Eccentric Existence?
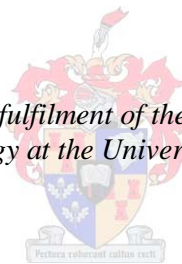
Engaging David H. Kelsey's theological anthropology as a basis for ecological theology

by
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Declaration

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

The earth and her ecology is in crisis, which impacts upon both human and nonhuman communities. Not only due to the blame for ecological destruction that is attributed to humanity (and specifically also to the Christian religion), but also because of the destruction of species, environments and the natural habitat of living beings theology is asked of to step into its public and prophetic role in order to address the challenges in whichever way it can. David Kelsey's enormous theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence* (2009), probably provides opportunities for this, through its theological inquiry and (re)formulation of Christian traditions' central doctrines and faith formulations. Kelsey's main thesis is that God relates to all that is not God to create, draw into eschatological consummation, and reconcile.

God relates to create the earth and her ecology. God relates to the earth and her ecology creatively ('living on borrowed breath') which entails that God relates "to" the earth and her ecology through the medium of address. The ultimate context of the earth and her ecology is therefore that of being directly and indirectly addressed by the triune God, through which it responds to its being called into being. The call that Kelsey describes, and therefore God's creation of the earth and her ecology, is public and communal, involving both the radical freedom of otherness and the intimate nearness of sameness. God relates to bless the earth and her ecology creatively in God's life-giving address, by enabling it to be alive and to bring forth life. The earth and her ecology, as particular instances or forms of life, is dynamic, persistent and frail. Creaturely reality involves being and having living bodies, through being created as dying life. The earth and her ecology not only lives, but is enabled to flourish, on borrowed breath. In this way, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically, finding its reality and worth and being and value outside of itself, in God's relating to bless it creatively.

God relates to draw the earth and her ecology into eschatological consummation. God relates by drawing the earth and her ecology into eschatological consummation ('living on borrowed time') which stipulates that God relates "between" the earth and her ecology through the medium of promise. The ultimate context of the earth and her ecology is therefore that of being drawn into God's own triune life and being called to

participate in the glory of God. The earth and her ecology is defined by the absolute promise of eschatological blessing and the implicit promise of transformation in the present and in the future, which is God's reaching out to all that is not God (also described as the *missio Dei*). The earth and her ecology, as particular instances or forms of life, stands under both God's election (or 'yes') and God's judgment (or 'no'). The earth and her ecology not only lives, but is enabled to flourish, on borrowed time. In this way, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically, finding its reality and worth and being and value outside of itself, in God's relating to bless it eschatologically.

God reconciles the earth and her ecology to Godself. God relates by reconciling the earth and her ecology through their multiple estrangements ('living by another's death') and entails that God relates "amongst" the earth and her ecology through the medium of exchange. The ultimate context of the earth and her ecology is therefore that of being reconciled to God through its multiple estrangements and being drawn into the divine life of God Godself. Incarnation and what Kelsey calls 'exchange' – God incarnated in Jesus exchanging Godself with the earth and her ecology amidst processes of violence and destruction to transform their living death into true life – defines the earth and her ecology in this mode of relating. The earth and her ecology is reconciled with herself and with living beings and all of life through their reconciliation by and in God. God's reconciliation is liberation and transformation of the earth and her ecology within particular times and places, within its particular contexts. The life of the earth and her ecology is therefore no longer tied to the fulfillment of certain functions or duties (or even vocations) that it may be subjected to or expected of, but lies solely in the worth and value that it finds in living and existing by the life and death of another, of God incarnate, of Jesus the Son. The earth and her ecology not only lives, but is enabled to flourish, by another's death. In this way, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically, finding its reality and worth and being and value outside of itself, in God's relating to reconcile it through its multiple estrangements.

God stands in relationship to the earth and her ecology in three ways that sustains and blesses it to flourish as mysterious living being that reflects the glory of the triune God. The appropriate response to this, respectively, is eccentric faith, eccentric hope and

eccentric love. The earth and her ecology, like all living beings and all of life, exists eccentrically, through God that relates to it.

Opsomming

Die aarde en haar ekologie is tans in krisis, wat impakteer op beide menslike en nie-menslike gemeenskappe. Nie net weens die skuld vir ekologiese verwoesting wat aan mense (en spesifiek ook aan die Christelike geloof) toegeskryf word nie, maar ook weens die verwoesting van spesies, omgewings en die natuurlike habitat van lewende wesens word daar van teologie gevra om in dié se publieke en profetiese rol in te tree en die uitdagings aan te spreek op welke manier dit ook al kan. David Kelsey se enorme teologiese antropologie, *Eccentric Existence* (2009), bied waarskynlik geleenthede hiervoor, deur die in-diepte teologiese ondersoek en (her)besinning van Christelike tradisies se sentrale doktrines en geloofstellinge waarmee dit besig is. Kelsey se hooftese is dat God in verhouding tree tot alles wat nie God is om te skep, in eskatologiese vervulling te bring, en te versoen.

God tree in verhouding tot die aarde en haar ekologie deur dit te skep (waardeur dit op geleende asem leef), wat behels dat God 'tot' die aarde en haar ekologie in verhouding tree deur die medium van aanspraak. Die uiteindelike konteks van die aarde en haar ekologie is daarom dié wat direk en indirek aangespreek word deur die drie-enige God, deurdat dit reageer daarop dat dit geroep is tot bestaan. Die oproep wat Kelsey beskryf, en daarom God se skepping van die aarde en haar ekologie, is publiek en gemeenskaplik, en behels beide die radikale vryheid van andersheid en die intieme nabyheid van eendersheid. God seën die aarde en haar ekologie kreatief in God se lewe-gewende aanspraak, deur dit in staat te stel om te lewe en om lewe voort te bring. Die aarde en haar ekologie, as spesifieke lewensvorme, is dinamies, voortdurend en weerloos. Geskape realiteit behels beide om lewende liggame te hê en te wees. Die aarde en haar ekologie leef nie alleen nie, maar word in staat gestel om te floreer, op geleende asem. Op hierdie manier bestaan die aarde en haar ekologie eksentries, en vind dit die realiteit en waarde en wese buite ditself, in God wat in verhouding daartoe tree om dit kreatief te seën.

God tree in verhouding tot die aarde en haar ekologie om dit in te bring in eskatologiese vervulling. God tree in verhouding tot die aarde en haar ekologie (waardeur dit op geleende tyd leef) wat bepaal dat God in verhouding staan 'tussen' die aarde en

haar ekologie, deur die medium van belofte. Die uiteindelike konteks van die aarde en haar ekologie is daarom dié wat gebring word in God se eie drie-enige lewe en wat geroep word om deel te neem aan die glorie van God. Die aarde en haar ekologie word gedefinieer deur die absolute belofte van eskatologiese seën en die implisiete belofte van transformasie in die hede en in die toekoms, wat God se uitreiking na alles wat nie God is nie is (ook beskryf deur die *missio Dei*). Die aarde en haar ekologie, as spesifieke lewensvorme, staan onder beide God se verkiesing (God se 'ja) en God se oordeel (God se 'nee'). Die aarde en haar ekologie leef nie net nie, maar word in staat gestel om te floreer, op geleende asem. Op hierdie manier bestaan die aarde en haar ekologie eksentries, en vind dit die realiteit en waarde en wese buite ditself, in God wat in verhouding daartoe tree om dit eskatologies te seën.

God versoen die aarde en haar ekologie tot Godself. God tree in verhouding tot die aarde en haar ekologie deur dit te versoen (waardeur dit leef deur 'n ander se dood) en behels dat God 'tussen' die aarde en haar ekologie in verhouding tree deur die medium van vervanging. Die uiteindelike konteks van die aarde en haar ekologie is daarom die wat versoen is tot God deur hul veelvoudige vervreemdinge en wat ingebring word in die goddelike lewe van Godself. Inkarnasie en wat Kelsey noem 'vervanging' – God wat mens word in Jesus vervang Godself met die aarde en haar ekologie te midde prosesse van geweld en verwoesting om hul lewende dood te transformeer in ware lewe – definieer die aarde en haar ekologie in hierdie modus van verhouding. Die aarde en haar ekologie word versoen met haarself en met lewende wesens en die hele lewe deur hul versoening deur en in God. God se versoening is bevryding en transformasie van die aarde en haar ekologie binne spesifieke tye en plekke, binne hul spesifieke kontekste. Die lewe van die aarde en haar ekologie is daarom nie meer gebonde tot die vervulling van spesifieke funksies of pligte (of selfs roepinge) wat daarvan verwag word nie, maar lê alleen in die waarde wat dit vind daarin om te leef en bestaan deur die lewe van 'n ander, van God-wat-mens-geword-het, van Jesus die Seun. Die aarde en haar ekologie leef nie alleen nie, maar word in staat gestel om te floreer, deur 'n ander se dood. Op hierdie manier bestaan die aarde en haar ekologie eksentries, en vind dit haar realiteit en waarde en wese buite haarself, in God wat dit versoen deur veelvoudige vervreemdinge.

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God staan in verhouding tot die aarde en haar ekologie op drie maniere wat dit onderhou en dit seën om te floreer as geheimsinnige lewende wese wat die glorie van die drie-enige God reflekteer. Die gepaste reaksie hierop is, respektiewelik, eksentriese geloof, eksentriese hoop en eksentriese liefde. Die aarde en haar ekologie, soos alle lewende wense en die hele lewe, bestaan eksentries deur God wat in verhouding daarmee tree.

Acknowledgments

It is said that writing a thesis is like giving birth.

If one would identify with this image, this thesis would have many parents – friends, family, mentors, lecturers and critics that all inspired me to dig deeper into that which captivates and energizes me in extraordinary ways: theology.

It is always dangerous to have extended thank-you's in an acknowledgment such as this, for I will unknowingly and involuntarily leave out people that deserve thanks, be unable to express the right intensity of my appreciation to each, and bore whoever has the pleasure of reading this thesis. Therefore I will not elaborate too much.

My supervisor, Professor Dirkie Smit, does, however, deserve special mention. Thank you for your support and guidance, Professor.

And even though it is undoubtedly presumptuous to dedicate a Masters thesis to anyone, I would not be the theologian that I am so far without the presence of three important and strong women in my life: my mother and two grandmothers. *Dankie vir elkeen van julle se leiding en voorbeelde van leierskap in my lewe.*

This thesis is, in a way, also *about* birth. David Kelsey argues that part of what makes us human is that we are born. The context into which *I* have been born have convinced me that being concerned for the future of the earth and all her inhabitants will need even greater attention and energy in years to come, especially from faith communities, if we are to flourish together on our mother earth.

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Chapter 1

The earth and her ecology

1.1   Introduction

It becomes clearer every day that the earth finds herself and her inhabitants in an ever-growing crisis that have already impacted greatly, and will continue to impact greatly, upon the well-being of human and non-human communities alike. The challenges of contexts or environments not conducive to the well-being and flourishing of creatures, the rapid decline in diversity and biodiversity in the natural world, and the lack of society's public, responsible, sustainable engagement with wide-spread destruction and pollution of nature asks of theology to step into its public and prophetic role in addressing the challenges in whichever way it can. This is, of course, by no means a new challenge or issue[1] (although it cannot be construed as a particularly old or traditional area of study either!), and a project that would seek to engage in this problematic would have to contribute some very specific, focused research on the matter. Indeed, a great myriad of research and ecclesial work has been done, especially in recent years, on the topic or in the field of ecological theology. A great many books and articles expound on a great many theses and proposals, suggestions and understandings, in service of addressing the (greatly encompassing and greatly increasing) problem of ecological degradation and destruction.

This thesis is an attempt in the direction of addressing the problem theologically, and, in particular, works with and within the dynamic of anthropology and ecology to engage the, at this point in time, largely unexplored proposals of David Kelsey's recently published book, *Eccentric Existence* (2009).[2] David Kelsey is Luther Weigle Professor

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[1] Lynn White's influential paper on the historical roots of the ecological crisis (1967) is normative in this regard, cited by a great number of ecological theological books (cf., for instance, Cobb, 1992:3 – 4; Hessel, 1996:21, 25; Bakken, 2000:1 – 2) and regarded as important catalyst for ecological theological study. In Peter Bakken's words, "The thesis of that essay was that Christianity, with its transcendent God in whose image humanity alone was made and its endorsement of the biblical commandment to 'have dominion' over the earth, bears a 'huge burden of guilt' for the current environmental crisis" (2000:1; in reference to White, 1967:1203 – 1204).

[2] Although a rapidly growing body of scholarship on this book is quickly developing. A recent issue of the theological journal *Modern Theology* (number 27(1)) was dedicated to *Eccentric Existence*, containing the proceedings of a symposium on the book. Also, a recent conference held in honour of David Kelsey at Yale

Emeritus of Theology at Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. In addition to the completion of his graduate and postgraduate studies at Yale (he completed his PhD on Paul Tillich's theology at Yale Divinity School in 1964), Kelsey has spent most of his academic career as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor and now Professor Emeritus at Yale. Kelsey is known for his research on theological education[3], biblical hermeneutics[4] and theological anthropology, and has delivered the Thomas White Currie Lectures at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (1982), the Sarum Lectures at Oxford University (Trinity Term, 1985), the Tate-Wilson Lectures at the Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University (1986), and the Inaugural Lecture for the Institute for Reformed Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia (1999). Earlier this year (28 to 31 March 2011) Kelsey also presented the Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. Professor Kelsey is married to Julie Kelsey, and it is also to her that he dedicates his book, *Eccentric Existence.*

This first chapter of this thesis aims to provide a brief exploration of some recent and normative ecological theological research, with an eye to orientating and contextualising the study of Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*, which follows in chapters 2 to 6. Chapter 7 serves as a conclusion to this thesis, returning to current ecological theological study and situating this thesis within this field of contextual theology. Chapter 1 is therefore closely tied to chapter 7, within a concentric structure that also sees a special relationship between chapters 2 and 6, and with chapters 3, 4 and 5 forming the theological heart of this thesis.

This chapter will begin with a description of what is called the 'ecological crisis' or 'environmental crisis' in ecological theological literature, in the light of which the research proposal for this thesis will be presented. A discussion on the centrality of the notions of 'life' and 'living' (including 'lifestyle') within ecological theologies and

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Divinity School took place 25 to 26 February 2011, with panellists such as Christoph Scwhöbel and Andrew Chignell, amongst others, involved.

[3] See especially his two books, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About Theological Education?* (1992) and *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (1993), in this regard.

[4] See his two books, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (1975) and its unrevised 2nd edition *Proving Doctrine: Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (1999), in this regard. His other books are his very first book, *The Fabric of Paul Tillich's Theology* (1967), and his very last book before *Eccentric Existence*, entitled *Imagining Redemption* (2005).

contemporary ecumenical discourse on the Accra Confession follows, which points to the importance of the conceptual framework that will be employed within this thesis and that is discussed thereafter. Attention is paid to the relationship between theological anthropology and ecological theology in Kelsey, after which this chapter is concluded.

1.2   The earth and her ecology in crisis

Climate change is real, and it is happening now.

In large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, this is a reality. The poor, the vulnerable and the hungry are exposed to the harsh edge of climate change every day of their lives. The melting of the snows on the peak of Kilimanjaro is a warning of the changes taking place in Africa. Across this beautiful but vulnerable continent, people are already feeling the change in the weather. But rain or drought, the result is the same: more hunger and more misery for millions of people living on the margins of global society.

In the past 10 years, 2.6 billion people have suffered from natural disasters. That is more than a third of the global population – most of them in the developing world. The human impact is obvious, but what is not so apparent is the extent to which climatic events can undo the developmental gains put in place over decades. Droughts and floods destroy lives, but they also destroy schools, economies and opportunity. It is time to stop this cycle of destruction.

One need only look at recent newspaper headlines to read of great ecological disasters around the world: the tsunami in Japan, earthquakes in Haiti and Japan and New Zealand, storms and tornados in southern USA, floods in Australia. The challenges of contexts or environments not conducive to the well-being and flourishing of creatures, the rapid decline in diversity and biodiversity in the natural world, and the lack of ecclesial communities' public engagement with wide-spread destruction and pollution in nature asks of theology to step into its public and prophetic role in addressing the challenges in whichever way it can. For Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whose 2008 address at the Major Emittors Meeting is quoted above (*Season of Creation*, 2008:1), climate change and ecological destruction is an undeniable reality for many, especially in Africa. Leonardo Boff picks up on similar themes in his book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (1997), where he argues for connecting the cry of oppressed humanity with the cry of the earth and her ecology by way of liberation theology. Indeed, he argues, "[t]he logic that exploits classes and subjects peoples to the interests of a few rich and powerful countries

is the same as the logic that devastates the Earth and plunders its wealth, showing no solidarity with the rest of humankind and future generations (1997:xi). In James Cone's words (2001:29), "[e]cology touches every sphere of human existence" – indeed, "people and the earth are thoroughly interrelated, either thriving or being oppressed together" (Conradie et al, 2001:153). The World Council of Churches' statement on eco-justice and ecological debt warns that the Global South "will bear a bigger burden of the adverse effects of climate change including the displacement of people living in low-lying coastal areas and small island states; the loss of sources of livelihood, food insecurity, reduced access to water and forced migration" (*Climate Change*, 2009:85). Climate change and environmental degradation is therefore a justice issue, since "[t]hose who contributed relatively little to the problem will suffer disproportionately worse from the impact of the climate change" (*Climate Change*, 2009:22). In ecumenical documents, the notion of 'ecological debt' is core in describing the Global North as the "principle ecological debtor" and the Global South as the "principle ecological creditor" (*Climate Change*, 2009:85) – the WCC's statement describes ecological debt as referring to "damage caused over time to ecosystems, places and peoples through production and consumption patterns", including "social damages such as the disintegration of indigenous and other communities" (*Climate Change*, 2009:84 – 85).

Eddie Makue, previous General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, agrees with Tutu and Boff that the consequences of climate change will continue to affect the most vulnerable living beings the worst. The South African *Climate Change* document would describe climate change as a new 'kairos', "a moment of truth and of opportunity where our collective response will have far-reaching consequences" (*Climate Change,* 2009:7), since climate change, like the broader ecological crisis, does not only have to do with exploitative technological, economic and political practices and policies – nor can the underlying problem merely be a lack of information. For this document, the problem underlying the ecological crisis is a lack of moral vision, which includes moral imagination, moral courage and moral leadership, and is therefore both an ethical issue and a spiritual, or theological, issue. The document itself is described as "an expression of love and concern for God's world" which "testifies to the priestly care and compassion of the ecumenical movement for God's world, specifically for the most

vulnerable peoples, communities and ecosystems" (*Climate Change*, 2009:v). Indeed, the common task of living together with all forms of life on planet Earth is a basic assumption of this document and other ecumenical documents and statements (cf. *Climate Change,* 2009:viii – x).

The common task of living together with all forms of life on the earth and within the earth's ecology requires recognising and responding to the groaning of the earth, the 'litany of ecological woe': "Exploding population growth, hunger and malnutrition, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, water scarcity and impurity, land degradation, waste production, energy misuse, air pollution and acid rain, global climate change" (Bouma-Prediger, 2001:65). A survey of other ecological theological literature – such as Larry Rasmussen's 'Earth Scan' (1996:21 – 173), Leonardo Boff's chapter entitled 'The Ecological Crisis' (1997:63 – 85), Jürgen Moltmann's chapter similarly entitled 'In the Ecological Crisis' (1993:20 – 52), and many others – leads one to agree with Steven Bouma-Prediger that "[t]he conclusion of many responsible earth-watchers is that the earth – its creatures and systems – is not doing very well" (2001:15). In Ernst Conradie's words, "In the twenty first century, many fear an impending ecological nightmare – which does not discount other burning social issues, such as HIV/Aids – or ecological death, in the wake of the loss of equilibrium in the earth's ecosystems" (Conradie, 2000:52 – 54). Indeed, to quote Archbishop Tutu yet again (Habel & Wurst, 2000:7), this time in a publication that seeks to deal with the ecological crisis through creative and imaginative rereadings of biblical texts,

> Planet Earth is in crisis. More and more life systems are being threatened… Resolving the ecological crisis of our planet, however, is no longer a problem we can leave to the scientists…

Nor is it a problem that can be left to national and international bodies and summits, as important as appropriate policy making and legal frameworks are in addressing this. In many instances, reforming policies on the environment and climate change *as well as* monitoring appropriate and consistent applications of these policies in local contexts are core to addressing the ecological crisis. However, this is not enough – as the splendid failure of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15) of 2009 showed. Addressing the ecological crisis will and does require partnership and alliances, also with theology and religion. Christianity's own

contributions or roles in such partnerships and reflections on the ecological crisis is not (and probably cannot) be simple and unambiguous. One is reminded of James Nash's famous ecological complaint (Bouma-Prediger, 2001:15) that is brought against Christianity as a whole, which serves to underline not only the difficulty of engaging anthropology in ecological theological study, but also engaging theology at all in the so-called ecological crisis (Bouma-Prediger, in fact, dedicates an entire chapter to the ecological complaint against Christianity (2001:67 – 86)). In Bouma-Prediger's words (2001:66): "the case is overwhelming that we humans are responsible for the damage to our home planet". Others, such as Boff (1997:xi) would argue even more strongly for humankind's implicitness in the destruction and oppression of the earth and her ecology:

> Today these issues have gained a seriousness that they have never enjoyed before in human history. The human being – called to be Earth's guardian angel and watchful tiller – may be Earth's Satan. Humans have shown that they can commit not only homicide and ethnocide, but biocide and geocide as well.

As the WCC's statement on eco-justice[5] and ecological debt would affirm (*Climate Change*, 2009:83) that

> [t]he earth and all of its inhabitants are currently facing an unprecedented ecological crisis, bringing us to the brink of mass suffering and destruction for many. The crisis is human-induced, caused especially by the agro-industrial-economic complex and culture of the global North, which is characterized by the consumerist lifestyles of the elites of the developed and developing worlds…

Not only is "Christianity… considered by many to be part of the problem, not the solution," but churches, too, are considered to be guilty. The World Council of Churches' statement on eco-justice and ecological debt acknowledges that "[c]hurches have been complicit in this history through their own consumption patterns and through perpetuating a theology of human rule over the earth" (*Climate Change*, 2009:83).

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[5] Max Oelschlager (1994:19), quoting John Cobb (in his *Sustainability,* 1992)), defines 'eco-justice' as "the determination to hold together the concern for justice as a norm for human relations and the awareness that the human species is part of a larger natural system whose needs must be respected." Conradie et al (2001:140) describes the responsibility of eco-justice as challenging "the abuse of power that results in a situation where poor people suffer the effects of environmental damage caused by the greed of others" and grounds the context of eco-justice within the challenges of poverty and a vision of democracy in South Africa (2001:141). Oelschlager (1994:236 – 238) emphasises, furthermore, the importance of public discourse on religion-grounded environmental ethics, which, he argues, may lead to sustainability in the environment.

Oelschlager's book, *Caring for Creation* (1994) is one publication that seeks to answer to the claim that religion – and Christianity, in particular – has been a major contributor to the ecological crisis. Others, such as Jacklyn Cock and Lynn White, have – as early as 1967 – argued that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for the environmental crisis". Ernst Conradie, writing from South African perspective, argued that Christian churches in South Africa appears to have a 'blind spot' with regards to environmental issues, although it is also shown that churches are increasingly becoming involved in the quest for eco-justice and the dignity of creation (Conradie et al, 2001:144). One need only be reminded of the *Climate Change* document of the South African Council of Churches to see how the public, ecumenical discourse and engagement with environmental challenges have already changed in South African ecclesial communities.

With Scott (2003:7) this thesis is therefore no attempt to "respond to complaints of Christian collusion in the ecological crisis", but against Scott (2003:7) this thesis does "construe the ecological crisis as the context for theology". Indeed (Conradie, 2005a:1),

> Ecological theology is an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom in Christianity as a response to environmental threats and injustices. At the same time, it is an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by the environmental crisis.

Thus theological research prompted by the ecological crisis has resulted in, amongst other things, the publication of a great number of books and articles.[6] Most notable amongst these are those that form part of the Ecology and Justice Series of Orbis Books (edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John A. Grim, Leonardo Boff and Sean McDonagh), such as John Cobb's *Sustainability* (1992), Jay McDaniel's *With Roots and Wings* (1995), Leonardo Boff's *Ecology and Liberation* (1993) and *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (1997), Larry Rasmussen's *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (1996), and Dieter Hessel's *Theology for Earth Community* (1996). It is described as a series that "publishes books that seek to integrate an understanding of the Earth as an interconnected life system with concerns for just and sustainable systems that benefit the entire Earth" (Boff,

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[6] A particularly helpful resource in locating these is Ernst Conradie's book, *Christianity and ecological theology* (2006), which contains a detailed indexed bibliography and even includes an index of sources grouped according to key words and terms.

1997:information page). A second notable contribution of a book series is those that form part of the Engaging Culture series of Baker Books, such as Steven Bouma-Prediger's *For the beauty of the earth* (2001). A third prominent series of books that seeks to engage in the crisis that the earth is finding itself in is the Earth Bible series. This series identifies with the ecological crisis by admitting the role that certain theological readings and interpretations may play and have played in forming a particular perception with regards to humans' relatedness to creation, and by name, nature. However, the contributors to these volumes seek to read biblical texts creatively and with sensitivity to those passages that may have played their role in devaluing earth and creation. The writers aim to read texts pertaining to creation and nature with a critical eye to the identified ecojustice principles, so that the intrinsic worth of creation and the relationships of God and humanity to creation might be advocated. Thereby it seeks to employ its own theological resources in addressing the challenges of the marginalisation and exploitative utilisation of creation and nature – in, for instance, *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Habel & Wurst, 2000) particularly via creative readings of the book Genesis. Thus "the Earth Bible Project has chosen to take the Earth crisis seriously and to re-read our biblical heritage in the light of this crisis" (Habel & Wurst, 2000:7).

According to Moltmann, our current context is characterised by, among other things, the ecological crisis of our scientific and technological civilisation, which has led to the exploitation and gradual exhaustion of nature by humanity. Furthermore, it is a crisis of the modern, industrial world, based not solely on the advances in science and technology, but first and foremost on human beings' preoccupation with power and domination (Moltmann, 1993:20 – 21). With a context of the earth and her ecology in crisis in mind, I turn to the potential significance of Kelsey's work in this regard.

1.3   Research proposal

David Kelsey's 1000-page dogmatic work is written in the form of a giant theological anthropology, a framework that seeks to give structure to the way he discusses Christian doctrine. This work is regarded as one of the most comprehensive theological anthropologies written in the 21st century, which makes it not only a very good systematic and dogmatic resource for theological study, but also invites broader

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engagement with it. One such engagement would be to investigate whether this great theological anthropology could accommodate ecological theology, or not.

This study engages David Kelsey's theological anthropology to investigate whether it could serve as basis[7] for ecological theology. The argument proceeds as follows. Many ecological theological works and research are focused on the importance of the world and creation and nature and ecology and the environment, and deem these as core to its enterprise. However, often a contrast or polemic relationship with anthropology is introduced when the impetus of ecological damage, destruction and death is ascribed to the consequences of humanity's way of relating to the earth. Exploitation, wastage and consumer culture are some of the dimensions that characterise the proposed relationship, and so both the responsibility and the blame for ecological degradation is laid before humankind's ways of life and living. Within a theological framework, ecological theological foci on the inherent goodness and dignity of creation and theological anthropological foci on the uniqueness of humankind's relationship to God and the consequent responsibilities and freedom of humanity are often polarised. One important consequence of this is the marginalisation of anthropological contributions in many ecological theological studies. This would be the first level of problematic in many conventional ecological theological research projects.

The second level of problematic in the use of ecological theological points of departure for study of understandings of the existence and dignity and worth of the earth and her ecology, which may stand in polarised relationship with anthropology, is the intimate connection of theological anthropology to the Christian doctrine of God. Anthropology, in a sense, stands at the heart of Christian theology[8], since through it theology is worked out and systematised with regards and in relation to humankind. Christian theology, after all, seeks to address humankind's relationship to God primarily,

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[7] Throughout this thesis Kelsey's work will be investigated with an eye to the probable significance – or importance, implications, consequences – that his threefold proposal may have for ecological theological thinking that identifies with the theological idea of 'God relating to all that is not God' (cf. p. 72 of this thesis for more on the use of 'basis').

[8] The famous introduction to John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian religion* emphasises this perhaps more than many famous works of doctrine, and, indeed, is quoted by Kelsey himself at very beginning of *Eccentric Existence* (2009:1). It reads there as follows: "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and which brings forth the other is not easy to discern."

as a species that have deliberately sought to systematise and engage with the experience of the mystery that is God. Thus ecological theology, in a proposed polarised relationship to theological anthropology, becomes problematic in a second way, in that the relevance of ecological theology's own relationship to Christian theology runs into serious consideration. If ecological theology stands in polarised relationship to theological anthropology, and if humankind stands at the heart of Christian doctrine, then one would be justified in asking which deep theological resources are left to engage with in ecological theological study? The more radical question would be whether there could be something like a Christian ecological theology at all? And so, often the greatest focus in ecological theology consequently falls on the doctrine of creation, so that any and all texts and doctrines remotely friendly to the causes of ecological dignity and caretaking bear the burden for substantiating and legitimising all theological research in this area. I would argue that this limits ecological theology and ecological theological contributions not merely in its research, but also in its agency to stand at the heart of the Christian doctrine. Moltmann mentions, for instance, that the doctrine of creation has not enjoyed attention as a separate theme in German Protestant theology since the memorable dispute between the Confessing Church and the 'German Christians' in Nazi Germany, between 'natural theology' (by which it was believed that God's order was inherent in the natural disposition of nature and race) and 'revealed theology' (which sought to reassert Jesus Christ as "'the one Word of God'") (Moltmann, 1993:xiii).

