the challenges of establishing sustainable life in the Anthropocene, *firstly*, humans should develop greater awareness and openness to the threats

posed by *anthropocentrism*. Secondly, the concept and praxis of restoration and forgiveness have become increasingly associated with a multidimensional process of transforming and restoring equality, social justice, and “biocultural” relations in the Anthropocene.

- e. Restorative justice processes incorporating forgiveness can help communities heal from trauma, social conflicts, and environmental disasters. By fostering empathy and understanding, forgiveness and restoration can create a foundation for collaborative action and long-term environmental sustainability.

Given the interconnectedness of communities and the changes within their “biocultural” landscape, the principles of restorative justice and forgiveness may serve to restore human dignity while advocating for social equality and justice in the Anthropocene. Restoration involves rebuilding what has been damaged, while forgiveness creates the moral and ethical conditions necessary for that restoration. Drawing on restorative justice and forgiveness can establish a framework for addressing challenges related to fostering peaceful coexistence among nations, countries, communities, and groups. The integration of restorative justice and forgiveness into the Anthropocene holds several practical implications. First, it requires a shift towards prioritising dialogue, reconciliation, and community involvement in addressing inequality and injustices in “biocultural” relations. Second, it calls for interdisciplinary collaboration to address the multifaceted challenges of the Anthropocene, necessitating insights from theology, ecology, sociology, and other relevant fields. By combining these perspectives, restorative justice and forgiveness can be applied to address both the social and ecological dimensions of inequality and injustices. Third, grounded in Christian ecotheology, which provides a moral framework for addressing the *Anthropocene’s* crises, emphasis should be placed on accountability, stewardship, restoration, and forgiveness for peaceful coexistence. This focus can empower individuals and glocal communities to take responsibility for their actions and contribute to sustainability in “biocultural” relations and care for the Earth.

Conclusion

The *Anthropocene* era presents humanity with challenges marked by ecological degradation, social inequality, and injustices. As inequality and injustice determine who bears the burdens and who reaps the benefits, the *Anthropocene* also offers opportunities for transformation. Confronting the challenges and opportunities requires a holistic approach that integrates forgiveness and restorative justice principles, informed by Christian ecotheology, as pathways for healing and transformation to foster peaceful coexistence, sustainability, and care for the Earth. The *anthropogenic* impact of humans on environmental changes raises the stakes in the struggle for survival, as how humans address the many challenges posed by the *Anthropocene* will determine the fate of life on Earth. To achieve lasting peace and unity, humanity needs to prioritise respectful and constructive relationships. By accepting their role as stewards of creation, humans can move beyond *anthropocentric* practices and build a global community dedicated to nurturing, preserving, and protecting the Earth and all its inhabitants. This is essential for establishing a peaceful and thriving future, one in which equality and social justice are grounded not in an anthropocentric neoliberal capitalist discourse, but in the quality of biocultural relationships and the principle of a just and equal coexistence in the *Anthropocene*.

Restorative justice and forgiveness can effectively address historical injustices, rebuild relationships, and promote stewardship and accountability, which are essential for fostering peaceful coexistence, sustainability, and care for the Earth. By recognising and addressing systemic issues, humanity can navigate the *Anthropocene* in a manner that promotes ecological balance and social harmony. Humanity faces a reality that presents a wide array of opportunities in which human progress must embrace the role of global stewardship and take responsibility for the well-being of our planet. In the words of Ellis (2011:38): “[W]e are awakening to a new world of possibilities – some of them frightening. And yet our unprecedented and growing powers also allow us the opportunity to create a planet that is better for both its human and non-human inhabitants. It is an opportunity that we should embrace.”

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