Thus I propose that, in this study, one not shies away from anthropological concerns and interests, in fear of marginalising ecological concerns or legitimising ecological destruction. Rather, I propose that one enter into theological anthropology deeply and investigate whether it could in fact serve as partner and support in the journey towards greater dignity for all, human and nonhuman communities alike. What would make the proposed study a novel contribution to the ongoing ecological theological conversation would thus be the use of the specific theological framework of David Kelsey's theological anthropology in order to investigate whether creative perspectives or alternative arguments could be harvested for engagement in the wider ecological theological and ecological discussions and debates. However, other than many (if not most) ecological theological points of departure, this study would want to use Kelsey's

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specifically theological anthropological framework to ask whether such an understanding of Christian theology could serve as basis for ecological theology. Thus, instead of a conventional polarisation between anthropology and ecology, this study inquires into the relevance and constitution of ecological theology within the broader project of Kelsey's intricate dogmatics. Kelsey himself chooses to interpret the doctrine of God within a theological anthropological framework, which could provide a fresh angle on ecological theology, if this very same point of departure could be used for the construction of a basis for an ecological theology.

Last year (30 June 2010) I had a meeting with Professor Kelsey at the Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut in the USA, where I discussed some general aspects of his work, in preparation for my writing of this thesis. I asked some questions about my proposed study and usage of his work, in particular whether he thought his theological anthropology could serve in a study such as this, and whether he thought it would be suitable that his theology be appropriated for such a purpose as this study. His answer to me was that he thought it both appropriate and suitable that the theses he develops in this study be considered for a study on his theological anthropology as basis for ecological theology. In particular, he emphasised that he hoped – but also that he believed – that his theology would be able to address the proposed topic of study, since he deems it very important to engage theologically in the ecological challenges and crises of the day.

These remarks served to substantiate the curiosity I had in engaging with Kelsey's work on this topic, in order to establish whether or not Kelsey's theological anthropology could serve as basis for ecological theology. It seemed both fit and suitable that his project and arguments be investigated in service of a topic such as *Eccentric Existence? Engaging David Kelsey's theological anthropology as basis for ecological theology,* an undertaking that has intrigued me in three ways. In the first instance the captivating title of the book indicated a probable connection to the concerns of ecological theology. David Kelsey's rationale behind the title for his book has to do with the unique contribution or claim that Christian theology has to make with regards to anthropology, namely that "we human beings are related to by God in a rather rich and complicated kind of way" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009). For Kelsey,

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"the result of that is that the basis for human reality and the basis for human value both lie, so to speak, outside of human beings – because it finally lies outside in God. So 'eccentric' means having your centre outside yourself. And 'existence' simply means living as a human being" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009). Secondly, the content and arguments of the book strongly substantiated the suspicion that the proposed study would be a fruitful and enlightening undertaking. Lastly, these suspicions were confirmed in the meeting with Professor Kelsey himself. Therefore, since both title and content of the book, as well as a meeting with the author himself, indicated that such a study would not merely warrant the satisfaction of curiosities or suspicions, but would in all probability be an intriguing and important study to be engaged with, I proceeded in investigating and engaging with Kelsey's many theological contributions.

The research problem that is addressed in this study has to do with whether David Kelsey's theological anthropology can serve as basis for ecological theology. In the light of the above, two things are clear. The first is that the earth and her ecology, and specifically ecological theology functions in contexts where guidance and fresh research is needed for creative and imaginative engagement with ecological crises, degradation, limitation and destruction. Thus, a need is created, not necessarily for more information on the topic, but for imaginative ways of understanding and addressing these challenges.[9] The second is that Kelsey's anthropology could possibly contribute significantly to the wider and narrower debates and discussions on life and living beings, including the earth and her ecology, as would be the inquiry of this study. Even more, the research problem investigates Kelsey's work for establishing some kind of 'basis' that it could form for ecological theological thinking. Of course this does not imply that current or past research and thinking on ecological theology did and does *not* provide such bases. For that reason important ecological theological literature will be engaged, in order to stay in contact with important research in this regard. However, the existence of such ways of thinking and 'basing' ecological theology may yet have room for even more creative and

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[9] Cf. the South African Council of Churches' *Climate Change* document (2009:37 – 42) for expositions on the need for and power of "moral imagination" and "moral vision".

imaginative ways of thinking and arguing about the significance of the earth and her ecology.

Some considerations had to be kept in mind in engaging with the proposed work in the particular research problem. The first consideration involved indicating to what extent the doctrine of God stands in a circular, and thus inexorable, relationship with anthropology (a contention of the book, and one Professor Kelsey brought up in our meeting as well). This brings to bear the relative independence that the doctrine of God has in this work – something which would be necessary for constructing a relationship between the doctrine of God and ecological theology. A second consideration had to do with maintaining the logical relationships (especially in terms of priority, in the sense of that which must be logically prior for (an)other argument(s) to function properly) developed in this study. Kelsey explains this through the usage of his triple helix model or metaphor, wherein he indicates how closely connected the different themes and proposals are, and how they relate to one another. More specifically, the proposals fall in a very specific order; of course any order or argument ought not be used uncritically, but since the heart of this project lies in the underlying unity or coherency of the proposals, the underlying structure and relationships of these to one another would had to be considered in depth when utilising them for use in this particular study.

The research question addressed in this study was guided by the questions asked by Kelsey of his own project. In this work, his research question pertains to how God relates to all that is not God, and he specifically focuses on three questions, namely "What are we?", "How ought we be?", and "Who am I and who are we?" (2009:1 – 2). Correspondingly, the research question of this project commenced with the same basic question and questions as that of Kelsey, namely how God relates to all that is not God. In particular, this study weighed each of the three major proposals that Kelsey makes in this study (and, as mentioned, their internal structure and coherency) in order to establish if, and indeed how and where then, they could be appropriated for use as basis for ecological theology. Not only the three proposals (God relating creatively, God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, God relating to reconcile) but also the corresponding questions structured the study. Questions that guided this study included: can there be something like a Christian ecological theology? How could

Kelsey's theological anthropology, as a major dogmatic work, be able to serve as basis for this? Could a basis for ecological theology be formulated in engagement with, and not apart from or in selective use of, theological anthropology? Could 'eccentric existence' as conceptual and argumentative resource be employed in formulating a Christian, Reformed ecological theology? Through questions such as these this study sought to embody the appropriation of Kelsey's proposals and theses in the study of the basis for an ecological theology.

For the purposes of this study, the framework of the triune God relating to the cosmos in three interrelated ways is employed. This framework is adopted from the framework developed by David Kelsey in his recent book, *Eccentric Existence. A Theological Anthropology* (2009), where he proposes to interpret theological anthropology through the triune God's relating to humankind in three interrelated ways. The first proposal he makes is that God relates to humankind creatively ("living on borrowed breath") and entails that God relates "to" us through the medium of address. The second proposal is that God relates by drawing humankind into eschatological consummation[10] ("living on borrowed time") which stipulates that God relates "circumambiently", "between" us through the medium of promise. The third and last proposal is that God relates by reconciling humankind through their multiple estrangements[11] ("living by another's death") and entails that God relates "amongst" us through the medium of exchange. In this study I make use of a similar theological framework to discuss Kelsey's theological anthropology as basis for ecological theology. This framework entails analogous movements, and comprises of three parts, in which Kelsey's three proposals are weighed and considered.

Regarding the question of approach and methodology, ecological theologies employ a number of different ways in which to approach the subject matter of the earth and her ecology in crisis. In the light of the urgent ecological crisis, brought about by "progressive industrial exploitation of nature and its irreparable destruction", Jürgen

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[10] Kelsey describes eschatological consummation as the promise for transformation at the end of history – "which, in biblical language, is called the kingdom of God" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009).

[11] Kelsey describes this estrangement as "fallen into bondage to evil" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009).

Moltmann approaches questions regarding the ecology with a focus on God as Creator and a pneumatological-eschatological reading of the doctrine of creation – since, for him, this crisis cannot merely be construed as "a crisis in the natural environment of human beings", but must be thought of as a crisis within human beings themselves, a crisis of life on earth (Moltmann, 1993:xiii). Ernst Conradie (2000:1 – 5), following John Haught, points to three approaches to ecological theology, namely apologetic (relation of a more harmonious relationship between nature and humanity with Biblical tradition and Christian history), sacramental (exploration of the inter-relatedness of nature and humanity) and eschatological (transformation of ecological vision towards the future). This thesis does not follow either of these theologians' approaches, but leans itself toward exploring the interrelatedness of nature and humanity within Kelsey's proposal of God relating to all that is not God. The research design or method for this study takes the following form. Since the study undertaken in this thesis takes the form of an engagement, it starts off with engaging with some studies and research in the ecological theological field of inquiry in this chapter, which features again in chapter 7. Chapters 2 and 6 provide an overview, analysis and summary of Kelsey's project. Chapters 3 to 5 involve in-depth analysis of Kelsey's work. Mostly, the approach and methodology of this thesis is taken from Kelsey's own approach and methodology, which is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 – however, the concern for life and living beings sets the agenda for this thesis. Since ecological theologies are closely connected to the concern for life on earth and within the earth's ecology, an engagement with Kelsey's project would focus in a particular way on the centrality of life.

1.4   Ecological theology and the centrality of life

The focus on (this) life is a contribution made by many ecological theologies, as Conradie points out (2005a:60): "we are urged by numerous ecological theologies to focus on this life". Perhaps this agenda for life is set in a special way by ecological theologies' concern to respond to the ecological crisis of our day, which, in Jürgen Moltmann's words (1993:xiii), is

> a crisis of life on this planet, a crisis so comprehensive and so irreversible that it can not unjustly
> be described as apocalyptic. It is not a temporary crisis. As far as we can judge, it is the beginning
> of a life and deah struggle for creation on this earth.

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Boff (1997:2) agrees:

> The model of society and of the meaning of life that human beings have projected for themselves
> – at least during the last four hundred years – is in crisis.

In a broader sense also, a central concept within ecological theology is that of 'life'. Ecological theology affirms the life of living beings – and, in this thesis, the earth and her ecology is included in this wider usage – and structures theological inquiry into the earth and her ecology within the work of many ecological theologians. So one finds that Scott (2003:3) structures his study by asking what he calls "[q]uestions privileged by environmentalism": "[H]ow do life forms interact? How might the quality of life be improved? How can life be sustained in the long term?" McDaniel sees the purpose of his book as envisioning "a way of living, a life path, that offers nourishing roots and unbound wings" (1995:3). Rasmussen (1996:173) dedicates more than 200 pages of his book to "an alternative orientation to life, an orientation profound enough to constitute a faith to live by", in light of the earth and her ecology in crisis.

Conradie (2005a:60) points out that the focus of ecological theologies on *this* life may not, however, be divorced from that which transcends this life, namely the Christian hope for eternal life, since "a denial of that which transcends this life does not necessarily encourage responsibility for this earth". It is exactly with "a strong sense of the Giver of life" that avoidance of a celebration of life that reverts to "a Fascist vitalism, a theology of blood and soil, an arogant, death-dealing idolisation of life" is possible and necessary. In sum, "[w]ithout a vision of that which transcends this life, we may easily become preoccupied with this life" (Conradie, 2005a:60). For him, a Christian environmental praxis is powered by an appropriate understanding of Christian hope, by the conviction of a future for the earth and her ecology and all living beings therein. Without hope for a future of living beings and all of life, life won't easily be meaningful: "[i]f life becomes a struggle for basic survival, as is often the case in Africa, it will be increasingly difficult to resist environmental destruction" (Conradie, 2000:1). Life is core both to current realities ánd future realities of living beings, as Pannenberg's (1994:34 – 35) connection of the dynamic of life of living beings and their self-transcendence points out: the "immanent dynamic of the life of creation may be more precisely described as a process of the increasing internalizing of the self-transcendence of creatures"; such a process of

internalising self-transcendence can be described as "the participation of creatures in the God who gives them life" (Tillich).

Exactly because ecological theology has to do with this life, but *not only* with this life, is it unnecessary and dangerous to oppose 'life' and 'death'. The centrality of life in the work of ecological theologians does not necessarily imply or assume juxtaposition of 'life' with 'death'. For instance, Conradie envisions life amidst the threats of death that, life beyond death, and eternal life with God (2000:294 – 352). For Rasmussen (1996:90), *oikoumene*, 'the whole inhabited world', points to all living beings belonging to "an all-inclusive form upon which the life of each depends". Indeed,

> Humankind and otherkind are fit together in an undeniable, if precarious and sometimes mean,
> unity of life and death.

It is clear not only that 'life' is regarded as central to the concerns and interests of ecological theology, but also that Kelsey himself speaks of the 'living death' and 'dying life' (both states assuming a *living* being) of that which is not God. Indeed, as will be indicated in chapters 2 to 6, according to Kelsey living beings have their life in the life of God, without whose constant relating to them they would cease to exist. Therefore, this thesis is more biocentric than it is anthropocentric (which is the case in Kelsey's project, for, as is shown in chapter 6, Kelsey himself describes his project as 'anthropocentric'), but since the life of living beings is unthinkable apart from God's life within Kelsey's theological framework, a proper description of this thesis' focus would be 'theocentric' (as Kelsey describes his own project as well). The theocentricity of Kelsey's project is, furthermore, thoroughly Christological – Christocentric, even – since, for Kelsey, "Christ's identity will be definitive of Christian accounts of God" (2009:961).). Indeed, it is this selfsame God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, Lord of all of life (Scott, 2003:9). In "[a] letter to Churches, Mission Agencies and all Christians concerned with the Church's Mission" (Vischer, 2007:3), participants in an International Consultation of the John Knox Centre in Geneva (with the title "Witnessing in the Midst of a Suffering Creation – a Challenge for the Mission of the Church) affirmed that "God is the author of *all* life". In the words of the Accra Confession, it is God who is "Creator and Sustainer of all life" (2004:4).

Ecological theologies' focusses on 'life' also lead them to say something on 'lifestyle' within a globalising world. As Conradie points out, the earth and her ecology in crisis "is not primarily a crisis pertaining to nature but to the dominant and increasingly global economic system and the consumerist cultural values supporting it" (2005a:2). A recent project on globalisation and justice, entitled *Dreaming A Different World* (Boesak et al, 2010), emphasises this as much as many other ecumenical publications (such as the SACC's *Climate Change* document (2009)). In this publication, which seeks to respond to the challenge of the Accra Confession for churches, it is argued that what is needed to address the ecological crisis is, amongst other things, "an increase in access to sufficiency through a turn-around in lifestyle" (2010:49). The World Alliance of Reformed Churches' well-known Accra Confession responds very strongly to practices and lifestyles that inhibit and sabotage the life of some living beings (nonhuman and human) on earth and within the earth's ecology. In the words of this declaration (2004:4):

> we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life.... We believe that any economy of the household of life given to us by God's covenant to sustain life is accountable to God.

The publications of various regional councils of WARC (which, since 2010, forms part of the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches) seek to respond to these and other challenges of the Accra Confession, and highlight the importance of and particular link between 'life' and 'lifestyle' in contemporary ecumenical discourse on the earth and her ecology in crisis. The publication *Choose Life, Act in Hope* (2009), in which African churches give expression to 'Living out the Accra Confession' (subtitle of the publication), insists that 'life-affirming agriculture' is an alternative against economic globalisation, and that "life-affirming agriculture is the basis of life and epitomises the interactions for the sustenance of life for humanity and the earth" (2009:125). The publication *Power to Resist and Courage to Hope* (2009), in which Caribbean churches give expression to 'Living out the Accra Confession (subtitle of the publication), insists that "God's blessings of family, community, material goods, natural resources are intended to sustain life, not threaten life… to be used in the service of life" (2009:40).

The publication *Europe Covenanting for Justice* (2010), in which European churches seek to respond to Accra's claim that "we are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself" (2004:2). Therefore, it (2010:168) calls on churches

> to confess their guilt in relation to the causes of climate change, to show signs of repentance and redeemed living and to be a prophetic voice in the life of our communities, through promoting a change of heart among congregations; urgently reducing church carbon footprints t [*sic*] every level in line with national targets; enabling members of our congregations to make similar changes towards sustainable lifestyles; and engaging politically with local and national governments.

Ecological concerns are, however, often still marginalised in the public agendas of politicians, economists, and public consciousness or imagination. Although the South African constitution provides for the recognition of the need for a healthy environment, many still view the preservation of the environment as a luxury of the rich and powerful. This often heightens the tension between protecting scarce resources and the care and development of human lives. Ecojustice issues (which want to acknowledge that systems and practices of injustice involve both economic and ecological exploitation) are core to discussions on human dignity, as well as the integrity of creation. Furthermore, "[t]here is a widespread sense of living in an end-time, drifting increasingly rapidly towards a catastrophe through human failure." Conradie argues that economic justice must be based on a more equitable distribution (and redistribution) of wealth, instead of an increasing production of wealth. This is a particularly daunting challenge, in the light of a "global culture of consumerism". Finally, as Moltmann acknowledges, the ecological crisis is not a temporary crisis, and as such the challenge to living lives of integrity, living as if life mattered, would constantly need recognition and response (Conradie, 2000:56 – 64). One such recognition and response is that of the Joint Declaration of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany, which, with regards to the earth and her ecology in crisis, reads (Wasserloos-Strunk & Engels, 2010:121):

> Praying, we commit ourselves together to care for your creatures and your creation; to work with all who seek for alternative ways… treasuring energy, protecting biodiversity, resisting desertification, saving water, preventing pollution, respecting your work, marvelling in your creation, celebrating the wonderful web of life, your rich and abundant household of belonging.

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Admittedly, all responses will need to attend to the language and conceptual frameworks they employ – and therefore a section on this is an important part to a thesis that engages ecological theology.

1.5   Conceptual framework

> Learning language is learning culture. Language plays a shaping role in our perception of the world, how we thinking about it and respond to it. For this reason, learning to perceive, think and talk differently often leads to acting differently.

Rasmussen's (1996:32) warning that conceptual frameworks and terminology have great impact on the ability of human beings to respond – the responsibility – to our world will be taken seriously in this thesis, for which reason we will proceed cautiously with regards to the use of concepts, particularly concepts that are not both explicitly ánd consistently used in Kelsey's project. For the most part, Kelsey will be followed in his use of concepts, although also critiqued on the use of a number of these. In light of the context sketched above, it is however clear that a great number of concepts govern and structure discussions on and in ecology and ecological theology, and may need more attention and explication for use in this thesis before one proceeds much farther in the arguments taken up in the chapters to follow. In this section of this chapter I seek to disentangle some of the conceptual difficulties that could prove detrimental to the overall argument of this thesis in later chapters.

This thesis makes an important twofold choice in its employment of concepts relating to the earth. The first part of the conceptual choice has to do with usage of 'living beings' and 'life' to refer to those beings and dynamics understood as Kelsey's 'all that is not God'. All that is not God is, however, not synonymous with 'living beings' – and therefore 'living beings' and life' cannot be regarded as all-encompassing or fully comprehensive (even if one were to argue that there are strong continuities between nonliving and living things (Boff, 1997:50)). Rather, the latter ('living beings') provides a particular reading or understanding of the former ('all that is not God') within the specific context of an ecological theological thesis. Boff (1997:50 – 53) provides helpful descriptions of 'life' and 'living beings', which will be followed in this regard. Boff (1997:50) presents life with and within the earth and her ecology as 'self-organising matter', "the realization of a possibility present in the original matter and energy" of what

he calls "the explosion of life" (1997:51). Life, for Boff (1997:52), is therefore self-organising[12], autonomous[13], adaptable[14], reproductive[15] and self-transcendent[16]. Living beings, as fully actual expressions (but not exhaustive descriptions or instances) of life are 'dissipative structures' (Boff, 1997:52, following Ilya Prigogine): characteristically driven, open systems that works to maintain their equilibriums through their internal and self-organisation. However (1997:52),

> Living beings consume enery from the milieu and thereby generate entropy, but through their internal order and self-regulation they also in some fashion elude entropy... They dissipate forces leading to increasing disorder... toward utter chaos... [and] tend toward being ever more well ordered and creative.

Living beings are therefore at the same time counter-entropic and at the same time immersed in some kind of chaos or disorder that requires it to be self-organised, autonomous, adaptable, reproductive, and self-transcendent – in short, alive. In a beautiful description of the development of life, which is to say "diverse forms of life that grew out of a single living thing" (1997:51), Boff indicates a helpful way of understanding the relationship between life and living beings in a sentence on mammals and a paragraph on human beings. "Mammals," he says, "signal the rise of a new quality of life, emotional sensitivity in the sexual bond and in the mother-child bond, which leaves an indelible mark on the psychic structure of creatures with a central nervous system" (1997:51). As for human beings (1997:51 – 52),

> Man and woman are the most recent shoot on the tree of life, the most complex expression of the biosphere, which is in turn an expression of the hydrosphere, and the geosphere, and ultimately of the history of the Earth and the history of the universe. We do not live upon the Earth; we are sons and daughters of Earth but also members of a vast cosmos.

Living beings are expressions of life-in-community, as Boff points out. Therefore living beings cannot be described and understood outside of the total environment of living

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[12] In that "the parts are within an organic whole and the functions are differentiated and complemetary" (Boff, 1997:52).

[13] In that "each being exists in itself, but at the same time it exists from others and for others, and hence it is not independent, because it is always interacting with its milieu" (Boff, 1992:52).

[14] Through which "the life-system assures its fragile equilibrium, survives, and expands" (Boff, 1997:52).

[15] For him, "this is life's most original quality, for it transmits itself identically within a single species" (Boff, 1997:52).

[16] In that it is "always open to new levels of evolution and new forms of expression" (Boff, 1997:52).

beings, since "A living creature cannot be seen in isolation as a mere representative of its specifies". Indeed, "It must always be seen and analysed in relation to the totality of vital conditions that constitute it and in balance with all the other representatives of the community of living beings present (biota and biocenoses)" (Boff, 1989:3). It is exactly within this community that life forms, living beings, occupy the necessary space for living. McFague (1993:99) therefore sees basic to each life-form "a body that occupies and needs space... to obtain the necessities to exist – food, water, air". Indeed, the struggle of living beings to find their space, "which will provide the necessities for life, is the primary struggle of all life-forms, including human ones". Embodied-life-in-community will, in sum, be core to understanding the use of living beings in this thesis.

The second part of the twofold choice of this thesis hones in on the earth in crisis, as an expression of exactly this notion of life-in-community. This thesis follows Bouma-Prediger's (2001:16 – 17) reasoning for employing the term 'earth', over against such concepts as 'environment'[17], 'nature'[18] and 'creation'[19]. It must be noted that this thesis does not share the concern relating to the term 'creation', since Kelsey's project is interpreted exactly with regards to all that is not God. However, precisely because 'all that God relates to' is too broad a term for Kelsey himself in his application or interpretation of his proposals with regards to human beings, 'creation' (although core to Kelsey's entire project), too, will be too broad a term for referring to the earth and her ecology. Kelsey himself distinguishes carefully between 'nature'[20] and 'creation'[21]. Another reason for not privileging the term 'creation' lies in the problematic over-emphasis it places on Kelsey's first proposal, against the second and third proposals, and

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[17] "[T]he term *environment* is sterile. It fails to capture the plethora of creatures in dynamic interaction that is the natural world" (2001:16; original italics).

[18] "[T]he term *nature* all too often denotes something over against culture or history, as if human are not a part of the natural world and as if nonhuman creatures have no history… The term *nature*, in sum, is too secular" (2001:16 – 17; original italics).

[19] "[T]he term *creation* includes everything except God… The term *creation* is, in short, too broad" (2001:17; original italics).

[20] Which, for him, "is defined in terms of the deterministic causal nexus described by Newtonian mechanics in which the concept of God relating to the nexus can have no role" (2009:90).

[21] Which, for him, is defined in contrast to 'nature', "in terms of God's relating creatively to all that is not God, such that God's creative relating is an inherent structural feature of what it is to be creation" (2009:90).

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will therefore not be employed as standard reference to the topical theme of an ecological theology of this nature – although, importantly, it will do so in this case for different reasoning than those with which Bouma-Prediger provides the reader. Finally, Kelsey is of the opinion that doctrines of creation "do remarkably little work", since "talk about 'creation' and 'creaturehood' in modern theology is terminally abstract" (2009:160). It is his contention that, when used, these terms ought to make theological and practical difference when employed. And so, especially from Kelsey's own work the concept 'earth' would appear to be a better choice than 'creation'. Indeed, Bouma-Prediger privileges the term 'earth', because (2001:17; original italics)

> The term *earth* is not abstract; it is specific, precise, concrete, denoting the very stuff of which we are made. *Earth* does not imply that we as humans are somehow separate and above (nor does it necessarily imply that we humans are only so much oxygen and nitrogen and calcium); it includes us with all the other inhabitants of this God's fecund planet. *Earth* does not carry a presumption of atheism; it can easily be seen as the work of God's hands. *Earth* does not refer to angels or stars or pulsars; it includes only that part of creation sometimes called the biosphere. *Earth* is anything but a sterile term.

The earth is that which "God created and continues to lovingly sustain and redeem and will one day make whole" (2001:17). Furthermore, neither the term 'world' nor the term 'cosmos' can be applied from Kelsey's project since Kelsey, firstly, understands these to be synonymous (2009:487) and, secondly, understands 'cosmos' as "humankind's lived world" (2009:491). By virtue of its focus, these terms do not appear to be the most appropriate for use in an ecological theology that would be based on Kelsey's project. Use of the concept 'earth' therefore appears to be the most appropriate for use in this context, and the first part of the application of the God's relating to 'living beings' will therefore make use of the concept 'earth'. It may, however, need support in highlighting (and not only assuming) not only this planet in all her concreteness and actuality, but also the systemic and dynamic environment in which she and her inhabitants find themselves in. Therefore 'ecology' will be employed in close proximity to 'earth' by way of its etymological tie to the word *oikos*, 'habitat'. The connection of 'ecology' with *oikos* and *oikoumene* follows Rasmussen's chapter entitled 'Ecumenical Earth' (1996:90 – 97), which, in turn, employs the World Council of Churches' discussion of *oikos* to structure thought on sustainability. 'Ecology' is understood to indicate the systemic environment

of concretely particular living beings – indeed, for Kelsey "biology (analysis of the life of a living body) is inseparable from ecology (analysis of the environment with which it interacts)" (2009:248)). The reason for the connection of 'ecology' to '*oikos*' in this thesis therefore resides, firstly, in the concern for life and living that the term denotes. Indeed, in Rasmussen's book *oikos* points to the earth as "finite, bounded space… curved, well-wrapped, a closed sphere", but bounded no less than by "life itself and what life requires to stay in place" (1996:91). Moreover, 'ecology' points to "habitation in this closed space (sunlight is the *only* life element not permanently resident within the biosphere)" (Rasmussen, 1996:91). Secondly, the concept of 'ecology' does not treat life and living beings as a separate concern or term, but assumes the underlying relation and relatedness of living beings within a quotidian context. Thirdly, 'ecology' has at its roots the Greek word *oikos*, which also forms the basis of two groups of closely linked concerns in a context of ecological crisis today – namely those 'economic' and 'ecumenical'[22]. Fourthly and lastly, the close etymological connection with 'house' and 'home' makes it ideal for a type of usage that would emphasise the close relation of living beings, as well as the importance of the earth as 'home for all' (keeping in mind the concerns of Ernst Conradie and others that the earth is not the home of human, living beings *yet* (2005a)). In short, this thesis follows Boff's (1997:3 – 4) reasoning for employing the concept 'ecology'. For him,

> Ecology is accordingly a knowledge of the relations, interconnections, interdependencies, and exchanges of all with all, at all points, and at all moments. From this standpoint, ecology cannot be defined by itself, in isolation from its implications for other kinds of knowledge… In short, ecology is defined only within the framework of the relation that it connects in all directions and with every type of knowledge about the way in which all beings are dependent upon one another, constituting the vast fabric of their interdependencies. They make up, as the technical expression goes, a vast homeostatic system, which means a vast balanced and self-regulating system.

In summary, 'ecology' has to do with the energy and dynamic of (and between) living beings within a homeostatic system, and 'earth' denotes the concrete and fully actual biosphere in which all earthly life and all living beings move and have their being. In this thesis, therefore, 'the earth and her ecology' will be employed to keep together these

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[22] Cobb highlights, in particular, the close relation of 'ecology' and 'economy'. He argues that both have to do with the household of God, the *oikos*, and the scarcity of resources (1992:56 – 58).

various concerns in referring to the life and being of earthly living beings. Furthermore, the designation 'the earth and her ecology in crisis' would be a proper description for the environmental crisis in this thesis, following Rasmussen's argument in his book *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (1996). Here 'earth' is not simply an overarching term for the related concepts 'nature', 'environment', and so forth, but entails both society and nature together in community. Adhering to the *internal* linkage of society and environment leads Rasmussen to choose to speak of 'the earth and its distress' rather than 'the environmental crisis' or 'ecocrisis', since (Rasmussen, 1996:9)

> the fate of mountains, rivers, and societies is a single fate; nature is not what is around us or where we live, but the reason we live at all; nature is the reason each and every society and culture that ever existed did so.

Clearly, the earth herself is both living being ánd houses living beings. A core question to this thesis would thus be the relationship of theological anthropology and ecological theology, not only with regards to the inherently anthropological character of Christian doctrine, but also the unwillingness to separate the concerns surrounding and thinking on society and nature in its focus on the earth and her ecology throughout Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*.

1.6   Theological anthropology and ecological theology

The relationship of ecological theology to theological anthropology – more specifically, the relationship of human beings to the earth and her ecology, with all her nonhuman beings included – has been written on extensively. Peter Scott, for instance, regards his 'political theology of nature' as "an exercise in theological anthropology in the liberative key" (2003:5). Ernst Conradie writes on anthropology in an ecological context in his book, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology* (2005a), and emphasises therein that "[i]n many ways anthropology forms the crux of any ecological theology" (2005a:2).

Indeed, theological reflection cannot but keep together anthropology and ecology, even if, as was argued above, Christian doctrine is deeply anthropological. In a sense, theology, anthropology and ecology belong together very intimately, even if they have often been sealed off from one another and brought into opposition to one another. Scott (2003:14 – 15; original italics) sees particularly in the rise and predominance of technology in the modern world the separation of nature, humanity and God by adhering

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to a worldview that not only makes God redundant but also sets up humanity "*sicut deus* over nature*". Kelsey himself is wary of theological anthropologies that would posit a dichotomy of body and soul or human and nonhuman beings. Theological anthropological projects need not undermine or oppose the interests, concerns or priorities of ecological theological projects, since anthropology is not synonymous with or necessarily subject to anthropocentrism. Theological projects that would attempt to speak to the relation between theological anthropology and ecological theology would need to be particularly wary in its approach, however, and methodologically cautious if it is to avoid subjecting the one to the other. Indeed, "[i]f nothing else has done so, the environmental crisis has made it clear that anthropologies, theological or otherwise, are dangerous if they disengage human beings from the ecological web that is their physical environment in order to demonstrate human 'superiority' over other forms of life. This danger is compounded when such anthropologies systematically make the interests of human beings the ground of the value of other forms of life in that web so that the latter have only instrumental value" (2009:117 – 118). The value of Kelsey's own methodology for constructing a basis for ecological theology becomes quite clear in view of this, not only because it would not need to subject ecology to anthropology in order to assign or discover meaning or purpose or ground for existence and life of beings (nonhuman in particular), but also because in applying the same methodology or approach used for constructing theological anthropology in constructing a basis for ecological theology the problematic breach of anthropology and ecology in theology may possibly be bridged. Thus, not only does such a methodology not divide these disciplines, but it may indeed serve to bring them closer to one another.

Kelsey's project is thoroughly anthropological, and it would therefore come as no surprise that Kelsey himself speaks deliberately of 'ecology' in a mere four pages of his entire book (2009:248, 1020 – 1022). It should added, however, that Kelsey also speaks of 'environment' (2009:117 – 118, 248), 'nature' (2009:90, 117, 469, 472 – 473, 962) and, of course, 'creation' (2009:34, 64 – 65, 90, 92, 161 – 175, 179, 201, 213, 245 – 246, 257, 270, 272, 275, 278, 293, 349, 411, 514 – 515, 518 – 520, 534, 538, 550, 924 – 926, 930 – 932, 935 – 936) in his project. Even though these references orientate my study of Kelsey to construct a basis for ecological theology in unique ways, it is the overall thrust

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of Kelsey's argument (rather than a detailed exegesis of how each of these terms function through Kelsey) that provides valuable input in understanding the relationship of ecological theology to theological anthropology within Kelsey's project. Indeed, Kelsey assigns great value to the earth's ecology, which he sometimes describes as synonymous with 'proximate context' (2009:249) by virtue of it being the basis of any kind of actual or potential or possible life. Kelsey's view on the tension between ecological theology and theological anthropology receives attention in a telling argument close to the beginning of his book, where he responds to the possible objection that his project may succumb to problematic anthropocentrism. He describes the objection as follows (2009:199 – 200):

> Construing creation, and with it human creatures, as the quotidian, and then construing the quotidian, and with it human creatures, in terms of human practices, privileges a particular model of the human person and a particular conceptual scheme with which to describe it… Privileging such concepts, the objection goes, will inevitably lead to a radically anthropocentric view of creation, and therewith of human creatures. To do so puts into play a pattern of thinking that systematically elevates human creatures over the rest of the creation, for only human creatures are capable in the full sense of intentions and intentional actions and enacting practices, and so only they are really creatures. So far as their reality and value are concerned, all other creatures are reduced to the status of extensions or appendages of human creatures.

Kelsey response to this objection by distinguishing between epistemic anthropocentrism and ontological anthropocentrism. Epistemic anthropocentrism, he argues, is the only way to think theologically about humanity's place in God's creation – "indeed, we might wonder how it could be otherwise when it is human persons who are trying to understand the context into which they have been born as God's creation" (2009:200). Ontological anthropocentrism, on the other hand, he regards as neither necessary nor theologically well-founded, and in any case not a pitfall that his project succumbs to – in his words, "this perspective [in reference to the necessity of epistemic anthropocentrism] is not necessarily anthropocentric with regard to judgments of the reality and value of nonhuman creatures… created to actualize purposes or ends entirely relative to human well-being" (2009:200). Kelsey's view of nonhuman living beings entail both that "they are not created by God simply for us" (2009:200) ánd that they, "along with us, make up

the quotidian[23], as genuinely other than we in being and value" (2009:200 – 201). He wraps up his response to the objection to possible anthropocentrism of or in his project by affirming that there is "no systemic move that can by made by theology that will conceptually *guarantee* that such distortion will not happen" and that is therefore the responsibility of theologians to be "vigilantly self-critical in testing whether we have fallen prey to this danger" (2009:201; original italics).

With this in mind, I propose that Kelsey may point an interesting and helpful way forward with regards to redefining the relationship between ecological theology and theological anthropology through the idea of 'God relating to all that is not God'. Kelsey (2009:1008) describes the overall theme of his project as

> that the reality and value of human beings, their basic personal identities, and how they ought to be set into and oriented toward their ultimate and proximate contexts are all eccentric, grounded outside themselves in the concrete ways in which the triune God relates to all that is not God, including humankind.

Kelsey's theological anthropology therefore appears not only to contain within it the possibility to serve as basis for ecological theology, but, itself, to be part of a bigger picture. The theological proposal 'God relating to all that is not God' accommodates anthropology in Kelsey's work, not the other way around, and some curiosity regarding how else this proposal may be interpreted and appropriated is therefore both natural and called for. In Kelsey's project, human beings are the clear focus of his study, but for Kelsey himself humankind is included in (and thus not the sum total of) the broader designation 'all that is not God', to which God relates to outside of Godself (*ad extra*).

In concluding, three important theological ideas need to be kept in mind when the relationship of theological anthropology and ecological theology is considered in this introductory chapter. Firstly, ecological theology is regarded as "a next wave of contextual theology" which, apart from reflecting the context from which it originates, entails "attempts to articulate and address… social contexts self-consciously and explicitly" (2005a:1). Secondly, if "[e]cological theology certainly requires a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine" (2005a:2), then the engagement that this thesis is

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[23] Kelsey understands 'quotidian' from Wisdom theology, to refer to the everyday lived world. In this sense, the quotidian may manifest itself in a number of diversely particular and concrete ways. It is finite (2009:201 – 212), a gracious gift (2009:212 – 214), that is not described either with regard to its genesis or its ultimate purpose or goal in Wisdom literature (2009:190 – 191).

busy with is such a reinvestigation. All aspects of the Christian faith need to be taken into account, as far as possible, in order to provide ecological theology with proper theological bases. Moreover, thirdly, since "ecological theology has to be more than environmental ethics or a revisited theology of creation" (2005a:2), such a reinvestigation cannot stop short of considering (in Kelsey, specifically) God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation and/or God relating to reconcile all that is not God to God, in addition to God relating to create all that is not God. For this thesis, where the relationship of ecological theology to theological anthropology may be core to engaging and possibly developing Kelsey's threefold proposal as basis for ecological theology, the understanding of ecological theology as contextual and as expression of Christian doctrine (and not merely as having to do with doctrines of creation or environmental ethics) will be normative.

1.7   Conclusion

This study wants to take another angle on addressing the challenges of ecological and environmental degradation and destruction. From within one of the most comprehensive theological anthropologies of recent times, it wants to investigate whether Kelsey's work would not be able to take the earth and her ecology seriously from its intricate and deeply anthropological proposals. Not only would such a study want to challenge the perceived polarised relationship between anthropology and ecology within theology, but it would most especially want to address ecological concerns from the heart of Christian doctrine. This study would be an attempt in showing whether or not theology ought to be asked to engage all possible resources in addressing issues of environmental degradation, most especially resources divided and polarised in the heart of this issue – resources such as that of both ecological theology ánd theological anthropology. It is my contention that an undertaking such as this could prove both valuable and insightful. In the words of the late Lukas Vischer (2004:11),

> In order to respond adequately to today's ecological crisis, it is essential for the churches to achieve clarity in their understanding of God's Creation and the destiny and vocation of human beings in it.

Therefore, new metaphors for understanding God's creation and the place of living beings (and, particularly, human beings) within it are regularly introduced and

reinterpreted in ecological theologies – and rightly so. So one finds Max Oelschlager (1994:236 – 238) arguing for the metaphor of 'caring for creation'[24], Leonardo Boff's notion of the earth as homeland and creation as theosphere (1997), Sallie McFague's metaphor for the earth as 'body of God' (1993), Rosemary Radford Ruether's 'Gaia', "our common mother" (1992:273) and "personified being, an immanent divinity" (1992:5), Jürgen Moltmann's self-witdrawal of God (*zimsum*) (1993), Ernst Conradie's images of the earth in God's womb (2009, following Elizabeth Johnson) and the earth as home for all (2005a), and so forth. Kelsey's contribution in this regard would not, however, be a metaphor, but would be what he calls a theological idea – that of God relating to all that is not God in three distinct but interrelated ways, namely to create, to draw into eschatological consummation, and to reconcile. Kelsey would therefore understand all contextual theology within his broader theological framework of God relating to all that is not God in threefold manner, and therefore only a strictly theocentric account of the relationship between ecological theology and theological anthropology would be possible from within Kelsey's theological framework. This is clear in his own appropriation of understanding *anthropos*, human being, within such a framework – equally, however, it allows the opportunity to ask of his project to appropriate its proposals in different directions, a move that this thesis will investigate to establish whether it will be possible with regards to the earth and her ecology.

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[24] Which, he proceeds, calls Christians up to witness, since "the biblical tradition contains within itself the seeds of renewal, the energy to rise up and throw off the monster that envelops us, whether this be Job's eloquent testimony to an irrepressible human dignity and indefatigable sense of responsibility or the parables of Jesus, which subtly yet powerfully undermine the final vocabulary of the state" (1994:238)

Chapter 2

God relating to all that is not God

2.1   Introduction

Ecological theology is concerned with God's relating to the earth and her ecology, as was shown in chapter 1, as integral part to its concern for living beings and all of life. David Kelsey has developed a theological framework for interpreting or understanding living beings – more specifically, human beings – theologically within God's relating to all that is not God. The central claim of Kelsey in his book, *Eccentric Existence*, is that all that is not God is to be understood ex-centrically, outside of itself, within God's ways of relating to all that is not God. The value and worth and being and reality of all that is not God is constituted in God's relating to it, rather than in itself or in its responses to God or (for an ecological theology) even in the assessment and understanding of one species, such as human beings. Kelsey distinguishes three formal ways in which God relates to all that is not God, and is careful to maintain the relationships of these three ways of relating to one another throughout his project. This chapter will investigate the structure and methodology underlying Kelsey's project in preparation for the detailed discussion on each of Kelsey's three proposals in chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively, and for the summary chapter of Kelsey's project in chapter 6.

This chapter gives a detailed account of the methodological and conceptual framework underlying David Kelsey's theological anthropological project. In addition to a broader discussion on these topics, this chapter pays attention to three core issues that are integral to a proper understanding of Kelsey's three proposals that follow on this chapter (in chapters 3, 4 and 5), namely those of Christian canonical Holy Scripture, unsubstitutable (human) personal identity, and the centrality of life in Kelsey's work. In sum, this chapter serves to set the rhythm and the tone for the discussion and appropriation of Kelsey's three proposals to follow, and would therefore do well to start by providing a summarising account of Kelsey's project.

2.2   David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*

Kelsey's book on theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence* (2009), is a two-volume, three-part treatise on *anthropos*, human being. More important than the subject matter, for Kelsey, is however the questions asked in his project in this regard: (1) "*What* are we?" (2009:1; original italics); (2) "*How* ought we be?" (2009:2; original italics); (3) "*Who* am I and who are we?" (2009:2; original italics). Also important are those who are asking these questions, and Kelsey identifies two types of people that his project addresses. Firstly, the project seeks to address "those who identify themselves with Christian communities and their traditions of thought and practice" and, secondly, "those people who are for any reason interested in what Christians propose as answers to anthropological questions, and why they say such things" (2009:3). In particular, Kelsey describes the overall end or purpose of his project as "to commend proposals to ecclesial communities about how best to formulate their claims about what and who human beings are and how they ought to be existentially set into and oriented toward their lived worlds" (2009:22). The project's questions are shaped by tradition-particularism[25], and Christian particularism specifically. Whereas Kelsey initially set out to map out his project in terms of intertraditional conversation (which would have wanted to incorporate other theological, as well as nontheological, voices in what could perhaps have been the beginnings of an interdisciplinary study of human being), especially with an eye to a "bridge-building project" (2009:7), he eventually abandoned such a methodology in order to concretely "formulate the theological end of the bridge", in his words (2009:7). For Kelsey, "the claims about human beings that are nonnegotiable for Christian faith are claims about how God relates to human beings" (2009:8), and even though Kelsey does not follow John Calvin (whom he quotes at the beginning of his book) in focusing first and foremost on questions surrounding knowledge of God, he does attempt to follow Calvin in "subordinating claims about humankind to claims about God" (2009:8). Consequently the root question for his theological anthropology is: "*What is implied*

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[25] Which he describes as "patterns of thought and practice that are handed on… that constitute Christian communities" (2009:3 – 6). Kelsey's understanding of 'traditions' (since he himself opts for plural usage, rather than singular usage) comes very close to, and probably presupposes (he also references his work in this regard), Alasdair McIntyre's own understanding of tradition as historically extended, socially embedded argument (1988:12). Cf. for instance Kelsey's description of traditions as "temporally extended" (2009:24).

about human being by the claim that God actively relates to us to create us, to draw us to eschatological consummation, and to reconcile us when we have become estranged from God?" (2009:8; original italics). In what follows in the rest of his 1000-page work, he traces the implications of this question for theological anthropology. It would make much sense for a project in ecological theology to follow suit in tracing the implications of Kelsey's threefold claim about God's relating to all that is not God for, as I would argue, living beings.

Kelsey describes the aim of his book as outlining certain definite patterns that define and describe "the identity of Christian communities' common life" (2009:565). On the whole for Kelsey, "[c]ertain anthropological claims are nonnegotiable for Christian theology… if they are part of a set of claims that are essential to the identity of communities of Christian faith" (2009:564) but "do not exhaust what may properly be said by faith seeking understanding about human beings" (2009:565). These could and would include continual intellectual interaction, conversation and negotiation between Christian, biblical theological claims and cultural wisdom – even if the appropriation of the latter into the former would need to be selective and possibly reformulated[26]. To a great extent, this thesis subscribes to such a methodological focus, even as the theological focus is not limited to human beings, but deliberately broadened to include all living beings.

For Kelsey, theology is ecclesial practice[27], and the subject matter of ecclesial theology God (including all that is related to by God and related to God). Accordingly he characterises his project as "one of several practices that make up the common life of some self-identified communities of Christian faith" (2009:14), so that communal practices inform communal identity (which, he argues, is "formed in us" (2009:15)) of churches as communities of response, "whose responses in various practices to the ways in which God relates to all that is not God are defined more particularly by the christocentric way in which we understand who God is" (2009:15). These responses

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[26] Cf. Kathryn Tanner's *Theories of culture* (1997) in this regard, in which she explores the relationship of theology, anthropology and culture in the spirit of H. Richard Niebuhr's famous *Christ and culture* (1956).

[27] Kelsey defines 'practice' as "*any form of socially established human interactivity that is conceptually formed, is complex and internally coherent, is subject to standards of excellence that partly define it, and is done to some end but does not necessarily have a product*" (Kelsey, 2009:14; original italics).

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manifest in enactment of practices, which entails "public bodily action… not privately devised" that requires "the public of a communally shared social and cultural space (2009:17 – 18). Thus "the common life of ecclesial communities… is a public life lived in public worlds" (2009:18). Ecclesial communities have, however, a single end or *telos* in the public enactments of their common life – namely, "to respond appropriately to the distinctive ways in which God relates to all that is not God" (2009:18), which includes practices that are oriented to God, mixed practices that are oriented both to fellow human beings and God, and mixed practices that are oriented both to nonhuman creatures and God. Kelsey distinguishes in this sense between 'primary theology' and 'secondary theology'.

Primary theology, for Kelsey, is the "self-critical dimension of every practice in the set that comprises the common life of ecclesial communities": "an informal, non-technical, often un-selfconscious engagement in the practice of theology" (2009:19).[28] Secondary theology is "one in the set of practices that makes up the common life of ecclesial communities", which has to do with "received and traditional claims about God and the ways in which God relates to all that is not God, and claims about all else in relation to God" (2009:20). Secondary theology, then, has to do with proposals about who God is and how God relates to all that is not God (and not with proposals about ecclesial communities themselves), which is to shape the identity and practices of Christian ecclesial communities. As such, it is "inherently and analytically descriptive, critical and revisionary practice" (2009:21), a second level of theological practice (whereas primary theology is deemed a first level of theological practice) that re-evaluates and re-interprets the claims and presuppositions of primary theology (cf.

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[28] Kelsey describes his book *Imagining Redemption* (2005) as an exercise in 'primary theology' (Kelsey, 2011:86). The following explanation of the difference of 'primary theology' and 'secondary theology' in his own work is helpful in highlighting the different dynamics at work in the two approaches: "I wrote [*Imagining Redemption*] while I was working on Part II of [*Eccentric Existence*] (the anthropological implications of God's relating to draw all that is not God to eschatological consummation). Where reflection on the Christianly appropriate way to speak pastorally about a family suffering at the terrible illness of a child has usually been guided by reflection on the theological theme of the reconciling efficacy of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Part III of EE), *Imagining Redemption* explores what reflection on the eschatological significance of the resurrection of the crucified Christ might lead one to say to that family about its experience."

2009:132 – 133)[29]. He includes some standards of excellence to which secondary theology must adhere if it is to be defined by the communal identities of ecclesial communities, which includes (1) complying with the person of Jesus, (2) adhering to Holy Scripture, (3) being in line with theological formulations that are relevant or preferable to communities' theological traditions, and (4) providing analyses of the relation between theological formulations and cultural features of ecclesial communities' host societies.

Furthermore, Kelsey identifies three questions (what he calls '*desiderata*') that, singly or in combination, often guide projects in secondary theology and which also provides guidance in this own theological anthropology. These questions are: (1) "What is the logic[30] of *beliefs* that inform the practices composing the common life of communities of Christian faith?" (2009:27; original italics); (2) "What is the logic[31] of *coming to belief* or of coming to faith in God so that one joins with companions in enacting the practices that compose the common life of ecclesial communities?" (2009:27; original italics); (3) "What is the logic of the *life of Christian believing* or the life of Christian faith?" (2009:27; original italics). Kelsey's own project is guided by the first question, namely by the logic of Christian belief(s) in a triune God that relates threefold to all that is not God – by an internal logic that is theocentric[32]. Kelsey relies on Hans Frei's work (1975) for much of the arguments surrounding the inner logic of his project, in particular for shaping his methodology – and even though Kelsey thinks that Hans Frei might be using 'apologetics' too narrowly, he does follow him in the formal proposals that he makes. Indeed, for Kelsey "Frei's formal point is not, Barth-like, to denounce inquiry into the logic of coming to believe (i.e., his narrow sense of apologetics), but to insist on the importance of the *distinction* between it and inquiry into

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[29] "The practice of secondary theology critically examines the communities' received formulations of the beliefs inherent in the practices that compose their common life and shape their personal and communal identities, and to which they appeal in primary theology when they debate the adequacy or appropriateness of the ways in which their practices are currently being enacted" (2009:132).

[30] The notion of 'logic', within this first question, refers to "the formal relation among beliefs" (2009:82) and differs from the understanding of 'logic' in the second question.

[31] The notion of 'logic', within this second question, refers to "a standard process, a kind of curriculum with its own internal logic, through which human beings are said to move in a transition from unbelief to belief or from unfaith to faith" (2009:82), and differs from the understanding of 'logic' in the first question.

[32] Kelsey argues that "theocentricity is a major *desideratum* in theological anthropology" (2009:29).

the logic of belief" (2009:685). Furthermore, Kelsey allows specifically premodern Christian theological anthropology to provide guidance as "the paradigmatic instance of doing theology in a way guided by that question" (2009:40), from which he derives his three proposals for how God relates to human beings in particular, although he does so from an awareness of the problematic inherent in making use of premodern anthropological proposals in early twenty-first century contexts. He identifies his own project as 'Anselmian' (in the sense of "faith seeking understanding" (2009:41)), and is especially cautious that the common life of ecclesial communities (or communities of Christian faith) should involve both believing ("identity-shaping belief" (2009:42)) and acting ("a lived life" (2009:42)) in public spaces. Indeed, the relation between the shaping of communal identity and personal identities is understood in his project to be 'dialectical': "each requires the other to be itself" (2009:42). Finally, Kelsey takes care in trying to "avoid undue systematization of the logic of Christian beliefs" (2009:44), since, following Søren Kierkegaard, "Existence is not a system" (2009:44). Thus Kelsey describes his project as "a project in systematically unsystematic secondary theology" (2009:45).

Moreover, Kelsey' project subscribes to modern theological anthropology's understanding of human being as "a process of self-constitution, a project of self-actualization that beings in mere possibility or potentiality and is only fully actual at its end" (2009:84) over against premodern theological anthropology's understanding of human being as "something given, a gift fully actualized" (2009:84). This posits a dialectical 'self-relation', which constitutes the subject (human being) as a center of consciousness. This "turn to the subject" (Kelsey, 2009:85) may take the form of several versions or types, of which one type is typically adopted as basic to theological anthropology (even where more of these types are incorporated). The first type that Kelsey identifies is that of "subjectivity constituted by self-relating in an act of self-affirmation" (2009:86 – 100), which can entail either moral or religious self-affirmation, and which is identified with the work of Albrecht Ritschl. The second type is that of "subjectivity constituted by self-relating in an act of self-recognition" (2009:100 – 108), which is identified with the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx. The

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third type is that of "subjectivity constituted by self-relating in an act of self-choosing" (2009:108 – 110), which is identified with the work of Søren Kierkegaard.

Kelsey recognises and acknowledges that "all the varieties of the theological-anthropological turn to the subject share two assumptions that are methodologically basic to most Christian theological anthropology in the modern period because they simultaneously ground the unity of anthropology in a single theological *locus* and exhibit anthropology's apologetic power" (2009:85). The first of these assumptions is that "human being is constituted by some sort of process of self-actualization or self-constitution" (2009:85). The second of these assumptions is that "this process can be described in a faith-neutral way" (2009:85), which can serve as potential for both the apologetic project and secondary theological project (if this process is shown to be identical to or to entail the content of Christian theological anthropological claims). Thus it is important to acknowledge that Kelsey's own concern for the 'subject' or theological anthropology that employs 'subjective' thinking on human being is accessible for use both in exposition of the logic of belief ('dogmatics') and of the logic of coming to believe ('apologetics')[33]. Kelsey views these assumptions as advantages for appropriation in theological anthropologies and not necessarily as problematic in themselves, if they serve their respective outcomes. However, he strongly opposes merging outcomes[34], and in particular regards the confusion of the attempt of theological projects to answer the question of the logic of Christian beliefs with the attempt to answer the question of the logic of coming to Christian faith as "a profound conceptual and methodological mistake… in the practice of secondary theology… (in that it) confuses two conceptually different kinds of inquiry" (2009:113). Kelsey describes this as the process of systematically "conflating the questions" (2009:113), and opposes it by way of guarding against "at least four theologically undesirable emphases" (2009:113).

The first problematic emphasis that such conflation systematically leads to is "a theological anthropological denigration of human beings and a correlatively utilitarian and functionalist trivialization of God's relating to human beings" (2009:113), which

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[33] Especially if one agrees that "the stages from unfaith to faith are nothing else than the stages from potential subject to actualized subject, and vice versa" (2009:85).

[34] Wherein one of these assumptions or foci are subjected to or confused with the other – indeed, it is his contention "that they do not serve each other" (2009:112).

privileges God's relating to reconcile and save fallen, sinful human beings and theologically marginalises God's relating to create and God's relating to consummate eschatologically. If properly trinitarian understandings of God structure understanding of the way that God relates to all that is not God, God's reality of relating cannot be reduced to functionalist or utilitarian or instrumentalist understandings. The second problematic emphasis of such conflation is "a quasi-Manichean theological assessment of nonhuman creatures", which is to say, upon this reading, "'nonhuman' means 'non-subjects' – that is, objects" (2009:116). The danger inherent in this sense has to do with conceptual dualism leading to ontological dualism, in that nature and spirit are assigned to opposed realms of reality (which, upon this understanding, is subjectivity and objectivity, respectively). This arguably implies that "nonhuman creaturely reality is evil" (2009:117) in the sense of being 'enemy', which itself has the twofold implication of nature being viewed negatively (ecological implication) and bodies being viewed negatively (anthropological implication). These implications are, for Kelsey, theologically unacceptable. The third problematic emphasis entails dangerous anthropocentrism in relation to all of life (and the environment by name), since "[a]ccounts of what and who human beings are and how they ought to be existentially set into their lived worlds that are systematically oriented to and framed in terms of major human interests are precisely the type of anthropocentric anthropologies that are dangerous to the entire living web of creatures, human and nonhuman" (2009:118).[35] The fourth problematic emphasis leads to "an anthropocentric moralizing of theological anthropology" (2009:118). Interestingly, Kelsey regards it as problematic not only in the sense of constructing God's relating to

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[35] However, Kelsey himself seems to assume a unique relation between God and human beings, even though he interprets 'human being' within the broader framework of God's relating to all that is not God. Descriptions of human beings as the "first among equals" (Kelsey, 2009:281) need not subvert a thesis on ecological theology that is based on Kelsey's theological anthropology, even though it would be imperative to understand properly what Kelsey aims to establish within his broader argument at that point of his book. Keeping in mind his own concern for dangerous anthropocentrism, at the very least an anthropocentric priority is probably not at play here. Indeed, Kelsey understands human beings in terms of God's own threefold relating, the triune God "who relates to each human being as she or he is part of the interrelated web of nonhuman beings constituting all that is not God" (2009:19). Thus, Kelsey himself does not limit what he refers to as 'all that is not God' or 'all that is other than God' to human beings, but includes human beings as one instance of concretely particular, actual living beings as part of a broader, all-reality-and-life-encompassing group.

human beings according to moralising priorities[36] but also in neglecting nonhuman beings within hamartiology. Upon this reading, "[s]in is peculiar to human beings, who alone among all that creatures are morally accountable" (2009:118). The implications for such an approach may have entailed that living beings may probably not be able to respond to God (either appropriately or inappropriately, as indicated here) – but exactly through *not* following this line of thinking, Kelsey's project does allow for responses (and here perhaps exactly *inappropriate* responses, such as sin) of nonhuman living beings to God and fellow living beings. These, then, are the particular consequences of organising theological anthropology around the recognition of sin and the move to salvation, which is highly problematic for Kelsey (as important as it is in theological anthropology). Theological anthropology becomes "systematically anthropocentric in that it is exhaustively concerned with human failure, an exclusively intrahuman defect or distortion (sin) that is in need of correction" (2009:118). Thus, Kelsey's theological anthropology "is confined to an exercise that addresses only the question, 'What is the logic of Christian beliefs?'" (2009:119), in an attempt to avoid the deeply problematic implication of conflating the questions of the logic of belief and the logic of coming to faith.

This does not, however, imply that Kelsey attempts (or needs to attempt) to construct a comprehensive, all-encompassing, systematically coherent exposition of theological anthropology. Throughout his project, Kelsey does not shy away from open questions and loose ends in arguments that he might make, in particular where concrete, coherent and theologically justifiable responses and answers are not possible. However, in his own words, "[h]aving such loose ends in a theological discussion can be justified only by a justification for keeping certain legitimate theological questions open while arguing the correctness of certain proposed answers to others" (2009:564). Kelsey makes a very deliberate move, especially with regards to open questions or "theological loose ends" (2009:558), in interpreting responses or answers to these as eccentric to humanity rather than as intrinsic to humanity. For instance, in dealing with an exposition of some sort of basis for the creaturely continuity of eschatologically consummated human bodies,

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[36] Upon this understanding, God's relating entails moving human beings from being sinful to being good, which operates on the assumption that human are "morally responsible agents" (2009:118).

Kelsey moves to interpret the "sameness" of living bodies before and after death not through reliance upon dualist theories of immortal souls (as intrinsic to humanity), but through the proposal that God relates to all that is not God (as extrinsic to humanity[37]). Since Kelsey does not object to the reliance upon or partnership of philosophical or scientific arguments and theology to address and tie up theological loose ends[38], and neither his methodology nor the integrity of his project is compromised by leaving theological loose ends or open questions intact. On a technical point, he also does not shy away from these questions due to his methodological objection to 'conflating the questions' – confusing the project of discerning the logic of belief with the logic of coming to belief, or apologetics – and is quite comfortable with the employment of apologetic arguments in addressing these if the arguments in themselves are appropriate and coherent, and if nonnegotiable theological claims trump philosophical or apologetic arguments in instances where incoherencies abound in the relationship between the two (cf. Kelsey, 2009:80 – 82).

In the interest of maintaining the logical and formal relationship between concepts and issues in his project Kelsey makes use of particular 'background beliefs' to give shape to his proposals. Background beliefs shape Kelsey's project to a great extent[39]. Kelsey identifies two broad types that are background to any anthropology. The first is the plural "*proximate contexts* of our lives, the physical and social worlds in which we live" (2009:4; original italics) and the second is the singular "*ultimate context* in which we live, the context that is most fundamental and decisive regarding what, how, and who we are" (2009:4; original italics). Kelsey approaches the exposition of living beings' contexts by referring to their 'ultimate' and 'proximate' contexts – moreover, with the latter in mind, he makes specific use of the concept of the "quotidian", which is meant to indicate "a society of everyday being", spaces and times (finite realities) that God creates

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[37] Indeed, "no basis for that continuity needs to be found within their creaturely 'what' because it lies eccentrically in the triune God's active creative relating to them" (2009:563).

[38] In his words, "I see no Christian theological grounds on which to resist use of philosophical arguments in the effort to tie up loose ends left by questions kept open by an exercise in dogmatic theology" (2009:566).

[39] Being "parts of the traditions of thought and practice that compose the common life of living communities, in this case, communities of Christian faith" (2009:4) and thus constitutive of the conceptual context in which theological anthropological questions are asked.

and wherein creatures are said to function (2009:190).[40] Kelsey's own aim in his project is interpreting human beings in their proximate and ultimate contexts, and he gives important insight into how he understands the relationship of the proximate context to the ultimate context of God's active relating to all living beings.

Importantly, the (singular) 'ontological identity' of the God who relates to create, to draw into eschatological consummation, and to reconcile establishes the singularity and the identity of the ultimate context of created living beings, and the various pictures or understandings of the ultimate context of human or nonhuman created beings do not stand in competition to one another. Rather, "[t]he distinguishable ways in which the triune God relates to us mean that our ultimate context is complex, but it is one ultimate context" (Kelsey, 2009:447). Like different hermeneutics may reveal various images or understandings of certain characters in Christian Scripture, so too the various modes of God's relating to all that is not God shed light on different aspects and features of the very same ultimate context in which created life is concretely situated. Since God's own ontological identity, according to Kelsey, situates and secures the identity of the ultimate context of life, the ultimate context cannot but be (1) singular and coherent by virtue of God's singularity, (2) diverse and complex by virtue of God's complex and diverse ways of relating, and (3) concrete and stable by virtue of God's own initial, free relating. God's relating is consistent, and so too in its being free, loving, creative, giftlike and gracelike. Thus, the ultimate context of living beings are the continuous relating of God to them, while the outcomes of God's threefold relating define the proximate contexts of all that is not God.

In summary, Kelsey makes use of clear methodological markers and structures to shape his project and to answer the questions as to what his project is on, for whom his project is written, and how the arguments that constitute his project are laid out. In the first instance, he describes the aim of his project as secondary theology that is concerned with the logic of beliefs, which shapes the expectation of the readers and describes the appropriate methodological lens with which to interpret his proposals. In the second instance, he employs clear narrative logic to describe and to distinguish between his three

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[40] Kelsey relates the quotidian and the understanding of contextual worlds in his usage of such concepts as "quotidian worlds" (cf. Kelsey, 2009:512, 514, 518 and so forth).

proposals – the various ways in which God relates to all that is not God – and to structure the underlying relationships of all the proposals. Thirdly, Kelsey describes and maps out the background beliefs (of the ultimate and proximate contexts of all living beings) that concretises and actualises his proposals with regards to the contexts of God relating to all that is not God.

Although Kelsey often invests great energy in giving clarity as to how he employs concepts (as well as the underlying relationships between related concepts), he displays a clear preference for open-endedness and deliberate vagueness in describing the relations between concepts, in a calculated move against closed coherency. As such, he prefers to approach the core of his project (namely, human beings) as 'mystery' rather than 'system', which is expressed through his use of the metaphor of the 'triple helix' to explain the inherent coherency and relationship of the various parts of his project (2009:900). This thesis, as descriptive rather than prescriptive study, would echo Kelsey's preference not so much for conceptual open-endedness (which Kelsey himself argues for, but which may allow space for ambiguous or wrongful interpretations of concepts and arguments) as for a greater suppleness, flexibility and adaptability in structure with regards to both the conceptual framework employed and the proposals made in this thesis, whilst adhering to the guidance and the form that the various structures in Kelsey's project provide. This becomes particularly important for a thesis that would engage Kelsey's theological anthropology to construct a basis for ecological theology.

2.3   God relating to all that is not God

David Kelsey describes his project as a theological anthropology (as the subtitle of his book also indicates), and defines theological anthropology as "an account from the perspective of the Christian faith of what it means to be a human being" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009). For Kelsey, the root question for Christian anthropology consequently is "What is implied about human personhood by the claim that God actively relates to us?" (2009:46) – which, in turn, asks questions as to who or what God is. Kelsey chooses to start with classical Christian

understandings of God, which are trinitarian[41], and to trace the implications that such an understanding might have for theological anthropology. The use of the triadic expression of how God is understood is self-involving, in that it "arose in identity-shaping Christian practices" (2009:48) and thus shapes personal identity in community.[42] Kelsey makes use of traditional triadic liturgical and confessional formulas to gain greater understanding into trinitarian descriptions of God and God's active relating to all that is not God, and comes to understand the One with whom human persons (and, one might add, all that God relates to, which is all that is not God, which is all living beings and all of life) ultimately have to do as "the immanent eternal life of the triune God… constituted by the communion-in-community of the three perichoretic hypostases [that are] freely and in love giving and receiving Godself eternally" (2009:120). This is important if God's relating is understood as "active, self-involving and self-expressive" (2009:59). Kelsey is careful to distinguish between triadic and trinitarian understandings of God[43], and it is in the Nicean Creed[44] that he finds trinitarian theology suitable for informing and structuring his project. For Kelsey, the Nicean Creed fulfills three roles with regard to theological anthropology, namely liturgical, rhetorical and methodological. The liturgical role of the Creed emphasises liturgy and worship as contexts of the Creed, within which Christian communities commit themselves publicly and personally, individually and together, to the particular trinitarian understanding of God that governs the Nicean Creed. The rhetorical role of the Creed provides the language with which to respond appropriately to God's relating to all that is not God, ourselves as human beings included. The methodological role of the Creed underlines the conceptual order in understanding the threefold relating of God – in particular, "an understanding of God's relation to all else as its Creator had a conceptual priority to understanding of God's relation to all else

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[41] Kelsey defines his use of 'trinitarian' as "any understanding of God that is accountable to the Nicene Creed as summarized in the more recently conventional formula: God is one substance in three persons" (2009:46).

[42] For Kelsey "the triadic formula serves to give an identity description, not only of God, but also of its users" (2009:48).

[43] Indeed, he sees the movement from triadic to later trinitarian understandings of God as "rooted in Christian communities' practice, fundamental to their common life, of interpreting biblical stories about God relating to humankind… [and in] practices of worship" (2009:78).

[44] Which, he is careful to maintain, is "a Trinitarian creed, not a Trinitarian doctrine of God" which "functions meta-doctrinally, as a norm for assessing doctrinal proposals" (2009:61).

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as its Savior" (2009:65) – and, at the same time, the normativity of "an understanding of Jesus Christ[45]… for knowledge of God as triune" (2009:65). These points, particularly the last role that Nicea fulfills, shape the procedure of Kelsey's theological anthropological project, since "[i]f what we say about human persons is rooted in the ways in which God relates to us, and if God is understood in a Trinitarian way, then what we say will be christocentric, albeit only indirectly so" (2009:65).[46] Thus, theological claims about humankind (and, I will argue, all of life) are rooted in claims about God relating to all that is not God and is to be shaped by Christian theological appropriate understandings of a trinitarian God.

Within "[t]he process leading to discovery of properly Trinitarian understanding of God" (2009:120), Kelsey relates his reflection on triadic liturgical formulas to three sets of scriptural stories of God relating to all that is not God, which, for Kelsey, describe a broad understanding of the divine economy. Since God is community-in-communion, three persons that relate to one another perichoretically, and since the patterns in the sets of stories about God's creating, eschatologically consummating, and reconciling constantly changes, what Kelsey calls 'complexification' or 'assymetries' arise from God's relating to living beings. He identifies two asymmetries, both having to do with the priority and interrelationships of proposals. Firstly, "God's creating is ontologically prior to and logically independent of God's drawing creatures to eschatological consummation and God's reconciling them" (2009:121). The existence of beings to draw into eschatological consummation or reconciliation is assumed in both second and third proposals of God's relating, even as eschatological consummation or reconciliation of living beings need not be assumed for the first proposal of God's relating to hold water. Secondly, "God's relating to creatures to consummate them and God's relating to creatures to reconcile them are themselves complexly interrelated" (2009:122). Both stories rely upon the story of Jesus in order to be expounded, and so are both inseparable and distinguishable. However, for Kelsey, even though "nothing about the stories of God drawing creatures to eschatological consummation entails that creatures must also be in

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[45] Kelsey opts for consistent usage of 'Jesus as Nazareth' (cf., for instance, Kelsey, 2009:866) instead of some other formulations, such as Jesus Christ (although he does sometimes employ the term 'Son of God' to refer to Jesus, especially within the various taxes), throughout his project.

[46] Since, Kelsey argues, Christian theology privileges christocentric understandings (cf. Kelsey, 2009:186).

need of reconciliation", "God's reconciling of creatures does seem to be partly dependent on God's drawing them to eschatological consummation" (2009:122). At first reading it might seem as if Kelsey is in fact arguing for the relation of the second and the third stories to be understood in a different way, namely that God's eschatological consummation is in some way dependent upon God's reconciling of estranged creatures destined for eschatological glory.[47] This might be in some way ascribed to the traditional pathways carved into systematic theological thinking, wherein it is argued accordingly that God creates, Jesus reconciles, and the Spirit eschatologically consummates. Apart from Kelsey's careful insistence that not one person of the Trinity relates in each instance, but that the triune God perichoretically relates threefold to all that is not God, he holds that the order ("of being (though not necessarily in temporal order)" (2009:126)) of proposals be that of God's relating to create, to draw into eschatological consummation, and to reconcile. Indeed, "the narrative of the triune God relating to reconcile presupposes the narrative of the triune God relating to draw to eschatological consummation, but it is not necessarily entailed by the latter" (2009:761). In this sense, Kelsey breaks with many traditional formulations and expositions of systematic theology, where creation, then reconciliation, and only then eschatological consummation are discussed. His motivations for this order seem to resonate with his concern for the importance of Christology in Christian theology and rigorous methodological thinking on the constitution and interrelationship of the various biblical stories of God's relating (cf. 2009:121 – 122) which is made clear through his use of the metaphor of a 'triple helix', discussed in chapter 6.

Kelsey makes use of his characteristic *taxis* or 'shift in pattern' to expound on how God relates to all that is not God in each instance, in what he describes as "the relations among the three central characters (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) [that] are plotted in a different pattern [so] that [it] gives each type of story a distinctly different character" (2009:122). Since Kelsey's project advocates Trinitarian understandings of God and human being, the threefold proposal that Kelsey puts forth "requires a differentiated

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[47] The reasoning behind the following argument might highlight this: "If God is drawing creatures to an eschatological consummation that is a creaturely participation in the divine life, marked by holiness, and if those creatures are in fact alienated from God and are thus unholy, then drawing them to consummation does entail reconciling them" (2009:122).

Trinitarian characterization of each of the three ways in which the triune God relates to all that is not God", by which Kelsey describes his use of the different taxes in the three proposals as "Trinitarianly differentiated characterizations of the triune God's three ways of relating to all else" (2009:915). Three questions flow, for Kelsey, from the core question of God's relating to human beings, and so this thesis will offer suitably adapted versions of these questions to structure the proposal of God relating to all living beings and all of life, in the course of inquiring into God's relating to the earth and her ecology. This thesis poses the questions "What is created life?", in line with Kelsey's "What are we?" (chapter 3), "How ought eschatologically consummated life be?" in line with Kelsey's "How ought we be?" (chapter 4), and "Who is reconciled life?" in line with Kelsey's "Who am I and who are we?" (chapter 5). Even though each part of Kelsey's project is expected to address one of these three specific questions, Kelsey also expects these three proposals to address all three questions as well (2009:914 – 915). Recalling the background beliefs that structure Kelsey's proposal in yet another way, the three questions are questions defining our ultimate contexts in particular, which define the personal identities of living beings in the proximate context in turn.

Theological anthropology does not stop at describing the ways in which God relates to human beings, but also differentiates between appropriate and inappropriate responses to these ways of relating. Appropriate responses to God's threefold relating are expressed in a "set of practices", which is "socially established cooperative human actions enacted by personal bodies[48] in their quotidian lived worlds" (2009:848). Each of these enactments are said to express or constitute an existential how of a personal body, which is "the concrete way in which she is set into her lived world at the time and place of the enactment" (2009:848). Indeed, Kelsey makes use of the concept of 'existential how' to describe "a particular way in which a human personal body in community takes charge of herself at some particular point in time, concretely orienting herself to and setting herself within her proximate context in its concrete particularity in time and

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[48] Kelsey borrows the term "personal bodies" from Paul Ricoeur to characterise creatureliness in a way that seeks to give expression to the embodied identity of personal living beings and that tries to avoid the conventional contrastive pairs of descriptions that define identity and persons, such as body and soul, or objectivity and subjectivity, or nature and history, or individual and communal relationships. With this in mind, he defines specifically human created beings as "personal bodies having a complex array of capacities for exercising various types of power" (2009:482).

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place" (2009:739). This means that an existential how is not a lifestyle or an ethic, but does involve the finite capacities of personal bodies, which Kelsey describes as "capacities to take charge of themselves" (2009:740). This taking charge cannot be an autonomous act, if human personal bodies are eccentrically constituted and posited through God's threefold relating to them, but involves the public enactment of appropriate responses to God relating in particular ways, "an orientation in action in and toward one's public proximate contexts that decisively shapes one's wanting, thinking, and feeling" (2009:803). Lastly, "the acts in which human personal bodies do take charge of themselves, constituting their existential 'hows', are acts they only enact as creaturely personal bodies related to creatively by God, drawn by God to eschatological consummation, and structurally reconciled by God despite their estrangement from God" (2009:740). Kelsey employs the notion of 'existential hows' to describe the way in which a personal body concretely and particularly orients itself to and situates itself within its proximate context. Existence presupposes concrete, contextual setting in space and time, but is more than just a given – it is also understood, in existential-phenomenological thought, as a task, or as the subjective and intentional and active situating of the subject in a particular setting in such a manner that it constitutes the subject's existence. This follows that the criteria for the assessment of existential hows involve, firstly, whether it either clarifies or obscures consciousness. and secondly, whether it either preserves or subverts "ontologically ungrounded free self-determination" (2009:341). Within a specifically theocentric account of human flourishing, Kelsey employs "how" to refer to the accountability and responsibility of personal living bodies for the ways in which they respond to God's relating creatively, relating to draw into eschatological consummation, and relating to reconcile. Thus the 'hows' referred to in this dissertation, as in Kelsey's book, are not mere modalities of subjectivities, but are responses "in the power of the Spirit", as (1) "concrete ways of being self-situated in proximate contexts that involve all of a personal body's entire array of powers", as (2) acts "conceptually formed by the communities of which those personal bodies are members and their traditions", and as (3) "radically autonomous" (2009:341).

Appropriate responses are responses appropriate to each of the three particular manners of relating, and defined by Kelsey as "personal bodies' attitude in which they

are oriented toward their ultimate and proximate contexts" (2009:501). In particular, these responses are enacted in a "set of practices", "socially established cooperative human actions enacted by living human personal bodies in their quotidian lived worlds" (2009:568), that constitute what Kelsey calls the "existential hows" of personal bodies. Accordingly, each set of appropriate responses (in accordance to each of the three ways of God's relating to all that is not God) entail an indefinite range and number of appropriate existential hows that could and would make concrete living, personal bodies' appropriate responses to God's threefold relating. When distorted (which Kelsey consistently terms "sins in the plural"), inappropriate responses and distorted existential hows are formal and structural in their distortion, which means to say that the ground for their faith (in response to God relating to create), hope (in response to God relating to consummate eschatologically) and love (in response to God relating to reconcile) is misconstrued either by not being centered to God, not expressive towards the ultimate context of being related to by God, or by not maintaining the concrete, particular, creaturely integrity of being expressive towards and within the proximate context of being related to by God.

The stories that are related to the modes of relating Kelsey mentions rely on (1) Jesus as the central figure and (2) their relation to stories of God relating to the covenant people Israel. However, it is God's own purposes that drive the movement of the narrative of God's relating to all that is not God, namely God's will that created life flourish, that creatures be fully actualised in eschatological consummation, and that Godself be entered into loving communion with created beings. However, even as he engages in this project, Kelsey warns of the irreducible differences among the three proposals that seek to describe the way that God relates to all that is not God, since "[n]o single monolithic story can be told about God's relating to us" (2009:130). If there is, as Kelsey argues, neither a single, simple Christian meta-narrative nor any Christian anthropological meta-theory, then so too can there be no Christian ecological meta-theory. Human beings, like arguably all living beings constituted by God, "are in their own way too richly glorious, too inexhaustibly incomprehensible, too capable of profound distortions and bondage in living deaths, too capable of holiness, in short, *too mysterious*, to be captured in that fashion" (2009:131; my italics). With this in mind, it is

important to the logical development of a thesis such as this one that the carefully constructed priorities of the framework employed are kept in mind. Apart from the very strong substantiation that this provides for the order of the proposals addressed in the research done here, a second reason would substantiate the very deliberate order of proposals addressed. In many ecological theological studies texts and arguments in and for doctrines of creation are used singularly or solely or primarily to formulate and in support of theses concerning the preservation and protection of the earth and her ecology. Thus, this study proposes to move from more familiar ground to more unfamiliar ground in its different foci on God's ways of relating to all that is not God.

In summary, this thesis would need to follow Kelsey's lead in interpreting the ways in which God relates to all living beings and all of life, to the earth and her ecology, if it is to engage Kelsey's project as basis for ecological theology. If Kelsey's project concerns God relating to all that is not God in certain ways, then not only the proposals of the various ways in which God relates, but also the logic behind the various ways in which Kelsey structures these proposals must hold true in this thesis. The greatest challenge to an ecological theology will probably be Kelsey's rigidity around the logic of beliefs being held separate from the logic of coming to believe – but this might also prove to be the biggest strength of Kelsey's project for constructing a basis for ecological theology. Apart from the great opportunities and challenges that such a structure may provide, it ought to be recognised that ecological theologies probably have a limited or no conceptual framework to describe the ways in which God relates to the earth and her ecology or the ways in which the earth and her ecology, living beings and all of life, respond to God's relating.

2.4   Christian canonical Holy Scripture[49]

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[49] Kelsey's earlier book, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (published in 1975, and republished in 1999 under the title *Proving Doctrine. The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*), probably forms part of the background to Kelsey's thinking on Christian canonical Holy Scripture here. In this book, Kelsey explores three questions, surrounding the issues of texts, context and pretext: "When a theologian takes biblical texts as scripture authoritative for theology, what decisions does he make about these texts? What decisions does he make about the setting in which the texts will be used? And what decisions does he make before ever turning to the texts at all?" Kelsey's affinity for dividing his thinking and work into three parts comes into play in this book too, where he makes use of three parts to structure his book, namely construing the text (part 1), using the text (part 2) and theology and scripture (part 3). He admits to the influence (and feedback) of George Lindbeck, Wayne Meeks, Charles Powers, John Schutz and, of course,

In the interest of good hermeneutics and methodology it would be pertinent not only to give proper account of the logical and formal relations between the different parts and concepts of Kelsey's project, but also to inquire as to which sources are used to do this – and, indeed, how they are used. Kelsey's use of biblical texts is important in an introductory chapter that would seek to pay attention to the methodology that he makes use of in his book. Throughout his project Kelsey employs the insights gained from biblical reflection to shape his proposals, so much so that he does not claim to make original contributions to biblical studies, but is content to rely upon the insights of biblical scholars (cf. 2009:649). However, it is of even greater importance to understand not only how Kelsey approaches the use of biblical texts and reflection in his project, but also how he views the relationship between the practices of secondary theology and the use of biblical texts within these.

Kelsey opts for a description of biblical texts as "Christian canonical Holy Scripture" (2009:132) and deems the accountability of theological proposals made in secondary theology to Christian canonical Holy Scripture, *as* canonical Holy Scripture, to be core. Indeed, as Kelsey would claim elsewhere (1975:1; original italics), "any Christian theology worthy of the name 'Christian' must, in *some* sense of the phrase, be done' in accord with scripture'". 'Scripture', however, is not one standard concept, but is "concretely construed in irreducibly different ways" (Kelsey, 1975:2). Even more, he regards canonical Holy Scripture "one of the substantive standards of excellence internal to the practice of secondary theology" (2009:132)) to his project. Study of texts is, however, not regarded as objective or devoid of interests, but as "always governed by some type of interest or set of interests in the texts" (2009:133) which construe texts in different ways and in distinctive ways that discipline the study of the texts themselves. As such, a particular interpretation of texts may highlight particular features, and a particular understanding of a text that may be "overwhelmingly persuasive of its kind", although it would "in no way establish that interpretation as the definitive account of *the* meaning of the text" (2009:134 – 135; original italics).[50] Kelsey understands 'Bible' to mean "either

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Hans Frei (1975:ix) – the last of which also played an enormous role in the development and construction of his theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence*, as he himself would admit in the book.

[50] Kelsey does not regard the task of interpretation of a text as making clear *the* meaning of a text (as if texts are governed by a single interpretation or the property of meaning), but is of the opinion that many

of two overlapping, historically contingent collections of ancient texts" (2009:135), which he calls the 'Hebrew bible' and the 'Christian bible'. Each of these collections contains a variety of literary genres, historical contexts and diversity of subjects, although neither constitutes systematic unity of any kind. He identifies two modes of disciplined study of these collections that are invited by the texts themselves, namely literary-critical and historical-critical study, but regards the only valid (albeit broad and generalised) description of their content as being about God, the ways in which God relates to living beings in particular, and the ways in which human living beings ought to respond to God in relating to God and fellow living beings. Kelsey understands 'Scripture' by way of the phenomenology of religion, as "texts that play important roles in the life of religious communities" (2009:136). 'Holy Scripture', then (2009:137; original italics), is

texts that are lived with in the common life of certain ecclesial communities that *explicitly* trust that God works through the communities' employment of those texts to call them into being as communities seeking to respond appropriately to the ways in which God relates to them, to nurture and guide their common life, and, when their common life is not an appropriate response to God, to bring that to light and to correct it.

Whereas 'Scripture', then, can be "adequately identified and described nontheologically, without reference to God" (2009:136), 'Holy Scripture' "cannot be adequately identified or described precisely as Holy Scripture except by reference to God – that is, theologically" (2009:137). The holiness of Scripture, however, is not intrinsic to those texts (whether by way of their content, context, literary genres, or other classifications) but is derived from the holiness of the God of whom they give account and who works through them "as they are employed in the communities' practices in response to God" (2009:138). The holiness of Scripture implies authority, in the sense that "[e]cclesial communities' acknowledgment that the texts of the Christian Bible are Holy Scripture… amounts to a self-involving performative act of acknowledgment that the texts have a certain authority in their common life" (2009:138). This authority is not ascribed, but regarded as 'primary authority', in that it is "'lived with' in the practices composing the common life of ecclesial communities" (2009:138).

Kelsey is careful to distinguish stipulations and understandings of authority from historical processes of canonisation (although he would admit to functionalist

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meanings and interests may play in on interpreting canonical Holy Scripture – indeed, interpretation is to be underdetermined (Kelsey, 2009:133- 135, following Fowl, 1998:56 – 61).

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understandings of texts as canonical). The authority or canonicity of Holy Scripture entails "an overall attitude of respect" (2009:140), which approaches texts in the particular, intelligible and self-consistent attitude of respect that regards texts as important, multi-dimensional, multi-layered and relevant.[51] Moreover, "[t]he existential interests that govern study of the Christian Bible as Holy Scripture clearly focus primarily on God" (2009:141) and, in turn, understands God in terms of the person of Jesus. Such interests, focus and understanding are "brought to disciplined study of these texts construed as Holy Scripture" (2009:141), which Kelsey regards as a type of *phronesis*. Kelsey describes *phronesis* as a fourth mode of disciplined study[52], namely "practical know-how" (2009:42), which requires "practical reasoning" (or "critical and self-critical knowing" (2009:142)) and the "capacities for good judgment, (paradigmatic) imagination and trained perception" (2009:142). Moreover, *phronesis* is regarded as essential to every mode of disciplined study of texts, since "technical information is not self-interpreting" (2009:147) and since "any responsible effort to explicate biblical texts as Holy Scripture must be a critical explication" (2009:147). Finally, 'canonical Holy Scripture' is understood by Kelsey (2009:147 – 148) to designate

the collection of the very same texts (the Christian Bible) when they are explicitly acknowledged (Christian Holy Scripture) by certain communities of Christian faith to be a determinate set of texts whose employment by the community in many practices that constitute their common life is the medium in, through, and under which God works to call the community into being; nurture and sustain it; and, when necessary, correct and reform the ways they seek in their common life to respond appropriately to God's ways of relating to them.

It is exactly to this collection of Holy Scripture (which Kelsey regards as a set) as *canonical* (that is to say, as a measuring ruler or source of authority) that secondary theology is accountable. Kelsey understands the canon of Holy Scriptures to be

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[51] Biblical texts are, for Kelsey, not always employed to assert or propose a particular argument or doctrine or way of thinking, but *is* always 'used' to shape Christian identity: "God 'uses' the church's various uses of scripture in her common life to nurture and reform the self-identity both of the community and of the individual persons who comprise it" (1975:214). "Theological proposals", then, "are to elucidate what that identity is and ought to be, and what reforms are called for and why" (1975:214) – keeping in mind that "[t]heological proposals are concerned with what God is now using scripture to do" and that "no degree of sophistication in theological methodology can hope to anticipate that!" (1975:215 – 216).

[52] In addition to rigorous study of the same texts by way of "literary, historical or social-scientific disciplines" (2009:146).

authoritative in a twofold sense, namely (1) as self-involving texts[53] and (2) as texts that call for accountability[54]. The canonicity of Holy Scripture is not understood as a uniform whole of a collection of texts, but rather as a diverse, concretely particular collection of edited texts that "has the formal character of a certain kind of whole" (2009:152). Thus, the formal wholeness of the canon of Holy Scripture does *not* imply that the canon can be regarded as a closed set, or that "all that texts in the canonical set are equally important" (2009:153), or that only one type of construal or interpretation of Holy Scripture is acceptable, or that New Testament and Old Testament texts need to be related to one another in any (and only) one, particular way. The formal wholeness of the canon of Holy Scripture *does*, however, imply that: "what is acknowledged as canonical is the received – canonically edited – version of the texts" (2009:155); the set of collection of texts "has an internal bipartite structure", namely Old and New Testaments respectively (2009:156); this set is "some kind of whole made up of texts that are so different from one another in many important respects as to be incapable of harmonization" (2009:156).

Kelsey makes two conclusions about the wholeness of the collection of texts of Christian canonical Holy Scripture that are important for his project. Firstly, he regards Holy Scripture as some kind of whole, although he does not subscribe to any one particular understanding of the wholeness of Holy Scripture. Secondly, the assumption of a particular kind of wholeness of Holy Scripture is important when holding the theological proposals of secondary theology accountable to Holy Scripture, and, as such, he takes the sets of interests that govern interpretation and study of Holy Scripture seriously.

In his project, Kelsey seeks to address the question "In what ways does God relate to all that is not God?" through canonical Holy Scripture's narratives. The importance of stories to Kelsey, in trying to give an account of God's relating to all that is not God, firstly has to do with the fact that these relations "have conventionally been held accountable to stories throughout canonical Holy Scripture" (2009:459). The differences in the stories, however, do not lie in the different attitudes or dispositions attributed to

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[53] "[I]n their roles in ecclesial communities' practices, authoring determinate communal and personal identities" (2009:150).

[54] In "their authority as the set of texts, listed in the canon, to which the particular practice of secondary theology is accountable" (2009:150).

God in the stories themselves. Kelsey does admit that "[t]he act of classifying canonical stories of God relating to all else as stories of distinct types of ways in which God relates is grounded in an act of imaginative judgment" (2009:459). Acts of imaginative judgment are employed to organise canonical stories of God relating to all that is not God into an array of modes of relating and to construe a single or unifying, overarching narrative (for which the modes of relating are moments in the narrative, and which in itself is an "act of paradigmatic imagination"). Kelsey reminds readers that such narratives are not in and of themselves found in canonical Holy Scripture, and could always be contested by appealing to stories that do not fit with the particular paradigmatic, imaginative judgment. Furthermore, Kelsey cautions that "each of the variations on the overall narrative tends to absorb stories of other types of ways in which God relates to all that is not God into the set of stories that tell of some one type of way in which God relates to all else" (2009:468). It is of theological interest for the projects of secondary theology to resist such absorptions, if it is to resist "domesticating in dangerously misleading ways the complexity, ambiguity and fierceness of God" (2009:468). Kelsey explains this by maintaining the distinctive differences between stories of God relating creatively and stories of God relating through the person of Jesus, which is of great importance to secondary theology's internal standard of excellence that is to be held accountable to canonical Holy Scripture. The two sets of stories have different plots, and Kelsey warns of employing a binary structure in such a project, whereby "these versions of the overall canon-unifying narrative is doubly plotted" (2009:468), "organized and related to each other in a reciprocal dialectic" (2009:469) and yet "systematic in the specific sense of requiring attention to these interconnections and their systematic consequences" (2009:470). It is evident in the various ways in which the overall structure of theological proposals and stories can be imaginatively judged, grounded, ordered and appropriated that binary structures are particularly dangerous, unstable and vulnerable to collapse and absorption of stories into established modes of interpretation. Kelsey is especially concerned for not harmonising, oversimplifying or domesticating the wildness and the fierceness of the God who relates to all that is not God in mysterious and complex ways[55]. Thus, Kelsey's project relies on a counterproposal to a binary structure for

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[55] Which could have interesting connotations not merely for new ways of looking at the wildness and

digesting theological anthropology. The alternative he proposes is expressed by the metaphor of the 'triple helix', so that three (and not two) basic plots and thus three (and not two) basic types of stories structure an overall canon-unifying narrative of God's relating to all that is not God. Stories of God relating eschatologically and God relating to reconcile are distinct and yet wound around and bound to one another in their being stories that have Jesus of Nazareth as their central figure and Jesus' life and death as their central plot. In addition, the pair of these stories are wound around and bound to the story of God relating creatively, "from which they are inseparable because they necessarily presuppose it, but into which they cannot be absorbed" (2009:476). The logics of these distinct narratives are bound to one another in the model of a triple helix, but do not follow in a linear or chronological pattern on one another, and cannot be absorbed into one another's plots or narrative logics. Additionally, the triplex structure attempts to stay true to the inherent standard of secondary theology's aim to attend and protect the complex and different theological *loci* from conflation into one, basic theological *locus.* Thus, this project organises its anthropological proposals "around the poles of three, not two, logically more basic theological claims about God: God relating to create, God relating to consummate eschatologically, and God relating to reconcile" (2009:477). Finally, Kelsey mentions that it is only in applying these methodological structures and frameworks that the proposals are tested and proven. Indeed (2009:477),

> The meaning and merit of methodological proposals like these only come clear when they are actually followed and inscripted (embodied?) in some exercise of the practice of secondary theology. This project in theological anthropology offers just that.

Kelsey's deliberation on Christian canonical Holy Scripture (and his use of the metaphor of the 'triple helix' to describe the underlying relationships of the three proposals of his project) provides crucial insight into the methodology underlying his project, and already points toward the close connection between Christian doctrine and theological anthropology that will become clearer throughout his proposals. A second pointer to this link is his discussion of the 'unsubstitutable personal identities' of human beings which is assumed in all of his three proposals, and is therefore a second crucial aspect to receive attention in this chapter.

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fierceness of life, and especially nature, as not contra God or humankind, but also as reflecting on the mysteriousness of God's own living self as basis for understanding living beings and all of life.

2.5　　Unsubstitutable personal identity

Unsubstitutable personal identity is an important notion used by Kelsey in his description of the identity of persons in his theological anthropology. He discusses the uses of 'person' in the Cappadocians[56], Richard of St. Victor[57], Boethius[58], United States Law[59], Enlightenment thinking[60], and Marcel Mauss[61], in order to give the reader some feel for current and dominant understandings of 'person'. Kelsey argues that a major problem in trying to employ a theological notion of the concept of 'person' within a Christian theological anthropology is the power behind or domination of a particular cultural understanding of 'person'. In his analysis of how Michael Welker[62], Hans Frei[63], and Christoph Schwoebel[64] (Kelsey, 2009:357 – 371) contributes to thinking on 'person' in theological anthropology, Kelsey comes to the conclusion that "a person is to be identified with the entire dialectic of private self-expressivity self-manifested publicly – that is, 'in difference'" (2009:368). Interestingly, Schwoebel remarks on the person as constituted by intrasubjective relations, which themselves are located within a larger variety and set of relations – such as, for instance, human persons' relations with "other parts of the animal world" (Kelsey, 2009:372); quoting Schwoebel, 1991:141). This last remark again opens up Kelsey's argument for identity not being understood only in relation to God or similar beings or persons of the same species or DNA, but as set within a "larger array of relations", as Kelsey calls it.

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[56] Where 'persons' are "relations in being".

[57] Where a 'person' is an incommunicable existence of a particular nature –and, in the context of trinitarian discourse, divine nature.

[58] Where 'persons' are "centers of agency".

[59] Where a 'person' has legal rights.

[60] Where a 'person' is a "center of conciousness".

[61] Wherein it is emphasised that understanding of the concept of 'person' has changed rapidly and profoundly over the course of history, but nonetheless involves some sort of teleological process.

[62] Where a 'person' is explained through the trope of the 'mask' for assisting a modern understanding of 'person', and, furthermore, is to be understood as a mediation between the two poles of human uniqueness and representivity of the human species.

[63] Where the trope of "self-expressivity" or "self-expression" is used to explain 'person', especially with regards to the dialectic of human persons' public self-expressed self-manifestation.

[64] Where the trope of "relational being" in the sense of "self-relating" is used to explain 'person'.

However, Kelsey proceeds by arguing that there are strong theological reasons for not adopting the modern concept of 'person' uncritically or in an unqualified manner. For these very reasons he then decides to put aside the notion of 'person', and reverts to making use of the concept of 'personal identity'. He very specifically ascribes 'identity' in this sense to the category of "human beings" understood theocentrically, namely in the relations of God and human beings to one another. Furthermore, 'personal' qualifies 'identity' by at once referring to what it means to be living being and to what it means to have unconditional dignity and worth in God's relating to them. Singularity defines this personal identity further, in that this identity "lies in the sequence of these dynamic intentional interactions and events of interpretation that cumulatively are integral to one singular life" (2009:379), and in that the singularity of this identity "lies in the peculiar ways in which that human creature engages in those actions, interactions and appropriations" (2009:380) so that singularity, he points out, is inherent to the very being and acting of a living personal human body's identity. This singularity manifests itself contextually, and so living beings' quotidian identities are understood as a "negotiated combination of a social construct or constructs provided by the quotidian proximate context and an original self-construct by the human being" (2009:382).

Being partly socially constructed and partly self-constructed, human beings' quotidian identities consist of four aspects, namely being unfinished, differentiated, reflective and individuated. By "peculiarly unfinished", Kelsey means to point out that a number of possible identities are accessible to the quotidian identity. By "peculiarly differentiated" he highlights that an individual's subjective reality is experienced as becoming increasingly complex. By "peculiarly reflective" he refers to proximate contexts and their reflecting back to quotidian identities a range or spectrum of experiences and meanings. By "peculiarly individuated" he means that identities have to do with individual rights and freedoms that take priority in the hierarchy of values. Similarly, human beings' basic identities are gifts of God, in that human creatures already have this identity in God's threefold relating to them. In this sense, human beings' appropriate responses take the form of acknowledgments rather than the actualising of their identities. Regarding the relation of basic and quotidian identities (which are both personal, by virtue of describing the identities of the persons of human living bodies),

Kelsey does not see the one replacing the other, nor does he regard them as synonymous. Instead, he describes a human being's quotidian identity as "taken up into its basic identity and, across time, shaped by it" (2009:385). Where quotidian identities are embraced but lived in ignorance or denial of basic identities, personal identities are distorted and divided and self-contradictory. Thus personal identities are called to take up and acknowledge both their basic (in an ultimate context of God's relating to them) and quotidian (in a proximate context of fellow living beings relating to them) identities.

Lastly, Kelsey describes personal identities as 'unsubstitutable', by which he does not mean to refer to the roles or functions they fulfill – in which they are in fact considered to ultimately be substitutable, or being what he calls "contingent unsubstitutability". Specifically, he points to "absolute unsubstitutability" in three respects. The first point has to do with the way in which the narrative logic of the life shapes a particular quotidian identity, in that a dynamic and unique sequence of acts and interactions shapes the unsubstitutable and non-exchangeable of a particular personal identity. The second point is the unique and unsubstitutable responsibility that is laid before particular personal identity, which has to do with the unique sequence of acts and interactions that befalls human persons, and their unique and unanticipated responses to these acts in these particular sequences. The third point is the unsubstitutability of personal identities as beloved, in that the particular ways in which human persons are valued and loved cannot be substituted, since love is contingent and dependent upon the unique and accidental features of shared proximate contexts. One can indeed then ask, with Kelsey, what the Christian theological objection would be to individualistic understandings of personal identities. Mainly, Kelsey highlights that human beings are often defined relationally rather than individually in theological anthropologies. However, in a study of Steven Lukes' conceptual analysis of the uses of 'individualism', Kelsey shows that individual and relational concepts of human beings cannot be understood as mutually exclusive either conceptually or historically. Most especially, social interaction is only one type of relationality, and so the real problem for Kelsey lies not in individual versus social relations, but rather in abstract versus concrete understandings of the individual. Human beings in their concrete particularity are both at once individual and relational, and so Kelsey does not shy away from stressing "concrete

individualism" in his appropriation of the practice of secondary Christian theology in this project. This is in accordance with his own concern that properly Christian practices should exhibit two qualities, namely being "so formed as to respect the array of concrete particularities that mark one human being as different from another" and in being "so formed as to be constantly self-critical regarding how well enactments of the practices meet the standards of excellence that partly define them" (2009:43). In conclusion, Kelsey advocates for an understanding of human living beings' identities as personal, basic and quotidian, unsubstitutable, and concretely individual.[65]

Kelsey's biggest concern with personal identities would, however, probably be that they are constructed by way of narratives or stories. For him, "[i]t is the narrativity of such identity descriptions that renders someone's personal identity in its unsubstitutability" (2009:636), and not in comparison or contrast with other personal identities, by way of ascribing particular characteristics or factors to them, or in some historical-critical account of a person's life. Rather, he regards the most appropriate or adequate descriptions of personal identities to be in narrative form. Being narrative descriptions of identity, Kelsey consents that both the basic personal identities ánd the quotidian personal identities of living beings differ from one another. The difference lies not in God's different ways or degrees of relating to each living personal body in each instance, but because the central living agent and the surrounding living agents are different in each instance, "located in different times and places" and reporting "different events and experiences" (2009:1049). The theological point here, however, is not that the basic personal identities of living created beings are finally about them, but that "[t]hey are about God" (2009:1049). For this reason Kelsey would be able to argue that "human beings' basic personal identities are defined by their being in Christ" (2009:822).

Who we are therefore as created living beings are questions pertaining to what Kelsey calls 'personal identity'. Indeed, here Kelsey's own answer to "Who are we?" involves using the expression 'basic personal identity' (2009:866). In this sense, the questions of "Who am I?" and "Who are we?" ought to be (re)formulated "as a question about the worth of our lives in light of their deep need for reconciliation" (2009:875). For

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[65] Cf. 2009:556 for a reappropriation of these in part 2 of Kelsey's project.

Christian theology this features not apart from, but within questions pertaining to communal identity. The question as to who we are is thus defined (2009:334) as

> a description of a personal body, possibly oneself, or a description of a community of personal bodies, that is maximally adequate to her, his, my or their concrete uniqueness across time in various circumstances precisely as a personal body or a community of personal bodies.

Kelsey aims to answer these questions with reference to the use of stories since, he argues, stories exhibit "patterns of intentional action" (not in contrast or comparison to other personal living bodies, but stories describing beings in their own right) and reveal personal identity that is constant and thus observable over time, or what he calls "self-manifestation-in-difference" (2009:335). Thus, the question of identity for Kelsey is not trying to narrowly address unique features of a particular being that would enable one to identify them out of a larger group. It does not want to focus primarily on simple descriptions mathematical or logical in nature. It must not be confused with the psychological phenomenon "self-image", either conscious or unconscious. Furthermore, questions regarding identity must not necessarily assume the senses of metaphysical identity (soul, physical body, memory, and substance) assumed in philosophical discussions. Rather, for Kelsey personal identity is manifested over time and space within the differences it itself exhibits, and very specifically not a set or a choice between a set of differing or universal features and descriptions that transcend differences and change. Whereas Kelsey's use of the concept 'identity' need not exclude any of the four senses of identity described above, he does not focus on any of these per se. For him, personal identity has to do with the identity of a personal body which inevitably experiences change and difference over time and space, and which can thus be described as "identity-in-difference" (2009:336 – 337). Indeed, "[p]ersonal bodies are agents, exercisers of a rich and complex array of creaturely powers" (2009:503).

Personal identities are, in summary, both present-orientated and future-orientated, being "appropriately defined by faithful trust in God and loyalty to God's creative project" (2009:601) and "appropriately defined by hope in God's promise of eschatological blessing, a promise proleptically inaugurated in the quotidian by God's resurrection of the crucified Jesus but not yet fully actualized" (2009:601) respectively. In Kelsey's project, it is assumed that "[p]ersonal bodies flourish in appropriate response to God relating to them" (2009:501), in present and in future. When personal bodies are

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distorted in their personal identities through sin, sins and/or evil, the mystery of living beings comes to be distorted by the mysteries of sin in the singular, sins in the plural and evil.

2.6   The mysteries of sin, sins and evil

Kelsey is careful to show that the canonical narratives, in their narrative logic, of God relating to create and God relating to consummate eschatologically respectively is coherent and makes full sense without any references to sin, sins or evil. For this reason, it is exactly within the problematic of what Kelsey calls a "conceptual dilemma" (2009:1036) that one finds the reasoning behind and rationale for the particular structure of his project on the whole. The dilemma (which relies on the correlative problematic of trying to determine whether the narrative account of reconciliation or narrative accounts of estrangement comes first) has to do with where an explication of sin, sins and evil should feature in his work in each part – first or last. Kelsey, however, chooses to attend to sin, sins and evil at the end of each of his respective proposals, for two reasons. Firstly, for him "it is part of the logic of Christian beliefs that christocentric accounts of how God goes about dealing with human sin, both singular and plural, entails a correlative account of sin that has a distinctive profile" (2009:1037). Secondly (2009:1037),

> it is systematically problematic for the order of exposition in Christian theology to begin with such topics as sin (especially in anthropology), evil (especially in the doctrine of God), oppression and injustice (especially in eschatology and theology of history), and inauthenticity (especially in soteriology)… [since] these ways of structuring theology are all variants of theodicy".

Adhering to his own concern to stay true to the logic of Christian beliefs, in contradistinction from the logic of coming to belief, Kelsey chooses to discuss sin, sins and evil only at the end of each of his proposals, because the order in which the proposals are explicated set up an internal logic that may drive arguments apologetically. A related aspect to this concern is that "concepts of grace, divine purpose or will, and God are framed in terms of their role in solving a problem… for which there are alternative solutions on offer… [and which are thus] framed functionally" (2009:1037). The formal point that Kelsey makes in this regard, in his arguments throughout and in the very deliberate structuring of his entire project, is that a God understood functionally, as "a

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utilitarian subject to whatever problem God solves" (2009:1037), is probably a useless God, which is not only theologically highly problematic but also jeopardises the carefully maintained logic employed throughout the project. In choosing for greater theological coherency and structured logic in his project Kelsey does, however, consciously choose against rhetorical advantage in his project. As he himself notes, the "sequence of topics in anthropology that I have adopted has the rhetorical disadvantage that this project's celebratory account in each part of human being as the glory of God ends with a dark account of human brokenness, self-deceiving self-contradiction, and thorough-going distortion" (2009:1038) – a repeated pattern that is indeed "self-subverting" (2009:1038). Furthermore, these narratives of God's three modes of relating "exclude any hypothesis that there are intrinsically evil creatures who are inherently and essentially sinful" (2009:1035). Not even canonical narratives of God's relating to reconcile attempt to explain humankind's predicament of sin – even though they do assume it. For Kelsey it is important that sin, sins and evil thus be understood as "unsystematic absurdities", being "undeniably given" but which "cannot be systematically derived from any more basic theological claim" (2009:1036).

Thus, Kelsey believes that it is important, for theological reasons, to distinguish clearly between the concepts 'sin' and 'evil'. The distortions of appropriate responses to God's active threefold relating, described as faith (in response to God's creative relating), hope (in response to God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation) and love (in response to God's relating to reconciled estranged creatures), is understood by Kelsey to be 'sin'. The living death that sin *causes* Kelsey understands to be one kind of evil. Thus, for Kelsey the distinction between sin and evil lies within its grounding: whereas sin is defined theocentrically (as distortion of appropriate responses to God), evil is defined creature-centrically (as violation of creatures' integrities). If "[e]vil is violation of what and who creatures are and how they are to be", then "[s]in, by contrast, is defined by direct reference to God… it is always 'against God'" (2009:409). For Kelsey, sin is alienation and separation from God, neighbor and self (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009). Consequently, sin can be said to be inappropriate responses to God's relating to all that is not God, since "[s]in is before God or against God" (2009:1035), whereas "[n]o reference to God is necessary either in a

definition of evil or in identifying evils" (2009:1035). The concept that Kelsey employs for descriptive use in both instances is that of 'living death', but with a careful distinction: "Accordingly, as violation of personal bodies, a living death is an evil, whereas the distorted response to God that leads to living death is sin" (2009:567). However, it could be said that there is some overlap between the concepts of sin and evil, as much as it could be said that there are definite distinctions. The consequences of sin and evil are said to be the same in that they both violate creatures. Indeed, "insofar as sin is a violation of the identities of living human personal bodies in a living death, it is also an evil" (2009:847). Furthermore, sin and evil are understood by Kelsey to be negative mysteries, since, for instance, there seems to be no account of how evil came to be. These are mysteries "in the sense of something undeniably real and a-rational, without cause or reason" (2009:411). Kelsey cautions against attempting to pose the question as to the genesis of evil in the created realm, as well as attempting to answer it, since both would succumb to conceptual mistakes.

Apart from his distinctions between sin and evil, Kelsey furthermore distinguishes in every part of his book between sins in the plural and sin in the singular, which he regards as a reworking of a traditional distinction between 'actual' and 'original' sin. He mentions that "[t]raditionally, theological accounts of sin have distinguished between sin (in the singular) as a state or condition of fallen human creatures (i.e. original sin) and sins (in the plural) as a variety of intentional acts (i.e. actual sin)" (2009:419). Indeed (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009),

> where 'actual sin' were individual pieces of behaviour that were sinful, and, what I'm calling sin the singular, that will be sin in the plural. So, sin in the singular is a lot closer to what has been called 'original sin'. It's simply the name for a way a whole human being as a whole human being is distorted and in bondage to that distortion.

However, Kelsey argues for sin and sins to be understood relationally "as personal bodies' inappropriate response to the triune God's having already related to them" (2009:419). Whereas sins in the plural embody for him 'existential hows' expressive of inappropriate responses to God's relating to all that is not God (very importantly, "rather than a multiplicity of specifically sinful individual human actions" (2009:419), sin in the singular "is distortion of a personal body's identity as a whole… to be in sin (in the singular) is to be a personal body in bondage" (Kelsey, 2009:432) to living death. Kelsey

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describes sin (in the singular) as structural distortion, and in particular as *incurvatus a se* ("being turned in on oneself" (2009:595)). Thus, for Kelsey, whereas sins are understood to describe inappropriate and distorted responses to the triune God's threefold relating, sin is the personal identity of a living body defined by distorted response to God's active relating (albeit not necessarily as the singular, which could warrant subjective interpretations of distorted personal identities of living death).

Sins in the plural may be consciously or unconsciously enacted inappropriate responses – and often take the form of the latter, "rendering personal bodies unaware of the distorted inappropriateness of the faith, hope and love in which they orient themselves to their ultimate and proximate contexts" (2009:849). However, what distorts existential hows and make the enactment of responses inappropriate and sinful lies not in conscious intent but in "the formal and structural distortions of the enactments themselves" (2009:849). Kelsey highlights five theological anthropological theses regarding sins in the plural. Firstly, since sins are distortions of appropriate responses to God, "they are not themselves evil" (2009:1040), but inasfar as they "threaten… [fellow creatures, shared proximate contexts, and enactors of sins] with violation of what and who they are" (2009:1041), they do threaten these with evil. Secondly, "[s]ins are not the antitheses of righteousness" (2009:1041), but rather distortions of modes or practices of righteousness. Thirdly, particular existential hows are made into sins when they express inappropriate response to God in failing "to be appropriate to the distinctive profiles of the concrete ways in which God relates to humankind" (2009:1041). Fourthly, since "no systematic account of sins (in the plural) is possible" in that they may "mutate unpredictably", it can be said that sins "have no single anthropological dynamic" (2009:1041). Fifthly, for Kelsey sins do not simply denote immorality, although sins may be sinful as well as immoral where they cause evil – indeed, since sins are defined theocentrically "there is conceptual space for the possibility that some sins are not immoral and, perhaps, some immoral acts are not sins" (2009:1042).

Sin in the singular is the living death of distorted personal identities[66], which acknowledge God relating in threefold manner to all that is not God in the following ways that are distorted. In God's creative relating, distorted personal identities

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[66] For Kelsey, "[t]o be in sin is to be in bondage" (2009:888).

acknowledge only their quotidian (apart from themselves or God), themselves (apart from God) or God (apart from fellow living beings) to ground their identities (Kelsey, 2009:865). In God's relating to consummate eschatologically, distorted personal identities acknowledge only their social roles (apart from God's judgment on their lives) or the judgment of their societies (apart from God's judgment on their lives) or God's judgment (but not consummation) (Kelsey, 2009:865). In God's relating to reconcile, distorted personal identities acknowledge only socio-political power (apart from, in the sense of over against, fellow living beings) or moral status ("in bondage to the assessment of others") (Kelsey, 2009:867 – 868). Kelsey identifies three ways in which living beings' may be caught up in the bondage of sin, in the sense of their quotidian personal identity living at cross-grain with their basic personal identity. Firstly, "[a] quotidian personal identity is distorted… when it is defined by acknowledgment of something other than the creative triune God as the ground of its reality and value" (2009:1042), or even when such an identity's "reality and value are dependent on other's acknowledgment of its reality and worth" (2009:1042 – 1043). Secondly, quotidian personal identities are distorted when they are committed to transformation in view of the eschatological consummation that God draws all that is not God, but lacks "a genuine *krisis*, a final judgment" that cuts through and ends cycles of unjust power structures and systems (2009:1043). Thirdly, quotidian personal identities are distorted when not defined as being 'in Christ', and thus reconciled to God through having their "personal identities in Christ's unsubstitutable personal identity" (2009:1043). For Kelsey, distorted quotidian personal identities bound to living death are not only not flourishing, but are, in the final analysis, "incapable of unbinding themselves into freed and free life" (2009:1044). In short, sin in the singular binds and distorts personal bodies' identities.

Indeed, Kelsey argues that the bondage of being in sin distorts personal identities insofar as they are present orientated (chapter 3), future orientated (chapter 4) and past orientated (chapter 5) to God's threefold relating. This is what Kelsey understands as 'original sin' (and, he ventures to say, is perhaps what the tradition means by using this concept), namely as "living in cross-grain" to the basic personal identity of being "estranged human creatures already structurally reconciled to God" (2009:888). The living death of bondage in sin (which distorts personal identities) "obscures personal

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bodies' reflection of the glory of God in virtue of their being in Christ, who is the glory of God" (2009:888). For Kelsey, living beings' distortion is definitive and given in their being 'in sin' and in contradiction to their being 'in Christ'.[67] Practices expressive of inappropriate responses, like practices expressive of appropriate responses, to God and fellow living beings are, however, "innumerable" (Kelsey, 2009:1038).

In summary, sin, sins and evil is not death, but they constitute what Kelsey calls 'living death', which is opposite to the flourishing and the well-being of living beings in their being 'dying life'. Exactly because life and living is central both within ecological theology and David Kelsey's project, a preparatory discussion on the centrality of life in Kelsey's proposals (in chapter 3, 4 and 5) could prove valuable.

2.7   The centrality of life in Kelsey's work

Chapter 1 has shown that life and living is central to ecological theological inquiry, and would therefore be appropriate descriptions of the ecological theology's concern for the earth and her ecology in an engagement with Kelsey's theological anthropological project. Indeed, Kelsey himself assumes life (albeit in a uniquely qualified sense) extensively in his explication of what it means to refer to all that God relates to, to all that

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[67] An intriguing question regarding sin, sins and evil is: can living beings sin? Is the latter part of Kelsey's project in each instance thus at all relevant to a thesis on ecological theology? If not, does that make human beings – whom Kelsey presumes can and does sin – 'more' than nonhuman beings? If an ecological theology does not take this seriously or avoids the issue altogether, is it not succumbing again to the temptations of limiting itself to creation theology or the doctrine of creation, instead of engaging with the heart of theological inquiry, of which hamartiology is a crucial part? At the heart of this thesis, a crucial question (also for the question regarding fellowship with God) could therefore be whether nonhuman living beings can respond to God or God's relating at all, in whichever manner? Kelsey presses the distinction between God relating to human beings and human beings relating back to God with regard to each of the three ways in which God relates to human living beings, because of his concern to emphasise that "human beings are these odd creatures that are quite capable of living in absolute cross-grain to reality, the reality of how God relates to us" – which functions within the reality of God relating to reconcile human beings through their multiple estrangements. In his words, human beings "are the kind of creatures that are capable of separating ourselves from God". He adds, importantly, that "*it is not so clear to me that any other kind of creatures are really capable of that... that is a difference that needs to be noticed*" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009; my emphasis – NM). Thus, Kelsey himself is not sure that nonhuman living beings are capable of separating themselves from God – but an ecological theology that would take Kelsey's core proposal seriously (namely that God relates to all that is not God in threefold manner) cannot only make use of two of Kelsey's three parts to his project, if the three proposals are indeed intimately and complexly related to one another. Therefore, this thesis will stay true to what it was intended to be, namely an engagement or investigation of Kelsey's threefold proposal of 'God relating to all that is not God', without necessarily answering these challenging and important questions.

is not God, and therefore 'life' and 'death' will be core conceptual indicators within this thesis.

In the first instance, Kelsey sees God's relating to all that is not God as essential, nonnegotiable, crucial to those beings if they are not to disintegrate or die or be destroyed ontologically – in short, God's relating to living beings and all of life, in particular, is core to their survival and their very being. Indeed, "God's faithfulness to God's self-commitment to creatures' well-being entails that in God's ways of relating to that which is not God constitutes their actual being rather than threatening their ontological integrity" (2009:551).

Secondly, however, Kelsey understands 'life' and 'living beings' in a very specific way. Kelsey understands life as involving the tension of a "continual overcoming of entropic forces[68] that, if unresisted, will degrade the function and organization of the living system" (Kelsey, 2009:1020; quoting Schloss, 2002:84). Kelsey regards it as important that living beings and life resist these forces, if a living body is to remain self-organising, self-regulating and self-directing, and if the functioning and organisation of life 'turns' on what he calls 'body' and 'ecology'. By this Kelsey argues that life needs both a body and an ecological niche to function as life, by which he means "a relatively self-organizing, self-regulating, and self-directing integral set of different kinds of energy systems" (2009:1020) and "a proximate context in which there are sources of the energy it needs to resist entropic powers" (2009:1020) (which can be described as 'body' in its own right) respectively. Living bodies involve bodied life, meaning that they are dependent upon interactions and relationships with fellow living bodies if they are to gather and sustain the energy supply necessary to keep entropic forces[69] in check. Kelsey argues for varying degrees of richness especially in the social aspect of bodied life, which he ascribes to different measures of complexity of energy systems and which is expressed in various sets of powers and abilities and capabilities of living, bodied beings.

Even when Kelsey considers eternal life he attempts to remain faithful to the descriptions of 'life' that is found in his project. Indeed, Kelsey considers glorified,

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[68] Kelsey defines or understands 'entropic forces' as forces that work toward "the disintegration of the set of energy systems that constitutes it, and to its death" (2009:1020).

[69] Included in this, for Kelsey, is living bodies' "drift toward disintegration and dissolution that is inherent in creaturely finitude" (2009:1022).

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eschatologically consummated bodies along with quotidian bodies within this definition, and he comes to conclude that "the body's set of various kinds of energy systems is always integrated with physical energy systems" (2009:1021), but that "a physical energy system is not, as such, an essential property of life" (2009:1021). He would, on the basis of such texts as Isaiah 11:6 and 65:25 for example, argue that eschatological bodily life need not be constituted on energy systems that rely on predation for energy. Indeed, he urges that "such living bodies would not require an ongoing evolutionary process in which death is of enormous, perhaps necessary, practical value" (2009:2021), and would even emphasise physical pain might be absent from such existence since such bodies "do not have the biochemical basis for it" (recalling such texts as Revelation 21:4, Isaiah 25:8 and 35:10) (2009:1022). Nonetheless, Kelsey argues that "even an eschatologically glorified body is mortal in principle – that is, capable of nonexistence" (2009:1022), especially for Kelsey in the limits to its reality brought about by its life with others. Importantly, glorified bodies are not exempt from being unsubstitutable personal identities – indeed, in one sense it is to be recognisable to others, as it is to be concretely particular, in another sense.[70] In sum, the risen Jesus Christ is regarded as the image of God in his glorified human body as much as in his created, quotidian human body, and can therefore be said to be "prototypical of glorified humanity" so that "all other living human bodies must be said to image the image of God in virtue of their glorified human bodies" (2009:1023).

A discussion of 'life' would be wholly incomplete and shallow without bringing to light its link with the 'quotidian' in Kelsey's thinking. Kelsey repeatedly emphasises that the quotidian as both created being, in that it 'is' as creature of God, and as one manifestation of the proximate context in which all other created beings have their interactions and exchanges.[71] Making use of the quotidian as analogy is quite appropriate,

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[70] "In its interacting with others, its complex mix of types of powers capacitates it to be a creative, expressive, communicating agent who is capable of being so existentially formed by what it does and undergoes that it has an unsubstitutable personal identity" (2009:1022).

[71] The use of 'cosmos' or 'world' in this thesis could also be appropriate with regards to the link with Kelsey's understanding of the quotidian as everyday life, and created life as all that God relates to. The elements of the cosmos (Galatians 4:3, 9) is interpreted in a variety of ways, but Kelsey takes it to refer to "humankind's lived world" (2009:491) as expressed through pairs of opposite cosmological principles and within the context of the ancient world where these were understood to either be violently conflicting or complementary. However, for the reasons expressed in chapter 1 this thesis will remain with the

not only for the similar way in which I seek to show the concept 'life' would operate in this dissertation, but also since it is in fact defined by Kelsey as 'everyday life' – which admits to its very nature as 'life' and 'living', and thus provides one with an even stronger case for the analogy. It may seem as if 'life' and 'quotidian' could then, upon a certain reading, become synonymous. At the very least, understanding how Kelsey employs and understands 'quotidian' may highlight some aspects of how 'life' is employed in this thesis. Apart from the strong affinity of 'quotidian' for 'life', a second similarity might prove useful in using 'life' in this thesis and in this chapter. 'Life' would, like the 'quotidian', seek to function primarily within the proximate context of God's relating, although the possibility of its describing relations and beings in an ultimate context is not excluded. Indeed, in this thesis 'life' would probably have the capacity to function in both, but with the focus of ecological theology it would seek to describe relations and beings within their proximate contexts primarily. What makes the use of 'life' different from use of 'quotidian' is twofold. Firstly, 'life' has a broader scope and focus than 'quotidian', in that the first refers to all that is related to by God and the second refers to the contextual, social-cultural and political and economic relations between all that is related to by God (but which may too include God). In this understanding the usefulness of employing 'quotidian' in Kelsey's work becomes apparent, since this fits well with his focus on theological anthropology and his concern with appropriating God's relating to all that is not God in the question of what we are as human beings. Equally, the designation 'life' fits well for a focus on ecological theology, with the concern of appropriating God's relating to all that is not God in the question of what constitutes created life. However, 'life' makes possible wider usage (in which, again, great care must be taken, lest it becomes abstract and unclear in the very act of seeking to clarify and bring into greater relief God's relating to all that is not God) in a second sense. This use of 'life' seeks to make clear, without succumbing to animism or pantheistic views on created life, that all that God relates to is in one sense 'alive', if its reality and value is constituted by God and if this God is the living God who constantly and actively and creatively breathes the breaths of life into His creation. Thus, even

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designations of the 'earth and her ecology', for the sake of clarity and coherency, although other terms, as shown above, may of course be relevant and appropriate for use in terms of Kelsey's project.

though the primary function of 'life' in this thesis would be its meaning to describe beings and relations within a proximate context of God's relating, it is used in ways that could and must, in certain instances, include engagement in the ultimate context of creatures' being related to by God, if it is to be said that "our ultimate context as creatures is the active creativity of God" (Kelsey, 2009:162). On this way of understanding 'life', it cannot function as an abstract concept (as argued later in this chapter), as a melting pot of throwing together all that is not God and therefore has to stay true to another aim of Kelsey's project, namely describing the concrete particularity of the object of inquiry (in his case, human beings; in our case, living beings), with a focus on the earth and her ecology. Also, great ambiguity is inherent in use of this concept, which could make it sufficiently blurred for use in ecological theology, although care needs to be taken to distinguish, where necessary, between its reference to being or relation. This distinction is one intentionally blurred by Kelsey himself in his project, if God's relating to all that is not God (in and through His own very triune being, which the use of the various taxes makes clear, for example) constitutes created, eschatologically consummated, reconciled life in íts very being and relation. It particularly needs to be made clear that the use of 'life' in this thesis does not exclude or replace use of the 'quotidian', but rather that the underlying relationship of the two concepts are made clear for use in this dissertation. For the purposes of this thesis, then, the being of life will be described by the concept 'earth' and the relation or system of life by the concept 'ecology'.

An important concept that Kelsey employs throughout his proposals is that of the 'flourishing' of the identities of living beings, which he describes consistently as 'dying life'. He understands 'flourish' in a twofold sense, namely as 'blossoming' and 'thriving': "manifesting the type of beauty of which one is capable and yielding 'fruit' that can nourish contemporaries and 'seed' that can nurture following generations" (2009:722) and "having oneself in hand" (2009:722), respectively. Arguably this describes the quality of life that Kelsey envisions living beings having through being related to by God in particular ways, so that appropriate responses to God's threefold relating describe what Kelsey means by the 'flourishing' of living beings in his project – flourishing in faith (in response to God relating to create), flourishing in hope (in response to God relating to eschatologically consummate), and flourishing in love (in response to God relating to

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reconcile). Thus living beings are expected to thrive when they live in wholehearted accordance with their basic personal identities and to blossom when living beings manifest in their own lives "the terrible beauty of the story of God's entering into solidarity with estranged humankind" (2009:722), which is the story of Jesus' ministry, crucifixion and resurrection.

In various places in his book Kelsey warns against what he calls "theological science fiction" and "theological science fantasy" (2009:1021), which he describes as invented thought experiments of theologians to describe the indescribable.[72] Particularly with regard to his discussion of what constitutes glorified, eschatological bodies, Kelsey is very careful to maintain the formality of his proposals. However, his concern could be a very real warning to ecological theology in a broader sense too, especially ecological theology that would dare to look to his project for some kind of basis. What cóúld probably be said is that, in taking great care with engaging Kelsey's project as basis for ecological theology, there is a central concern for life and death, as is evident through his uses of 'living death' – indeed, for Kelsey, "living death" is "failed life" (2009:885)! – and 'dying life'. A thesis that would engage this theological anthropology for ecological theology could argue for the centrality of life in Kelsey's work, and therefore the appropriateness of interpreting God relating to human beings in the wider sense of God relating to living beings, as well as God relating to all that is not God as God relating to all of life, as will be shown in this thesis. Exactly because Kelsey's understanding of life and death and human beings is not abstract but concretely particular, the use of 'life' and 'living beings' in this thesis need not be abstract, and should not be defined in very great detail in order to stay true to Kelsey's own concerns for describing concretely particular beings – keeping in mind his own concern for open-endedness and deliberate conceptual

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[72] The proper context of Kelsey's warning is this: In his discussion on the nature and being of fully actualised, eschatologically consummated personal bodies, Kelsey warns of the dangers of exercises of what he calls a "game", "a (new) literary genre: theological science fantasy" (2009:541). He himself is of the opinion that serious secondary theological proposals ought not engage in this speculative game, since it moves, firstly, beyond the limits of what could be said from original theological proposals and since, secondly, "[g]iven its defining task in the common life of communities of Christian faith, the practice of secondary theology is under no obligation to pursue every question generated by its theological proposals (2009:541). He himself chooses to consent to the serious conceptual challenges faced in some instances, in this particular instance with regards to explaining how eschatologically consummated creatures is to be both finite and yet possibly have methaphysical powers and capabilities sin the absence of organic physical bodies.

vagueness in his project. Thus, even though 'life' and 'living beings' do not constitute a melting pot of understanding for all that is not God, but rather a broader, base designation for or description of the objects of inquiry in ecological theology, which will be appropriated in greater detail and specificity as 'the earth and her ecology' in the concluding chapters.

2.8   Eccentric existence as basis for ecological theology?

The core hypothesis of this thesis is that Kelsey's theological anthropology has something to offer ecological theology. This something is described as a 'basis', that is to say theological proposals that undergird and ground the project or process of inquiring into the logic of beliefs that basically constitute ecological theology. Kelsey himself chooses to describe subjects that are structurally constituted by a threefold God-relation[73] as 'creation' rather than 'nature', since this describes "a context that is hospitable to the self-actualization of subjects characterized by a blessed immediate self-consciousness, rather than as context that is subject-hostile" (2009:98). He is also critical of this very notion, since in the very affirmation of subjects as 'creaturely' and 'good', these descriptions of subjects are limited to consciousness of their intersubjectivity and interdependence. The 'world' (which he describes as "the content of sensible self-consciousness" (2009:98)) can be described as 'good creation' "only in a systematically anthropocentric way" (2009:98), and thus this "cannot be affirmed theologically of the world in and for itself" (2009:98). Kelsey sees in such a move theologically dangerous anthropocentrism which, located in a context of ecological and environmental crises, is problematic, since it opens the door to "theological justification of instrumentalist and exploitative attitudes and practices in relation to nonhuman creatures" (2009:98 – 99). However, I would argue for the use of the 'earth and her ecology', as argued for in chapter 1. The intimate relation of belonging or possession which the possessive pronoun 'her' designates brings an important element of belonging into the understanding of God relating to living beings and all of life in particular ways, most especially within languages that often subdue the earth by the very way that it refers to it

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[73] And "the larger situation in which subjects move through the stages of the developmental process of their self-actualization as subjects… in terms of God-relatedness" (2009:98).

anthropocentrically. Keeping Kelsey's strong reaction against anthropocentrism in mind, one might do well to understand the earth biocentrically – with the focus on life, as many ecofeminist studies do[74] – although this can only, within Kelsey's theological framework, be understood as such within the broader eccentricity that is core and inestrangeable to the very being of life and living beings. For these reasons, as well as reasons cited throughout this chapter, a proper designation of arguments employed in this thesis may be understood to stand in the spirit of 'eccentric biocentrism', within the broader description of God relating to all that is not God. With this in mind, I would argue that there are three ways in which one would be able to appropriate Kelsey's three proposals in this thesis.

The first and most obvious approach would be an apologetic approach, whereby a dualist concept of human and nonhuman life could be brought to bear on arguments. This would not be a good appropriation, and has been a method that I have steered clear from in the whole of this dissertation, for the following reasons. Firstly, in a formal sense this way of appropriating the proposal would have run counter to Kelsey's own rigorous methodological concerns and approaches, in particular his concern with keeping the logics of belief and coming to believe separate and in not conflating the questions around these two logics. Secondly, such an approach would have seriously undermined the overall focus and aim of this thesis by condemning ecological theology to the outskirts of theological inquiry by merely appropriating proposals made for another scope of inquiry altogether. This would mean contributing only derivatively to constructing a basis for ecological theology. Thirdly, such an approach not only applies rigorous thinking only derivatively in the interests of ecological theology, but widens the gap in the very attempt of bridging a perceived gap between ecological theology and Christian doctrine, which Kelsey expounds by means of his theological anthropology. In sum, this thesis follows Kelsey's project in not engaging with the threefold proposal of God relating to all that is not God apologetically.

A second approach would be an ethical approach, whereby the ethical and moral implications and nuances of God relating to all that is not God – with a focus on human

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[74] Cf., for instance, the publication *Ecofeminism and Globalization* (2003), and in particular the article by Ivone Gebara, entitled "Ecofeminism: An Ethics of Life" (2003:163 – 176).

beings – is teased out and developed, especially regarding appropriate response of human living beings towards the earth and her ecology. Kelsey, however, explicitly and clearly states that he does not attempt to provide a theological ethics (even if one would be able to see the contours and beginnings of one from his work) and most especially not a moralising theological anthropology (cf. 2009:118). He remarks that some aspects of his work, such as his deliberation on human dignity, may be a major part of a "fully-fledged theological ethics or moral theology" (2009:279), but that such a theological ethics is not the aim of his project (2009:356), even if, at some points in his book, his theological anthropology may provide "a theological conceptual context that a theological ethics might find to be at once an intellectually nurturing home and an intellectually provocative point of departure" (2009:356). Therefore a thesis that would attempt constructing a theological ethics – moreover, some set of or deliberation on environmental or ecological theological ethics – from Kelsey's project may be justified and would probably find it, as he himself states, an 'intellectually nurturing home' and 'intellectually provocative point of departure'. However, that is not the focus or the point of Kelsey's project, and nor is it the focus or the point of this thesis. That such projects in theological ethics and moral theology may be crucial, especially regarding the earth and her ecology, few would dispute. That one may find the contours and beginnings for a theological ethics or moral theology – and, especially, an environmental ethics! – in Kelsey's project would be understandable. However, that some groundwork needs to be done if such an attempt would be made from Kelsey's project is, by now, hopefully clear. This thesis would therefore, again, remain closer to Kelsey's own methodology here. In sum, this thesis follows Kelsey's project in not engaging with the threefold proposal of God relating to all that is not God with an eye to constructing a theological ethics or moral theology.

A third approach would be an ecological theology that is taken seriously from within theological anthropology. This thesis follows this approach, but takes great care in not doing so superficially, by uncritically substituting and exchanging proposals across the limitations of each scope of inquiry. Rather, in the interests of taking both ecological theology and theological anthropology as fields of study seriously and, of course, in the interests of good and penetrating research, this thesis investigates Kelsey's theological anthropology in a critical and cautious manner that appropriates proposals only with

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qualifications and in full awareness and concern for its theological anthropological ties and grounding. It is my contention that the first proposal, namely God relating creatively to all that is not God, provides for greater ease in appropriating arguments and contributions than the second and third proposals might, but exactly in investigating the whole of Kelsey's project, and not merely those aspects that work both easy and well with an ecological theology, this thesis engages Kelsey's theological anthropology to determine whether it could be employed as basis for ecological theology. In particular, this thesis is guided by the concern for life that is taken in this study. In sum, this thesis follows Kelsey's project in not following either an apologetic approach or a theological ethics approach, but in remaining an investigation into the logic of beliefs, secondary theology, which one may perhaps refer to as a dogmatic approach.

Some other remarks on the methodology underlying this thesis – especially in relation to Kelsey's own methodologies, as explored above – need mention. I have, as far as logically appropriate, followed Kelsey's logic and methodology, not only because it makes much sense for an ecological theology that engages Kelsey's theological framework to do so if it is to appropriate his proposals and arguments properly and non-superficially, but primarily because it simply is good, solid logic. There are, however, some minor adjustments that need to be made for a thesis of this nature. Apart from conceptual choices and interpretations (a dynamic that will probably be quite clear throughout the discussion on Kelsey's proposals) made in this thesis, it is – methodologically – mostly unnecessary to focus on the so-called 'B parts' to Kelsey's project (since these constitute his more intricate backing up of hypotheses and arguments), and quite crucial to focus on the so-called 'A parts' of his project. Taking care not to set up binary distinctions that Kelsey himself did not intend – his project is very much presented as an integrated whole – I have seen the need to involve both in this thesis, exactly because these constitute Kelsey's own support for his theses. Indeed, I have opted for focusing on the 'A parts' of Kelsey's project to form the main focus of this thesis, while treating the 'B parts' as core sources of support for informing the 'A parts', where deemed necessary to the argument. Furthermore, I have chosen not to focus on Kelsey's use of biblical texts or biblical hermeneutics, and rather to assume Kelsey's discussion of biblical texts within my own appropriation, in light of the limited scope and

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focus of this thesis. An interesting, further study could perhaps do well to inquire as to how Kelsey appropriates biblical texts to substantiate his arguments, and especially as to how he interprets and employs the insights of biblical scholars throughout his project, whom he admits to be reliant upon. Lastly, Kelsey himself is clear therein that he does not deliberately attempt to enter into conversation with any specific theologies or, even more, theologians (although this does occur throughout his project!), and so, even though this thesis does enter into some conversation with ecological theologies (primarily in chapters 1 and 7), its main focus is Kelsey's arguments and proposals. Kelsey's theological anthropology, as expounded in his *Eccentric Existence*, forms the core and the heart of this dissertation, and therefore any conversations (especially within the core chapters of this thesis) with specific theologians or theologies ought to be regarded as secondary to the aims of this thesis.

The purpose of this thesis is not to rest at accepting how ecological theology is based in the ultimate context of God's relating to all that is not God, even though this is a crucial and primary move in Kelsey's own project also. Even more, it must be shown, for an ecological theology that would seek to engage in secondary theology's concerns for thinking through the logic of belief, how ecological theology is also based somehow in the proximate contexts of the interrelations and interdependence of living beings. Taking the whole of Kelsey's project seriously, then, is the core concern of this thesis, whilst adhering to limitations of a project in secondary theology (as explained above, in reference to Kelsey's own project) that is concerned with the logic of Christian beliefs, with the specific focus as to how this would shape a basis for ecological theology when engaging with Kelsey's theological anthropology.

2.9   Conclusion

In conclusion, Kelsey's threefold proposal of God relating to all that is not God has to do with all of life and all living beings, including the earth and her ecology. Indeed (Kelsey, 2009:441),

> The root question for this theological anthropology is, what does the specifically Christian conviction that God actively relates to us imply about what and who we are and how we are to be? The structure of the overall answer is made complex by the intersection of two specifically Christian background beliefs: that God is best understood in a triune way, and that the triune God

> actively relates to us in three interrelated but distinct ways – as One who creates, grounding our reality and its flourishing; as One who promises us an eschatological consummation and draws us to it; and as One who reconciles us in our multiple estrangements.

The subject of Kelsey's project, namely 'human being', involves both Christian believers and those interested in Christian beliefs – a thesis on ecological theology too, which focuses on the earth and her ecology, addresses both Christian believers and those interested in Christian beliefs. And like the overall end or purpose of Kelsey's project, namely to commend proposals to ecclesial communities on how best to formulate theological claims regarding human being, this thesis may claim a similar purpose with a different subject matter. Indeed, if, for Kelsey, theology is ecclesial practice and therefore not done in abstract – in separation from the life and being of churches – but rather embedded in ecclesial life, then, for Kelsey, the 'public' is probably closely linked to ecclesial communities, including those (non-believers) interested in Christian beliefs. Stated otherwise, the church, for Kelsey, *is* public, and therefore has no need of being or becoming or acting in public. In this sense, this thesis must itself be an exercise in public theology, if it is to follow Kelsey's project in secondary theology – since it is, for him, in its very nature geared towards ecclesial communities, and probably some kind of 'public'. Hopefully, this thesis could be an exercise in 'public theology' in a second sense as well, namely in its concern for the influence of theological ideas (such as Kelsey's theological idea of 'God relating') on policy-forming processes and decisions, most especially regarding policies regarding environmental sustainability and well-being. Concern for the 'public' in Kelsey's project is especially clear in his own vision of an intertraditional study (which, as mentioned, was the original design of his project) on human being, and may therefore be seen as taking the 'public' so seriously that it would probably invite much further (intertraditional, perhaps even interdisciplinary) engagement.

In Kelsey's project, the concern for the 'public' structures a particular reading of his arguments and proposals that are geared towards engagement with it, particularly from ecclesial communities and those interested in Christian beliefs. His project is further structured through his concern and adherence to what he calls 'Christian canonical Holy Scripture', especially in its close link with what he describes as 'secondary theology'. However, he closely identifies Christian doctrine with theological anthropology (cf.

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chapter 1), which is quite prominent in his concern for what he regards as (1) 'unsubstitutable personal identity' (speaking to the consequences of appropriate response to God) and (2) the mysteries of sin (in the singular), sins (in the plural), and evil (speaking to the consequences of inappropriate response to God). Two characteristics of Kelsey's discussion of sin, sins and evil are particularly important. The first is that he discusses these systematically throughout his three proposals, but does so only at the very end of each proposal. The second important aspect is that he never provides (indeed, avoids!) a coherent and comprehensive, all-encompassing system of sin(s) or hamartiological framework – and, therefore, it would be counter to his own, carefully constructed methodology to do so, even if in service of ecological theology. Furthermore, 'life' and 'death' are core themes in his work, and therefore this thesis makes the choice for conceptually employing 'life' and 'living beings' in the chapters to follow.

For Kelsey, his project "rest[s] equally on the three parts" (2009:xi) of these three proposals that he employs throughout, and so, in order to use Kelsey optimally in inquiring as to whether his theological anthropology could serve as basis for ecological theology, this thesis' proposals will need to reflect this particular balance. This is especially important in ecological theology, where the doctrine of creation (which comes to the fore in Kelsey's first proposal, namely that of God relating to create) has, in particular, played a prominent role in theological study and research. Second to that would probably be thinking on eschatological consummation, with the reconciliation that is wrought in Christ accessed only sporadically, and then almost primarily through the use of cosmic Christology. Kelsey's theological framework is therefore ideally suited to investigate whether a basis for ecological theology would be able to accommodate 'more' theology, so to speak, with a greater balance or spread between various doctrines or understandings of how God relates to all that is not God. Exactly because Kelsey's three proposals are part of a greater (though complicated and unsystematic) whole, and cannot be understood as three separated modes of God relating, it may prove to be an enormously helpful resource in investigating the significance of Kelsey's rich theological thinking for ecological theology. Furthermore, since God's three ways of relating cannot "be homogenized into one characterization of 'God's relation to all that is not God'" (2009:916), it would require of an ecological theology that would engage it as basis to

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engage with the concrete particularities of living beings and all of life – indeed, with the earth and her ecology. Thus, in chapter 3 it will be argued that, in relating to create, God is at once free from depending upon created living beings in creating ánd that God grants living beings the time, space and freedom to be themselves as genuinely 'other' than God. In chapter 4 it will be argued that, in relating to consummate eschatologically, God is both free from the dynamics of the quotidian ánd that God relates intimately to living beings within their very quotidian lives. In chapter 5 it will be argued that in relating to reconcile, God is simultaneously free from living beings' resistance and estrangements ánd that God stands in intimate solidarity with living beings within their vulnerability and estrangements (Kelsey, 2009:917).[75]

In sum, this thesis, following Kelsey's project, does not deal with the theological idea of God relating to life and living beings, the earth and her ecology, either apologetically or with the aim of constructing a theological ethics or moral theology. Rather, its focus is on a particular reading and understanding of Christian doctrine – dogmatics, if you will – that may prove helpful and enriching for a thesis that seeks to engage Kelsey's theological anthropology with the aim or purpose of constructing a basis for ecological theology.

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[75] Kelsey describes each of these as "one aspect of the ultimate context of human life" (2009:917).

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Chapter 3

Flourishing on borrowed breath

3.1   Introduction

Chapter 3 of this thesis explores the first of David Kelsey's three proposals. Could Kelsey's proposal that God relates to create all that is not God serve in the construction of a basis for a Christian ecological theology?

God relates to create all that is not God to flourish on borrowed breath. The description of the first hypostasis of God's relating to all that is not God assumes priority with regards to the second and third ways in which God relates, since both of the lastmentioned instances assume or presuppose the existence of created life before it could propose drawing created beings into eschatological consummation or reconciling created beings. Kelsey argues that "God's creating is ontologically prior to and logically independent of God's drawing creatures to eschatological consummation and God's reconciling them" (2009:121). However, he emphasises very carefully that this priority is to be understood not as a chronological ("as though human existence goes through three developmental stages in order finally to become actual human existence" (2009:121, 893)) nor a logical ("as though each successive part was deduced from the preceding part" (2009:893)) priority or process, as if to proceed in linear fashion, but is clearly said to function as ontological priority. Even more, God's relating to create does not in any way necessitate either God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation or to reconcile. This priority itself points to the ontological status of creaturehood that is to be understood, firstly, as being a core assumption of the second and third proposals to be discussed in chapters 4 and 5 respectively, and secondly, as a proposal that applies to all that is not God, and is thus universal in scope. These two points are important to the way in which what follows in this chapter can be appropriated as basis for ecological theology. Granted, whereas Kelsey's explicit aim is to give a thorough account of theological anthropology, this thesis seeks to appropriate his contributions for ecological theology. However, I would argue that his core assumptions and arguments need not, even if it could be, altered to stand in service of an ecological theology, and so these points would already outline an approach that is to be followed up later in this chapter.

In the process of inquiring whether Kelsey's theological anthropology could serve as basis for ecological theology, the core question that would structure inquiry into this first proposal would be how life in the world is to be understood, namely "What constitutes created life?" This chapter relates to the first proposal of Kelsey's project, which has to do with the implications for theological anthropology by claiming that God relates to all that is not God creatively. In what follows, we begin with a detailed account of Kelsey's first proposal of God relating creatively to all that is not God, which would entail treatment of Kelsey's discussions on the ultimate and proximate contexts of being related to creatively, having and having been given living bodies, flourishing on borrowed breath in faith, the personal and public realities of being addressed by God directly and indirectly, and the living death of distortions of faith and personal identity. This will be followed by an appropriation of the proposal of God relating to create all that is not God, where after we will conclude and summarise with responses to the question as to what created life is in Kelsey's project.

3.2   God relating creatively to all that is not God

'The Father creates through the Son in the power of the Spirit' is the *taxis* employed to describe the divine perichoretic dynamic in the triune interrelationships in this first manner of God's relating. If "[i]t is the triune God in its threefold dancing around that creates", then, firstly, the Father's creating is grounded in the triune "inherently generative love", "a relation generative of the reality of the other", "a loving giving of reality" (2009:123). Secondly, the Son's creating emphasises the "eternal dynamic relation in which Godself is given and received as God's intelligibly wise self-expression" (2009:123). The relationship of the Father and the Son, as the wise 'self-expression of God', characterises the triune reciprocal relationship of continuous giving and receiving in creation. Thirdly, the Spirit, as God's sustained 'breath of life', is "divine triune love's vitalising, enlivening, and empowering life-giving power", "ordered to making living creatures wise for their own well-being in their proximate and ultimate contexts" (2009:125). Kelsey affiliates the preposition 'to' with the relationship of God with all that is not God in this mode of relating, where both the utter otherness and the

intimate nearness of God 'to' living beings are mutually implied in God's relating 'to' create.

God's relating creatively to all that is not God provides the ground thinking on the ultimate meaning and context of created life. The proposal of God relating creatively provides a first angle on thinking with regards to constructing a basis for ecological theology, and so gives guidance as to formulating and outlining the proximate context of created life, in the daily exchanges and interchanges of giving and receiving, through the metaphor of having been born. God relating creatively entails being and having living bodies, of whatever type of life or species that might be. It also involves admitting to the realities of death and finitude, or 'dying life', and the prospects of flourishing in faith on borrowed breath. Created life, furthermore, are publicly and personally addressed in God's relating to them creatively, which reveals something of the realities of all that is other to God (including human created beings, which is the focus of Kelsey's own scope of inquiry). God's relating creatively calls for certain appropriate responses and 'existential hows', which might be distorted and lead to sin, sins and evil in the quotidian and creatively blessed life. All of these dynamics, however, are integral to Kelsey's argument on what we are as eccentrically grounded living beings, and will form the basis of what I argue to be the constitution of created life as eccentrically grounded living beings related to by God creatively.

3.3   The ultimate context of God relating to create

In the first part of his book, Kelsey describes the ultimate context of God relating in this way as 'living on borrowed breath', wherein he interprets createdness as "having been born" or, in his words, "a theology of birth" (Kelsey, 2009:159). In the first chapter of this first part of his project, he discusses the ultimate context into which human beings are born. Kelsey starts off by describing human beings as creatures of God, wherein he means to refer to the complex networks of energy systems and exchanges in which they function. This he regards as constitutive of human persons' proximate contexts. In this part of his project he chooses to make use of Wisdom theology in the Old Testament as Biblical source and resource for working through the first of the three ways in which God relates to all that is not God. He provides very specific reasoning for making use of these

texts, rather than the traditional use of the Genesis accounts of creation (cf. Kelsey, 2009:176 – 189). The main thrust of his arguments entails that he regards the narrative logic of Genesis' creation accounts as bent under the pressures and agendas of stories about God relating to reconcile; that not only the probable redaction history of the Genesis texts point to a post-exilic context, but also that the texts themselves seem to have been edited with the Israelite exodus, rather than the genesis of creation itself, in mind. On the contrary, Wisdom theology's stories on creation "is remarkably silent regarding both redemptive covenant and the ultimate end or purpose of history" (Kelsey, 2009:162), which make them more attractive sources and resources for use in his project. Recalling chapter 2 of this thesis, Kelsey deems it of the utmost importance that the various narrative logics of God's stories of relating to all that is not God be distinguished and be kept distinguishable from one another.

Kelsey makes several moves in the description of God's relating to all that is not God creatively that might bear significantly upon a fresh understanding of ecological theology. In true Reformed form, Kelsey stays true to the theocentric priority of his project by emphasising from the beginning that "[t]he context that ultimately defines what and who we are and how we are to be is not the created cosmos… our ultimate context as creatures is the active creativity of God" (Kelsey, 2009:162). The activity that constitutes all created life, all that is other to God, is God's relating to all that is not God creatively. This would be a core proposal to this chapter of the thesis, in that many implications and consequences for ecological theology could be drawn from this. A first implication of this move is provided by Kelsey himself, when he states that "[w]e share this ultimate context with all reality whatsoever other than God" (2009:162). For ecological theology, this means that all reality, all of life, and all living beings take part in the active relating of God. The very deliberate use of the preposition "of" describes created life's role in the process of relating, and brings to the fore that creation and creatures cannot affect or influence God's relating to them, since it constitutes them ontologically, and so before they have any choice in the matter. Of course, later in his argument Kelsey does make provision for creatures' (and specifically human creatures') responding to God in appropriate or inappropriate ways, and although these are products of the initial relating, they cannot enhance or destroy or change or in any way affect the

fact or manner of God's initial relating to all that is not God. Thus, in his account of God's relating to creation, Kelsey emphasises the importance of the use of the proposition "to" to describe the relation of God to everything other to God. From God's side this relation is intimate, intense and attentive to the other's concrete particularity, described by Kelsey as "love". This love is understood not as a needy or sentimental feeling that seeks to absorb the other into God's Godness (not even through processes of so-called *theosis*), but is understood as wholly self-determined, and, by implication, wholly free. As such, it is a self-commitment of the Creator to creatures, in the very act of God's free initiative in creating, a free giving from God's side as "an act of unexacted and unearned love" (2009:163 – 164). Furthermore, God's creative activity cannot be forced or enforced in any way, since "God remains creative at God's free initiative" (2009:164), and so God's creative activity, creative relating, is characterised by delightful freedom and free delighting. Indeed, this creative relating is not only delightful but also intimate, and so Kelsey describes God's relating to all that is not God as "intimately free and freely intimate" (2009:212).

In the texts of Genesis, as in Wisdom texts, some important features of God's relating creatively ought to receive attention. The first pertains to the intimate and intense relating of God to all that is not God – the texts bring to the fore how God is intimately involved in every aspect of creation's constitution and coming into being. The second feature points to God's absolute and uncaused freedom in creating (often formulated by the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*), a feature of God's relating that Kelsey explicates in combination with the first feature of the intimacy of the Creator. A third aspect deserving of attention is the immediate intimate involvement of God not only in the initial act of creating, but the simultaneous attention to the well-being of creation. The repeated consideration and judgment that creation is to be deemed "good" in the Genesis texts is understood by Kelsey as referring to it being good "for the purposes to which the Creator is self-committed in creating" (2009:165). Fourthly, God blesses creatures in what they were created for, namely for being life and for bringing forth life, something Kelsey would later describe as 'dying life'. This blessing, Kelsey is quick to emphasise, is a condition and not an event, in that it is a continuing activity and not a once-off event.

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With a theocentric, trinitarian focus on God's relating to all that is not God, Kelsey chooses to interpret God relating creatively with the *taxis* "the Father creates through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit". This stresses, for Kelsey, "that the One who creates is intrinsically productive of divine reality constituted by an intimate communion of freely given reciprocal love among the three who are genuinely 'other' to one another" (2009:167). It is within this understanding that Kelsey applies the metaphor of birthing, rather than the metaphor of causing (since Wisdom theology itself is indifferent to explanations hinging on a causal relating of God and all that is not God). The involvement of the Father in the creation relation thus entails God's freedom to be concretely and particularly present in all reality, whilst relating intimately in the interests of this very reality's wellness and well-being. The involvement of the Spirit is the life-giving power of Woman Wisdom's life-giving evocative and pedagogical force in evoking wisdom in students. However, Wisdom is not seen as violating the integrity and otherness of all that is not God, but rather as advancing and deepening it. The involvement of the Son, which is interpreted as "Logos" in Hellenistic philosophy, does not provide the backing for an understanding of life in terms of static order. Rather, the Johannine Logos (interpreted from Wisdom theology) involves acts of communication – speaking and addressing – which are made possible by the stability or reliability (but not order) of the proximate contexts of created life. Thus, Kelsey argues that canonical Wisdom clearly makes use of the medium and rhetoric of "address" to describe God's acts of creation, as do the creation accounts in Genesis (cf. 2009:167 – 173).

The One who addresses all that is not God is both transcendent and immanent. The understanding of relationship of the transcendent and immanent God to all that is not God need not involve a choice between the two (which, as Kelsey shows, will then also need to involve a compromising of the one or the other), but could be radicalised to include Kelsey's (who echoes Tanner's, 1988) suggestions that God's creativity is not to be understood as God collapsed into or opposed to creation or as limited in scope. Rather, the ultimate context into which human creatures, but I would argue for the specific designations 'life' or 'living beings', are born is "God's hospitable generosity, creatively relating to us, free of creatures in creating and attentively delighting in them in their otherness to God, self-committed to that which is created" (2009:175).

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Kelsey argues for the primary use of Wisdom theology in formulating a theology of creation, rather than the traditional uses of Genesis 1 – 3. The main reasoning behind this understands Genesis 1 – 11 as serving as introduction to the broader pentateuchal narrative of God's rescuing and reconciling of the nation Israel. If, as Kelsey warns, the narrative logic of the Genesis accounts might be bent to support this agenda, then the narrative logic of the creation accounts employed in these accounts will in all probability not be ideal for use in a project that seeks to keep the strands between the three narratives of God's relating to all that is not God coherently separate. The narrative and numerative types of writing in Genesis 1 – 11 (Kelsey, 2009:177; quoting Westermann, 1984:4) serves to describe the contexts in which God's acts of deliverance are to take place in the Pentateuch. Furthermore, three classes of narratives (creation; achievements; crimes and punishment) are found in these chapters – narratives that make concrete God's acts of deliverance in Israel's history (2009:180 – 186). As important as these acts of deliverance are in the practice of secondary theology, Kelsey does not allow these accounts to determine the dynamics of what he systematically reveals to be a fresh perspective on creation theology – and nor, for that matter, should we. If this thesis would seek to make a novel contribution not only, but also, to thinking on creation theology, then we would be in good stead to follow Kelsey's moves here in privileging the contributions of Wisdom theology to the formulation of thinking on creation theology.

In Kelsey's thinking on the ultimate context of God relating creatively, all that is not God is caught up in this ultimate context and is ultimately defined by this context and initial relating. Wisdom sees God, equally in his triune immanence and transcendence, as relating to all that is not God not in order to violate it, but to draw it into greater coherency and connection with its own creaturely otherness. If the ultimate context of God's relating creatively draws all other than God into greater focus of its own creaturely integrity and createdness, then so too should the proximate context of God's relating creatively reflect the quotidian and created life as a whole. For these purposes, and within this understanding, Kelsey interprets the triune God's relating to the concrete realities of everyday life as having been born, which infuses the life and being of living beings with theological meaning appropriate to his project.

3.4 Quotidian and proximate context of having been born

Kelsey deems it of the utmost importance that human creatures be understood within their created contexts, or within "God's creation as a whole, the proximate contexts into which we are born" (2009:190). He shows how it is the aim also of Wisdom theology to describe God's creation (or, in his words, "humankind's lived world") in terms of the quotidian, everyday lived world. Wisdom theology contributes on a number of important points, with regards to a theology of creation specifically. The first is Wisdom theology's lack of description of any cosmic origin or genesis of the quotidian – it is remarkably silent in its treatment of it. The second is the lack of teleology in its non-treatment of the ultimate purpose or goal or general movement even of history and historical processes. The lack of teleology points, for Kelsey, to Wisdom theology's creation theology as separate also from the third story of God's relating to all that is not God, namely relating to reconcile. Thirdly then, Wisdom theology's most significant contribution in this regard appears to be it describing the dignity of the quotidian not in terms of divine origins or endings, but in its just being what it was created to be (Kelsey, 2009:190 – 191). This of course makes Wisdom theology ideal for use in theological anthropology, but even more so in ecological theology. If created life and the beings that are blessed to live and bring forth life within its confines of space and time is not primarily understood in its being what it was created to be, then even the noblest of goals and purposes ascribed to created living beings confuse (for Wisdom theology) the meaning of life. Kelsey proceeds by describing proximate contexts in greater detail, of which the quotidian forms an integral part.

The quotidian is interpreted in terms of its locatedness (vis-à-vis Hegel) and its complex sets of acting and interacting energy systems (which Kelsey especially sees in its various systems of power). The value and role of tradition in shaping the quotidian is shown to be an important source and resource of energy in generating and sustaining the dynamics inherent in the quotidian. This brings Kelsey to the conclusion that every instance of the quotidian is to be relativised, since the diversity of the concrete quotidians points not to any one, perfect form of it, but accommodates a great many interpretations and forms of energy and energy exchange and energy interaction. Thus, there can be no good theological reason (and especially not from the reasoning of Wisdom theology) for

idealising or romanticising or absolutising a particular social world. Kelsey goes on to argue that Wisdom theology describes the quotidian in terms of human acts and activity and practices[76], or practices wherein human agency is involved. An interesting remark follows, "These practices also include studying other creatures in their own right" wherein, it is said, the 'world of nature' often receives attention in the international Wisdom writings of the Ancient Near Eastern societies. According to Kelsey there is also a normative side to Wisdom's description of the quotidian – namely in its concern and cherishing of the well-being of the quotidian, or, one could say, dying life (as opposed to living death, to be discussed later) (Kelsey, 2009:192 – 194).

Core to the quotidian and to how Wisdom theology thinks through the various manifestations of the quotidian, certain types of practices are somewhat of a currency for exchange and interchange of energy within proximate contexts. As mentioned, Kelsey describes practices according to its socially established, public manifestation, and proceeds by discussing the complexity of practices, which he sees tied to the distribution of power in societies. Language is regarded as an important manifestation of the public nature of human practices, but since it cannot be conceived of as separate from forms of life (in Wittgensteinian terms) which are themselves public, language ought to be engaged in a particular manner. Kelsey argues that language be used in manners that are true or fitting to the practices that it establishes, that it be faithful or true to persons participating in the practices, and that it corresponds to the larger public context in which it functions. Thus Kelsey comes to the conclusion that, since the quotidian represents the good of what God creates in its everyday concreteness, distorting the practices as discussed above "deforms creation". Of these, language forms an integral part, since "human creatures are above all social, intentional bodied enactors of complex cooperative practices that necessarily include practices of language use" (Kelsey, 2009:198 – 199).

At this point Kelsey introduces a worrying problematic or objection that flows from the anthropocentric focus in arguments above. Kelsey formulates it best, as follows: "Construing creation, and with it human creatures, as the quotidian, and then construing the quotidian, and with it human creatures, in terms of human practices, privileges a particular model of the human person and a particular conceptual scheme with which to

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[76] Defined by Kelsey as "a form of socially established cooperative human activity" (2009:198).

describe it" (2009:199 – 200). It may thus be objected that such reasoning privileges human creatures above nonhuman creatures and, indeed, the rest of creatures, since these may not be able to enact intentional acts and activity and/or practices to the extent and in the way that human creatures may. This might lead one to ask whether they can be properly construed as creatures, according to the logic of the argument followed above, and if, indeed, they are not reduced to the status of being additions to human creatures. At this point Kelsey highlights two important contributions from Wisdom theology. The first is simply that Wisdom theology does not provide one with an objective, disinterested, detached view and overview of the creaturely realm. The second is that it does not pretend to give such an account from God's perspective either. Two implications follow from this for the author. The first is that the reality and value of nonhuman creatures and creation is not necessarily anthropocentric, and the second is that it is nowhere assumed that nonhuman creatures' reality and value is to be construed through their actualisation of human ends or purpose: "They are not created by God simply for us. Indeed, canonical biblical Wisdom invites us to attend to the creatures that, along with us, make up the quotidian, as genuinely other than we in being and value" (2009:200 – 201).

The issue of language can be pointed to as one possible catalyst for worrying anthropocentric argumentation, as outlined above. First off, language cannot be said to be strange to nonhuman creatures and so to be strange to nonhuman practices, even if nonhuman language does not conform to the structure and convention of human language. Thus, as with many appropriations throughout this thesis, even though concepts within Kelsey's argument with regard to humans may seem like uniquely human capabilities[77], oftentimes (such as in the case of language) it could be appropriated with regards to some and probably most other created living beings in mind too. Even more importantly, and in taking care not to succumb to the apologetic draw of this argument, the process of appropriation will highlight most significantly the uniqueness of created life exactly in the difficulty one would have to critically and credibly appropriate all aspects of one living being to another living being. In the case of language, and as Kelsey discusses the concept and its functioning within practices above, human created beings'

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[77] Which, to be sure, must be, since all creatures have a range of unique powers and capabilities within their species, groups and/or individual selves.

thinking and experience do dominate because (1) it is thinking *from* human createdness and capabilities and is (2) thinking *on* human createdness and capabilities. Quite the opposite then to estranging human creatures from the context of created life that they are born into, language and particular practices highlight the concrete particularity that must be inherent in creatures' meaningful contexts. As public manifestation of concrete, particular practices then, language, for those creatures capable of it, is a form of response and embodiment of response to God and to the quotidian and to fellow created living beings. However, even after Kelsey's statement on the danger of the model of human persons becoming the norm for the construing of practices, he warns that this still not mean that such a distortion will not happen, and that vigilant self-critique is important if we are not to succumb to the temptation. Many an ecotheologian may want to challenge his notion that (nonhuman) creatures are other than human creatures in being, but one would think it to be one of the strengths of his argument here, in that it does not seek to collapse the being of nonhuman creatures into the categories that would describe and give meaning to those of human creatures. One would think, furthermore, that the context above provides substantial support for such a position, in that it is exactly in the interests of nonhuman creatures that they require a different ontological description, not in the interests of necessarily elevating human created beings above them, but in order to attend to them in their radical particularity and otherness – a core concern of Kelsey's project overall.

Kelsey's use of specifically Proverbs to back up his claims with regard to God's relating to creatures within their proximate contexts "likens God's creative relating to what is not God to Woman Wisdom's way of making her students wise" (2009:235). An important part of Kelsey's discussion of Proverbs is the truthful use of language that is public, which is to be kept faithfully expressive of the life forms it accords with. Furthermore, the medium of address serves to express the manner of God's relating to create, in Wisdom texts as well as Genesis texts, and to point to the calling of created living beings to be wise within their very communities of everyday lived life and enacted practices. The address is described as performative (in constituting communities) and commisive (in calling communities to wisdom). Moreover, God is fully self-committed to the well-being of the communities constituted by the address (cf. Kelsey, 2009:215 –

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241). This is to be understood within Wisdom theology's, and Proverb's, concern in discerning God's providential engagement with and rule of the world (often through such understandings as social or teleological ordering (cf. 2009:238)) that had been brought to bear on Kelsey's arguments. In summary, then, "Wisdom actively orders the world, then, not only by reference to what makes for the well-being of life, but also by reference to God" (2009:240). The *taxis* 'the Father creates through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit' enhances the idea that God's creation is most intimately tied to an ordered and "order-generating" manner – an order that is described by Kelsey as "quasi-personal, socially teleological sort of ordering of reality other than God" (2009:241).

Kelsey pays attention to the quotidian, not only in terms of its locatedness or its complexity or even its orderedness, but also in its finitude. The quotidian is described as limited in two senses, namely ontologically and morally ambiguous. The limited being of the quotidian, in all its creaturely ambiguity, is described by Kelsey as "a function of its radical dependency for its existence on God's ongoing creativity" (2009:201). For Kelsey, there is no place for fatalistic or deterministic worldviews within such an understanding of the quotidian, in the sense of understanding any element or dimension of creation being everlasting or existing necessarily. Rather, Kelsey understands creatures as finite without exception, in two ways. The first is the intrinsic limits to which finite beings are subject, in that they, as complex sets of energy systems, are subject to progressive disorganisation and disintegration. The second is the extrinsic limits to which finite beings are subject, in that creatures inevitably change and damage and even destroy one another. These limits serve to give content to the creaturely ambiguity mentioned above. The finitude and thus limitation of creation implies that God "makes possible the well-being of God's creatures in the ways appropriate to their kind" but also that "creatures are inevitably vulnerable to damage, deterioration, and destruction". This points to both the condition for the possibility for delight in and well-being of creatures and the condition for the possibility for the threat and death inherent in the very same quotidian that provides the context for the living and dying of creatures. When turning to Wisdom theology, Kelsey appropriately affirms that "the Creator who gives life also

deals death".[78] He adds that this does not imply that God is necessarily indifferent to created life and beings (Kelsey, 2009:201 – 203). Here, again, God's relating is likened to the giving of life, so that the dynamics of life and death come to describe the ontological status of creatures' being related to by God. However, an interesting notion in Kelsey is the possibility of interpreting life and death not merely as descriptions for physical existence or non-existence (and even, I would argue, to a large extent not interpreting it in this way at all!), but in terms of God's relating to all that is not God – which of course includes existence, in that creatures would cease to exist without God constantly and providentially relating to them. Since the notion is by and large not limited to physical dimensions (although that too), life and death become deeper signatories of the ambiguity of creatures' existence in relation to God. Particularly, Kelsey seeks to deal adequately with the tensions between 'life' and 'death' within his descriptions of dying life and living death. These designations may help profoundly in understanding creation – the earth and her ecology – and living beings as highly ambiguous beings, in that well-being and threat of living beings in the quotidian cannot be regarded as mere opposites, but are to be understood as contemporaries and partners in defining and constituting created life as is.

Kelsey goes on to discuss two claims around how the Creator deals with both life and death. The first is that God's mode of reality in creating is finite physical reality, which means to say that living beings are created *with the purpose* of being finite and limited. The second is that creaturely change is implied in the first claim, so that the mode of God's ongoing creativity may contain both survival (through adaptation) ánd destruction of creatures. Thus, Kelsey's inquiry into Wisdom theology's contribution to creation theology would affirm proximate contexts as properly finite and thus highly (or experientially) ambiguous (2009:203 – 204). And so Kelsey defends the thesis that human persons could not be perfect or fully actualised, human persons being the creatures of God. Often legacies such as those of the Enlightenment would affirm human perfection in the criterion of freedom, so that freedom both in morally responsible action and in self-expressive creativity could be defined as freedom free from the instincts and

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[78] Which again provides an interesting lens on our use of 'life' in this thesis, specifically 'living beings' as a conceptual means in broadening Kelsey's scope of inquiry for analysis as basis for ecological theology.

drives and even threats of nature. Over and against this, Kelsey seeks in this part of his project to define the human person as "God's good creature in his or her quotidian everydayness and finitude", without consenting to an understanding of humanity as perfect or fully actualised (2009:205 – 207).

The second sense in which the quotidian is ambiguous is in terms of morality. However, unlike ontological ambiguity, moral ambiguity is not a function of the limitedness or finitude of the quotidian, which means that the question of evil and the origin thereof comes to the fore here. Wisdom theology gives no explanation as to the origin of evil (Kelsey explains that this is because Wisdom gives only a relational, and not a genetic, explanation of creation, and so also evil), but assumes evil to be inexplicably "already present" in creation. This leads him to affirm the existence of evil as unexplained and mysterious. He goes on to explain evil as that which damages the well-being of created living beings, against God's self-commitment for the preservation and well-being of the quotidian, and thus being against both fellow created living beings and God. Kelsey regards evil that results in intentional action as sin, in that it has to do with inappropriate responses to the creative relating of God. This, as moral ambiguity, is not to be confused with the damage creatures inescapably do to one another, in a context marked also by ontological ambiguity and finitude. At some point Kelsey gives way to the mysteriousness of evil, in that it is not something (especially ontological evil) that can be completely grasped and explained. Thus, his project seeks to focus on moral evil, an evil predominantly characterised by Proverbs as or through violence ("human action that violates other creatures") (2009:208 – 209). Avoidable and unnecessary violence against fellow creatures in the quotidian are described as evil, and evil is described as the deformation of created living beings (or, in Kelsey's words, 'agents') in their identities, so that such deforming exercises continuous corruptive force. However, evil is not seen as a created living being in its own right, but is rather regarded as a type of parasitic presence that preys upon the quotidian and the context of creaturely being. Over against this, God's hidden providential care is seen as working in on creation in an "eruptive" manner within this very context and with the very moral and ontological ambiguities in mind (2009:210 – 212).

In conclusion to this part of his argument, Kelsey regards the quotidian into which creatures are integrally and inextricably born as "a society in which creatures interact in bewilderingly complex ways that inescapably involve their damaging one another" (2009:213). God's gracious, continuous relating to this context is described as a gift, a bestowal made in complete freedom and with the priority of the well-being of the recipient in view. Kelsey describes this gift as the gift of creatures themselves relating creatively to one another in various interrelationships[79]. Indeed, Kelsey emphasises that it is exactly this God that is deserving of worship, and not (the gift of) creation itself, described not as grace but as a gracious gift. Not only creation in a broad sense, however, but also the concrete particularity of being and having living bodies is a gracious gift of God's relating to create.

3.5   Being and having living bodies

Kelsey explicates what he means by interpreting God's relating creatively through a "theology of birth", through which he proposes to explicate human creatureliness. In a meditation on Job 10, he reflects on two distinguishable accounts that tell of two ways in which Job tells of his birth. The first story focuses on Job's birth from his mother, "his coming to be as a living body" in Kelsey's words (2009:245). The second story focuses on Job having been given a body by God. The gift of a living body is seen by Kelsey as both totally ordinary and totally mysterious (this sets the tone for his argument later that human persons are to be regarded as wholly mysterious, cf. especially 2009:1050 – 1051). The metaphor of birth is appropriate in that it points to a continuous process, which Kelsey argues begins with the fertilisation of a human egg by a human sperm and comes to completion when a living human body is born and able to live outside of its

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[79] Kelsey's idea of God relating to create all that is not God perhaps resonates with Moltmann's notion of God's self-limitation to allow everything that is not God to exist – for instance, "in creating, God precisely does not give Godself… what God gives in creating is thoroughly other-than-God" (Kelsey, 2009:214). In his words: "This is the doctrine of the divine *zimsum*: '*Deus creaturus mundos contraxit praesentiam suam.*' Kabbalistic interpreters surmised that this is why Genesis does not talk about the creation of space; for it is rather that creation is fashioned *in* the emptiness God ceded for it through his creative resolve… The created world does not exist in the 'absolute space' of the divine Being; it exists in the space God yielded up for it through his creative resolve. The world does not exist in itself. It exists in 'the ceded space' of God's world-presence… [t]he space of the world corresponds to God's world-presence, which initiates this space, limits it and interpenetrates it" (Moltmann, 1993:156 – 157; original italics).

mother's body by itself. He describes the life of a living body, in conversation with Jeffrey Schloss (2002), in three ways.

In the first instance he argues that a body needs be understood in terms of its environment, since biology and ecology is inseparable from one another.

The second states that the life of living bodies are teleonomic, goal-oriented, and to be regarded as open systems in terms of the flow of both information and energy, in that "[t]he interplay between living bodies' integral self-relating homeostatic function and their integral self-directing teleonomic agency to fend off entropic disintegration may be viewed as *the essence of life*" (2009:248; my emphasis – NM). Again, life features most strongly for Kelsey when related to created beings, so much so that bodies are not only be understood as the manifestation of life, but also that living beings' drive to survive is essential to created life.

Third, death is not described as necessary for either evolution or the biological functioning of bodies, but is seen as necessary if a habitat is finite and its resources limited. In this third description of the life of living bodies he gives very necessary, particular attention to the smooth functioning of a healthy ecology. Therefore he states that either an infinite source of energy or non-reproduction would be necessary if a proximate context were to function well without the occurrence of death. God creatively relating to all that is not God thus entails God's engagement (although, not as yet another energy system) in processes of intricate and complex energy exchange, whereby living bodies drive towards overcoming entropic forces that threaten to damage or destroy them. In his meditation on Job 10, Kelsey establishes that human beings' living bodies are to be understood as gifts, actual, related to in appropriate though particular ways by God, classified by its genetic structure[80], constant change and development, inherently mysterious and inexhaustibly complex, and described as good with regards to God's relating to it (Kelsey, 2009:250 – 270).

These are notions that are used in conjunction with the description of human bodies particularly, but, I would argue, would be equally suitable for use to describe nonhuman living bodies, sincce it is appropriate for use with regards to all living bodies. I

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[80] In the case of human bodies, DNA is used to make this concrete, the unique genetic structure of *Homo sapiens*.

would think them relevant exactly in the core assumption in these arguments, namely that life needs death to survive. Either in the case of limited resources and space, or in the case of predation, human and nonhuman beings as created living beings are addressed. What differentiates living beings from one another would be specific genetic structures and DNA, but for all creatures death would be an inherent and integral part to their living and survival in their drives to overcome forces of disintegration and destruction. God's engagement in processes of energy exchange builds upon the thesis of God's relating to all that is not God and again emphasises God's intimate involvement in the routine struggles and victories of living beings to survive and overcome forces of death and entropy. The living bodies of living beings are gifts that enable them to facilitate processes of energy exchange and negotiate the complexities of energy systems, and is described with reference to God's intimate and immediate involvement in the process of birthing. This need not be limited to one type of creature or another, although particularity on the whole is core to Kelsey's description of living bodies. This he does by making use of the concepts of 'genetic structure' or 'DNA' to make concrete the particularity of the living bodies under discussion (classifying it as 'human' or whichever species it may be). Thus, it could be said that God is intimately involved in the birth of living bodies, which are defined in their particularity by their specific DNA or genetic structures. These living bodies are gifts given to the particular living being and their proximate contexts, bodies which are constantly changing and developing or, one could say, 'evolving', in processes of adaptation and dynamic interrelationships of energy exchange with other living, creaturely bodies. Since these bodies are centers of (varieties of) power, and since these powers are finite, partaking in dynamic and complex systems of energy exchange involves actual and personal, rather than possible, probable or potential, living and being – even more so in their drives to overcome entropic forces that threaten to damage or destroy them – so that they come to be described as personal. Later Kelsey will argue that these personal bodies have inherent and unqualified dignity and value by virtue of them being creatures of God.

However, if living bodies' actuality is defined as a function of having been born, then pre-birth definitions of actual human life could be considered as potential or possible human life, rather than actual human life. Of course, this creates an interesting dividing

line in applying Kelsey's logic to creaturehood in the broad, since not merely mammals are included in this designation, but life in the broad is the focus of using these concepts in this thesis. Thus, reptiles or bacteria or pre-birth energy and beings might be excluded from the designation 'life' in the very attempt to define God's relating creatively in a broader and more inclusive manner. Interesting possibilities abound as soon as this question arises. Does God relate to bacteria, which, after all, is other than God? Does God then not relate to human or nonhuman unborn babies? If living personal bodies is what constitutes 'life' for Kelsey, then these should in all probability also be included in the designation 'life', since, according to Kelsey, "God is involved throughout, from conception through gestation to birth" (2009:246). Thus, in this thesis 'life' would include instances of pre-birth bodies and those instances of life that would not necessarily be mammalian or having and being given bodies. However, the particularly challenging questions that often arise from ecological theology's side pertain to the understanding of especially natural elements which is not in possession of living bodies, such as water or air. Of course, one could mention that these elements form the make-up of living bodies at one point or another, or at the very least play a role in providing for the survival and well-being of these living bodies at some point and in some manner. I would argue that one would have to conclude that since God relates to *all* that is not God, in Kelsey's terms, even the elements stand in relationship to God – indeed, Kelsey argues that "God's creative relating to nonhuman bodies is as immediate and free as is God's relating to human living bodies" (2009:255). Thus, it is not by virtue of any living being or thing having the capacity out of themselves (such as reason or will or intellect or intuition or conscience or subjectivity or self-awareness or whatever the case might be) that they are merited in standing in a relationship to God, whether after birth or before. Rather, God's initial, free and intimate relating to all that is not God constitutes the relationship between God and all that is not God, which includes all of life. Living bodies can then only be one expression of such life, an expression that would make complete sense in a theological anthropology since it encompasses the lowest (coherent) common denominator in humanness without introducing dualist concepts. In ecological theology one would have to take greater care in employing the concept across the board, though. However, Kelsey himself gives this thought also when he states that a description of God as triune would

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be immediately and intimately involved and engaged in "whatever may be the structure and dynamics of organic and inorganic creatures alike" (2009:255). How exactly this is to happen is not addressed by Kelsey, and one would be hard-pressed to give a theologically solid answer without admitting to the priority that the mystery of creatures' existence have in questions such as these. It is clear for Kelsey from the accounts in Job that (1) "God directly relates creatively in each moment", (2) even though a part of a human body cannot be construed as an actual living human body, although even the parts (such as human living cells) is seen as creatures of God, and that (3) these parts of bodies (such as tissue of cells) may (potentially) develop into an actual living body, and thus cannot be called an actual living body, even if the various moments in the process are part of the process of actualisation of a body (2009:263). Created living beings with bodies ánd created living beings without bodies are related to by God, and can be construed as life, then, exactly in being centers of finite powers (2009:265) and energy systems or systems of real powers (2009:266). Even more, Kelsey's speaks of God relating to "creatures living and nonliving" (2009:267). Interesting possibilities abound, particularly for discussion on providence and reality after death, but one should take care not to step into the trap of what Kelsey would call "theological science fiction" (2009:1021).

Indeed, perhaps at this point one reaches the utmost boundaries of what could be said about both the mystery of living beings, and the mystery of God's relating to human beings within this mode of relating. Kelsey emphasises very strongly that human living bodies are "all radically dependent on God's free creativity for their continuing actuality" (2009:267) but are nonetheless ontologically mysterious, for two reasons. The first involves the vulnerability of living bodies' constitution in networks of relations, wherein they are prone to damaging and destroying one another. The second has to do with consumption of other creatures, wherein Kelsey thinks predation to be inescapable if creatures are to survive (2009:267). These mysteries are the mysteries of the dying life of creatures, and in particular the mystery of the inevitability and meaning of death in created life. Perhaps it is no wonder that, in their mysteriousness, death and evil are thought of as synonymous, collapsed in the fears and ignorance of the mystery of the threat that both hold to the vibrant vulnerability of life. A clear distinction between death and evil that Kelsey coherently maintains throughout his project lies in the responsibility

to account to God in terms of the one (evil, or more specifically, where evil and sin overlap; living death) but not the other (death, or dying life). A next question would thus pertain to how one would formulate appropriate responses of life to God's creative relating to all of life, but this will be taken up in the next section. Suffice to say for now that "God relates concretely to creatures in ways that are appropriate to their creaturely powers. Consequently, how God relates concretely to different kinds of creatures necessarily varies" (2009:255). If it is kept in mind that Kelsey's particular proposals, such as humanly appropriate responses to God's relating, varies, then how God relates concretely to created living beings will each and of their own accord need careful and systematic thinking through. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not to attempt to give such particular and fine formulations of God's concrete relations to all that is not God, but rather wants to inquire into constructing a basis for these concrete relations.

For Kelsey, 'living bodies' are used in conjunction with 'creatures' to express actuality of life. Indeed, "God freely and intimately relates directly to human living bodies, *just as* God does to all nonhuman creatures" (2009:256; my emphasis – NM) – and 'human' serves to classify it (2009:257). These living bodies are described as "good" creations and creatures by virtue of God's free and intimate and active relating, since the goodness of goodness is grounded in God, and not in the moral qualifications attributed to or moral ambiguities brought about by their proximate contexts. This entails God's relating to them in ways appropriate to their distinctive powers, which Kelsey would call "ways making for the well-being of the creatures in their proximate contexts". These various dynamics are intricate and complex, and are thus described as both epistemically and ontologically mysterious. For Kelsey, the complex energy systems and interrelations wherein living bodies exist and life operates are reason for wonder and intense amazement (2009:269).

The second metaphor, as mentioned, involves Job's being given a living body by God, for which he is held accountable and responsible. The abilities to give account and to respond involve use of the full range of powers and capacities of a creature, but Kelsey deepens this discussion when he describes these as particularly human capacities. He connects this with what he means by unsubstitutable personal identity and appropriate responses to God's creating when he argues that "[n]one can respond to God in place of

another. No one is accountable for another's response to God" (2009:274), and even when one gives response and account in 'oneliness', one cannot give response and account alone. The inherent accountability of human creatures to God provides the ground for their human dignity, namely as ex-centric, "grounded and centered outside human creatures" (2009:275). This in itself could prove to be a fascinating study on Kelsey's contributions to thinking anew on human dignity, and his objection that "the culturally dominant concept of human dignity justifies ascribing dignity to human beings on the grounds that 'humanity' differs from animals" in being self-determining and ascribing to a universally acknowledged rationality (2009:276) or rational will (2009:277). Not only is this something that excludes persons not capable of these acts, such as the mentally impaired[81], but it would also exclude all nonhuman creatures from qualifying for being ascribed dignity to them and as requiring respect and responsible action towards them. The question whether nonhuman creation could be or should be included in descriptions of and arguments for the dignity of human creatures is an intriguing one, especially if "[o]ur dignity is inherent in the sheer gift-character of creation" (2009:278). One would have to wonder whether such a description of dignity could exclude nonhuman creation if it is to serve as basis for describing and ascribing dignity of and to human creatures or human living beings, and if it is derived from God's active relating to all that is not God. Kelsey does, however, distinguish between human dignity and creaturely goodness. Whereas the latter creatures have by virtue of God relating to them, the former is also to some extent determined by having been born, and by thus made responsible and accountable to God for the personal bodies given. In light of this, Kelsey argues that respect for human dignity must be universal, practical, override any other interest, and must be objective (2009:278 – 279). Since human dignity rests on God's relation to all that is not God, the dignity of all creation (within which human dignity forms a more specific focus) must be universal, practical, override any other interest, and be objective.

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[81] Cf. Moltmann's contribution to this in his *God in Creation*, entitled "Life in health and sickness" (1993:270 – 275).

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Two tales of personal bodies, namely in being given and having living bodies, bring to the fore the mysterious dynamics of the complex energy exchanges and interchanges of and between bodies. The living bodies, which are expressions of created life and thus inclusive of both human and nonhuman creatures (as all that God relates to), and is given living beings can be said to be teleonomic, finite, actual and mysterious.[82] As a first tale of how personal bodies are said to be (and especially as how they are said to be given), being given a personal body traces some core aspects to what constitutes living bodies. In a second tale, on having living, personal bodies, the acts of giving account and responding to the gift of living bodies are discussed, and it becomes clear that most especially the concept of dignity is contingent upon sound and healthy understanding of living bodies. This does not mean to exclude the reality of death, or to confuse death and evil in the very mysteries of dying life that they present, but rather points to creaturely reality exactly in being dying life.

3.6   Creaturely reality as dying life

In a meditation on Job 10, Kelsey discusses a number of features of God's creative relating through human creatures' having been born. In particular, he aims to listen to the voices of Genesis 1 – 3 against the background of Job 10's two tales, namely as being born or created and having been born or being given a living body. The first feature of this meditation he discusses has to do with the possibility or inherent capability of creatures for disintegration due to an "integral ontological unity" (2009:282) that is inherently frail and vulnerable. However, he equates created living beings' integrity not with physical, moral or psychological integrity, but in God's relating, and thus in their

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[82] With the mystery inherent in the development of creatures and creation in mind, a fascinating study could be the relation between the process of evolution, wherein species adapt to their quotidian in order to ensure their well-being and survival (which, as noted above, would not exclude either death or damage or predation), and the formation of the fetus before birth as perhaps a type of mini-evolutionary process wherein the fetus adapt to its proximate context in order to ensure its well-being and survival both within and outside the mother's womb. A deciding factor that would separate the two would of course be the phenomenon of birth, since large-scale, long-term adaptation would need to happen collectively after birth to affect change and since individual and short-term adaptation would need to happen individually before birth to affect change and would be predetermined by genes and genetic structure and DNA. Questions regarding the interrelationships of human dignity, thinking on the human soul, contributions by Whitehead and others in process theology, and the like might provide interesting analogies and parallels for thinking on the processes of evolution and pre-fetal development, especially in terms of adaptation, growth and change.

ex-centeredness. This also entails dependence on other creatures, which is seen not as a violation of creaturely integrity but as "an essential condition of my creaturely integrity having the concretely actual personal identity it does in fact have" (2009:283). The ultimate degree of creaturely disintegration for Kelsey is death, and he argues that in creating finite life which contains the possibility of death God in fact creates dying life. This, indeed, is crucial to the aim of engaging with David Kelsey in constructing a basis for ecological theology, since it creates great opportunities for responding to and thinking anew about the ecological crisis that we find ourselves in this very day. By emphasising the limitation and finitude of life, and death as integral to creaturely life with integrity, Kelsey first helps us in our understanding of life as not the opposite of death, but rather dying life as the opposite of living death, which will be discussed later on in this chapter in greater detail. Again, life seems an appropriate lens for interpreting what Kelsey describes as all that is not God.

An important second aspect, then, is indeed the implications of his statement that God creates dying life, finite life prone to damage, destruction and death, in its frailty and vulnerability, in its dependence on predation for survival, and in its adaptation to make for its well-being in its proximate context. With this view, one might ask whether some ecological theological projects are not unjustified in (1) its unqualified use of 'life', as life as opposed to death, and (2) in its unequivocal advocating against ecological destruction and damage for the sake of such a skewed understanding of 'life' in mind. It might be asked whether death and destruction are not inherently part of living dying lives within a finite quotidian, itself within a limited proximate context? If this be endorsed, one might have to wonder whether ecological crises are not part of the very nature of dying lives, human and nonhuman, lived together in realities of finitude, predation and the priorities of means of surviving the forces of entropy and disintegration inherent in created lives? With Kelsey's emphasis on God creating dying life, one might play the devil's advocate and ask whether ecological degradation and disasters might not perhaps be all that unnatural or strange, and whether God would not then allow this (although I will not push this point, in light of Kelsey's own methodological objection with confusing the logic of belief with the logic of coming to belief) as part of 'being created'

(cf. 2009:284, 321, 500). Perhaps Kelsey himself addresses this tension best, when he says (2009:286) that

> God's continuous creating of us, for all of God's self-commitment therein to our being and well-being, does not necessarily entail that God will protect us from the consequences of accidents, or from failures by others that may sometimes incapacitate some of us to be properly in charge of ourselves, nor from the way in which we ourselves culpably fail to take charge of ourselves. In relating to us as our creator, the triune God is directly and intimately related to each of us as One who gives us space and time to be ourselves.

I would argue that one situate the ecological crisis, therefore, solidly within the living death of distortion wreaked through responding inappropriately to God's threefold relating – and especially God's relating to create.

A second feature Kelsey discusses is living human bodies in their creaturely integrity as "personal living bodies" (2009:286). By 'personal' Kelsey means to point not to those physical or mental predicates inherent to human creatures, nor to emotional, spiritual, moral, intellectual, rational capacities of human creatures, but rather to the constitution of human creatures as personal beings by God's immediate and direct relating to them. Psychological, intellectual, social and cultural aspects of human beings are, in light of this, not regarded as 'predicates' then, but rather as constitutive of the energy systems into which human beings are born and which are given them at birth. Kelsey argues that both Genesis and Job make use of the analogy of 'address' to describe the manner in which "God relates to creaturely human bodies to personalize them" (2009:292). This points to human beings' being 'personal' before being 'persons', in that God relates to creatures (actual human creatures in their complexity, in this case) in the distinctive way of 'address'. This further implies God's self-commitment to a public space which is "constituted by the dynamics of God's giving and human creature's receiving the gift of creation" (2009:292) and wherein language, and thus God's addressing, functions to make 'personal' a public reality (2009:296). The mode of address is clear both in Job 38, where God is silent for a long while before responding to Job's questioning by questioning Job himself, and in Genesis 2:4b – 3:24, where God commands human beings to act in accordance with their well-being. Both narratives

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assume communities of discourse[83], but Kelsey points out an important difference between the narratives. Whereas Job's metaphor of address does not necessarily imply that created living beings are capable of responding to God's address, Genesis does assume that human beings are able to respond to God's command. However it may be, God addresses all of creation in both Job and Genesis, which constitutes all that is not God as addressed (and some in greater particularity and specificity than others) by God.

A third feature is the relation between actually and perfectly personal bodies, in an attempt to discern some standard for the being of personal bodies. The text of Job 10 implies three important distinctions with regard to the being of human creatures. The first is that actual personal bodies imply personal histories of change and adaptation, or, in Kelsey's words, maturation and actualisation of a wide array of capacities and powers. The second assumes a relative (rather than an absolute) concept of human perfection. The third points to the careful distinction made between God's relating to creatures (which has to do with actuality) and creatures' relating to God (which has to do with perfection). Adhering to Genesis 1 and 2 against the background of Job 10 emphasises that God creates "unexacted and uncoerced", creates all that is not God as "good" (but not necessarily "perfect", since this would depend on creatures' response to God) and "concretely actual" (2009:302 – 303).

A fourth feature entails "the proper relation between human and nonhuman creatures" (2009:303). Specifically, Kelsey sees the contribution classical theological anthropology makes as problematic. Job 10 is understood as a narrative telling of human living beings as particulars, as persons engaging in and constituted by the relationships of their proximate contexts, or ecological, social and cultural environments. Human creatures are understood as complex and fragile created living beings, set within larger contexts of biological and social life. In distinction from the accounts in Genesis, "Job as creature is on a par with other living creatures" (2009:304) and not the climax of God's creative work per se. Genesis, on the other hand, highlights the glory and the blessedness of human living beings. Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a stresses the glory of human creatures, which is the 'dominion' – Kelsey defines this as 'mediating', 'protecting', preserving' – over all

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[83] One might add Genesis 1:1 – 25 to the discourse narratives, where God calls all that is into being by addressing them (Kelsey, 2009:295).

other creatures. Genesis 2:4b – 24 stresses the blessedness of human creatures, which emphasises too that human creatures need, and consequently desire, other bodily creatures for survival and to delight in. Kelsey sees the inherent "relationality of human creatureliness" (2009:306) in both Job's account of his birth and Genesis' accounts of the creation of *adam*. By themselves, Genesis' accounts of creation might be thought to propagate a view wherein nonhuman creatures are understood in their relation to human creatures, which, in turn, might not have the capacity to "check a purely exploitative relation by human creatures with nonhuman creatures except, perhaps, enlightened self-interest" (2009:306). However, Job's account of his birth might be able to assist in stressing that in their relationality human creatures are equal to nonhuman creatures, although human creatures might have a vocation other creatures do not have in being called to be wise in actions for the sake of the well-being of other creatures. This point is no more important than other points of formality in this project, since it is not human creatures' relation to nonhuman creatures that constitutes the latter, but God's relating to all that is not God that constitutes all of created life – and so even nonhuman creatures do not have to be sources of delight, wonder, nourishment, partnership or assistance in any way to remain actual and good creatures in own right.

A fifth feature of Kelsey's understanding of human bodies is that of human creatures being terminal individuals, "personal bodies, as instances of quite familiar kinds of complex, integral and finally mysterious centers of finite powers" ought to make use of their "capital of heredity" (in Ricoeurian terms) or "entire array of senses of life in which a human body may be said to be a living body" to respond to God (2009:307). In being terminal individuals, personal living bodies are firstly the only ones who can respond as for themselves to God and to fellow creatures, and secondly the only ones who can finally give an explanatory account of intentional actions. This makes human beings unsubstitutable in being terminal individual personal living bodies.

These various features of what Kelsey sees human bodies to be are not to be equated with the term *imago Dei*, as Kelsey discusses this only in a coda at the end of his project – for very specific reasons, to be echoed in chapter 6. Rather, human bodies are seen to be personal living bodies subject to disintegration, as placed within a certain environment and network of interrelationships, as created as actual but not necessarily

perfect persons, as set in created life as "first among equals", and as terminal individuals (2009:281).

Creaturely reality as dying life is understood to be finite, personal, actual, responsible and unsubstitutable life. However, for Kelsey living is not truly living without flourishing, and so God's address to all that is not God is taken to point above and beyond – to the flourishing of all of life, on borrowed breath.

3.7   Flourishing on borrowed breath

The ultimate context of all that is not God, related to creatively, is address, for which the appropriate response is eccentric faith.

Kelsey interprets the triune God's creative relating to humankind as actual human personal bodies' living on borrowed breath. Furthermore, "[t]hat their breath of life is borrowed does not imply that the life of their living human bodies is not their own" (2009:309). Rather, he means to show that human creatures, as all creatures, do not own their bodied personal lives, and thus is accountable and responsible to God for the way of life that is their response to God's creative relating. Following this line of reasoning, Kelsey interprets sin and evil as contrasts to the glory of God expressed in God's creative relating. Consequently, human creaturely glory could be described as flourishing in a twofold sense.

Flourishing can firstly be understood as created living beings' trust in "God as ground of their being and value" and secondly as loyalty to "God's creative project" (2009:310). The glory of God, "the full richness of God's reality", is described by Kelsey as at once "God's self-expressive self-giving" and "God's attractive beauty" (2009:310). He understands God's glory to be relational (through his interpretation of the concept in biblical contexts), and so to entail both relating to others in their genuine otherness ánd in drawing others toward Godself. The way in which God relates to all that is not God creatively expresses the glory of God, and so it could be said that the ultimate context of creatures is the glory of God. For Kelsey, God's relating creatively in this sense describes two instances of the fullness of God's perfect reality, namely freedom and hospitable generosity. Indeed, the glory of God defines the flourishing of human beings. Kelsey interprets the flourishing of created life and living beings to be twofold, namely

blossoming and thriving. Blossoming, he argues, manifests a type of beauty a life is capable of due to God's relating to it, while thriving has to do with having oneself in hand[84]. Created life's flourishing, as blossoming and thriving, is determined by two theological themes, namely those of the radically finite nature of life and thus life as life toward death – and that human living beings' flourishing is inseparable from the flourishing of all created living beings (he adds, "in their kinds"), and thus all of life. Therefore human creatures' glory lies not behind or ahead of the quotidian – in the past of God's first creation or in the future of God's new creation – but within "human creatures being dedicatedly active for the well-being of their everyday proximate contexts as citizens of the society of creatures that comprise the quotidian" (2009:315). Living bodies' life toward death thus entails the flourishing of dying life, so that in their dying lives creatures express the glory of God in response to God's relating creatively.

It could be said that flourishing personal bodies are in themselves expressive of the glory of God merely by being living bodies, and so too "[d]ifferent creatures are God's glory in different modalities; they simply express God's glory in different ways" (2009:316). However, Kelsey is very serious that the flourishing of human living bodies ought to be understood in relation to God, which, for him, cannot mean that flourishing be defined as health or particular capabilities or powers or functionality since, even if healthy bodies are preferable to unhealthy bodies, unhealthy bodies also express the glory of God in their own ways. Rather, bodies are to be understood as flourishing in their being derivatively the glory of God. Thus, the flourishing of living beings within their created life ought to be understood eccentrically, not in relation to themselves or their functionality but in relation to God as the ground of their reality and value. Important for this thesis, 'life' in Wisdom literature (from which Kelsey works to construct also the ways in which creatures are deemed to flourish in their proximate contexts) "is construed broadly to embrace several dimensions: biological, emotional, intellectual, social and cultural" (2009:318), each of which is interdependent with the other dimensions in complex ways.

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[84] Kelsey refers to the root of the word 'thrive', which he takes to be the Old Norse word 'thrifask', meaning "to have oneself in hand" (2009:315).

However, flourishing also indicates living bodies to be living bodies on loan, which points to personal living bodies as the glory of God made to flourish when they respond appropriately in acting wisely for the well-being of the quotidian for its own sake. Firstly, personal bodies are called to act intentionally and thus with practical wisdom or know-how (phronesis). Secondly, personal bodies' wise acts should seek out to promote (positively) the well-being of the quotidian for its own sake, in protecting (negatively) the integrity of living beings from violence and violation[85]. Since the divine relating constitutes all that is not God, the divine relating "is central to every creature's integrity and to the integrity of the everyday world as a whole" (2009:321). This means that the practices of human beings ought to be, in Kelsey's words, formed by a vision that makes for the well-being of fellow created living beings or created life (positively) and for the protection of the integrity of fellow creatures or created life against violation and violence (negatively). Thus vision forms a core part of what Kelsey formulates as wise action, in that "[p]ersonal bodies flourish in wise action that has learned to envision its proximate contexts within the ultimate context of the triune God's actively relating to them creatively" (2009:321). Might this provide yet another key to responding to the ecological crisis of our day? Kelsey very clearly does not define too closely what such a moral vision might have to entail, but does sketch the imperativeness of such a vision when he states: "When our practices are not formed by such a vision of our fellow creatures, the circumstances within which we act, and ourselves as agents, we risk doing violence to fellow creatures' integrity" (2009:321).

Moreover, acting in the interests of the well-being of the quotidian for its own sake does not entail prescribing to totalising (history as a singular totality and unified whole), teleological (history as moving to realise some overarching goal of God), or Hegelian (history's inexorable movements toward greater maturation and self-actualisation) views of history. Rather, Kelsey understands history as consisting of a series of different periods or "times" which entails acting in prophetic witness and with prophetic vision in discerning what a particular time is for. Indeed, "[w]e are called to wise action for the well-being of the quotidian for its own sake and not for the

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[85] Kelsey limits these cases to the integrity of created living beings, and so the vocation he formulates does not exclude predation or damage to living beings.

actualization of some goal beyond it" (2009:324). Acting for the well-being of the quotidian for its own sake is to be understood, not in terms of some transcending or ultimate goal, but in terms of the particularities of fellow creatures. Kelsey does not subscribe to totalising views of the lives and purposes of creatures or their quotidians, and formulates the vocation of human beings in the quotidian as acting wisely within a lifelong project of human beings' actualising of themselves as wise persons. Kelsey argues that meaning is ascribed to lives and to life when what is regarded as making life worth living is lived within a greater, integrated whole in mind, which may or may not be centered in a meta-narrative or value or goal. Against either committing to a lifelong project or to the project of self-actualisation, canonical Wisdom is shown to call human beings to wise action, albeit not with such projects in mind. Instead, "[t]he ground of meaning in human life is eccentric to that life" (2009:327).

At this key moment of his argument, Kelsey develops the suggestion that faith qualifies as an appropriate response to God's call to creatures to be wise in their proximate contexts or created lives (2009:310). Being in faith or being faithful to God involves created beings living within their proximate contexts in trust of God as their ground and value and in being loyal to their creaturely proximate contexts as God's own project. Flourishing in faith firstly involves trusting God and being loyal to God's creative project through the Son, in that faith echoes and reciprocates God's faithfulness to creatures in their proximate contexts. Faith itself, however, is complex, involving the whole array of creaturely powers of personal bodies, and cutting across all powers and capabilities of a personal body in faithfulness. Faithfulness itself is a complex response because it responds to something complex, namely the expression of God's glory, which is visible in the exchange of freedom and hospitable generosity constituting creatures' ultimate context. Faithfulness to God is not only seen as response to God's glory, however, but is in itself seen as expressive of God's glory in its very glorification of God. Furthermore, faithfulness is described as an attitude, rather than a virtue or "process that is existentially self-involving" (2009:330). Thus it is clear that personal living bodies flourish, blossom and thrive, when they glorify God, and they glorify God when they respond appropriately to the way in which God relates creatively to them. Flourishing in faith involves blessing (and not a state or condition or consequence resulting in the

investing of personal powers or capabilities) in the power of the Spirit. Indeed, "wisdom is finally a free blessing from God" (2009:330). Wisdom is ambiguous, since it at once involves listening, self-discipline and hard work, and also needs of God to grant it as free gift given in God's freedom and hospitable generosity. Finally then, faith itself is a gift given by God, as expressive of the appropriate response to God's creative relating to all that is not God a in broad sense and to human beings in particular.

Created life is the glory of God, and faith as the appropriate response in both senses of being God's glory and responding to God's glory involves the public and personal realities of being related to by God creatively, through the medium of address. What constitutes created life is the glory of God in God's creatures constituted by God's relating, through being directly and indirectly addressed by the triune God.

3.8   Personal, public reality as living addressees

Thus far in this chapter, the question of what created life is has formed the main focus of the discussions. In line with Kelsey's own method of discussion of all three core questions in each part of his work, how eschatologically consummated life ought to be and who reconciled life is will also need to receive attention in this part of my discussion on his proposals, albeit to a much lesser extent than the core question.

Who we are as God's creatures is constituted through the medium of address for Kelsey, following Wisdom theology. Through the performative and self-involving nature of direct and indirect address, God relates to us creatively by situating us as created life within a society of interdependent and interacting beings and by calling us to be wise in our practices within our quotidian (Kelsey calls this "vocation"). Address is made possible and appropriate through the epistemic distance or over-againstness between God and all that is not God (2009:526). God's addressing us as creatures holds with it two senses and two implications. The first sense is that finite creatures are radically given to by God, and thus empowered to act and to be in and of ourselves, and to relate to creatures other than ourselves. The implication of this sense is the first appropriate response to God's relating in this manner, namely an attitude of faithful trust in God. The second sense is that finite creatures are called to be wise within their quotidian and for the sake of the well-being of the quotidian. The implication of this sense holds with the first

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implication as appropriate response to God, but in this case focuses on faithful loyalty to God's creative project and seeks to reflect God's own loyalty towards the quotidian and its well-being. Whereas the senses of God's addressing us describe our personal identities as constituted by God, the implications point to how our personal identities are appropriately reflected in the very responses to God's acts of constituting our identities or relating to us in a certain manner. An important qualification follows. Personal bodies' identities are not constituted in isolation but is to be understood as personal identity in and through the giving and receiving (interdependent relations) with created life and living beings other than themselves. This involves both God, in whose relating living beings are constituted, and fellow created living beings, with whom living beings are constituted. However, the personal identities of personal living bodies do not depend upon the assessments or understandings or judgments of these identities by other living beings, but is radically free of these by being grounded eccentrically in the radical giving of the triune God. Faith is the attitude of trust in God's radical giving of created life and loyalty to God's radical giving also of the quotidian, which makes both my and other creatures' relating and being possible and meaningful. Thus, "[i]n the context of the triune God relating to us creatively, the 'who?' question was answered in terms of a vocation" (2009:525).

Furthermore, Kelsey suggests that faith in and faithfulness to God's creative relating to us best be described as "fear of the Lord" and the appropriate attitude toward our proximate contexts as "reverent and awed doxological gratitude" (2009:340). The existential hows, the ways in which living bodies orient and situate themselves in relation to their proximate contexts, inherent in this mode of relating, involve living out faith "in the power of the Spirit" and in expression of doxological gratitude toward the triune God's active and creative relating. Within this attitude, doxology is the appropriate response to the hospitable generosity or glory of God's relating to all that is other than God ("praise for creation's ultimate context" (2009:344)), and gratitude the appropriate response to the expression of God's glory in our proximate contexts ("doxological gratitude for our proximate contexts in their quotidian finitude" (2009:344). Personal living bodies live out doxological gratitude through the exercise of the variety of powers

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and capabilities that they were constituted with, in a variety of appropriate ways called for within a variety of circumstances at a variety of times.

However, how we are to be as God's creatures cannot be expressed through a set and exhaustive number and application of appropriate (faithful) practices and acts. Rather, "prudent and just acts need to be discerning acts guided by a vision of the quotidian's needs and possibilities as a whole" (2009:354). In line with this broader thrust in his argument, Kelsey identifies three broad types of existential hows or appropriate responses to God's direct and indirect addresses, "through the Son in the power of the Spirit" (2009:345), to all that is not God.

The first of the three types of existential hows expressive of doxological gratitude (as Kelsey calls them), involves "practicing wonder". Indeed (2009:345),

> [w]onder at fellow creatures is gratitude's doxology in which God's creaturely gifts are each and all referred to God. It is a way of being loyal to the fellow creatures to whom God is loyal simply by being attentive to them, attending to them in their concrete particularities.

This involves learning to wonder at created living beings, which involves practice, which involves discipline. A first discipline, then, is that of learning respect for fellow created living beings in and of themselves, in their radical givenness and sheer otherness. A second discipline would be learning to attend to fellow created living beings in their concrete particularities as God's creatures, specifically with regards to sensory experience. In learning to look and see created life anew, in its own right, stereotypes and prejudiced perceptions would still play a part in human understanding[86], but would be liberated from the grip of preformulated images and perceptions of those particular created living beings. A third discipline would then require curiosity regarding fellow creatures, or as Kelsey terms it, "a passion for inquiry", which is committed to understanding fellow living beings in their concrete particularities.

The second of the three typologies of existential hows, "practicing delight", is described as "an engagement with fellow creatures as they are given and self-given here and now" (2009:348). As with the first typology, this existential how involves three disciplines. The first is learning to rejoice faithfully in praise of God for the radical givenness of creatures. The second discipline has to do with learning patience in allowing

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[86] Or, as Gadamer argued, prejudice as a condition for human understanding (Kelsey, 2009:347; quoting Gadamer, 1990:277 – 307).

fellow creatures the time and the space to be themselves fully, and echoes God's relating to all created life in such a way as to giving all that is not God the time and the space to be themselves fully (cf. Kelsey, 2009:349). A third discipline is the proper loving of the abovementioned objects of delight. Of the various designations often used to describe love in Christian theology, *agape*, *philia* and *eros* are among the most common. *Agape*, for Kelsey, describes "God's way of loving estranged creatures that become, in their estrangement, unlovely" (2009:349). *Philia* designates "reciprocal love between those who have equal status in a hierarchical structure and who are engaged in a common project" (2009:350). *Eros* is "passion attracted to its beloved by the latter's perceived capacity to satisfy some need of the lover" (2009:350). Of these, Kelsey regards *eros* as the closest description of what he aims to define as the discipline of loving fellow creatures, in that "delight's love is a desire for fellow creatures that is born of the lover's doxological gratitude for himself as God's creative gift, quite as much as it is born of doxological gratitude for the beloved as God's creative gift" (2009:351). Loving fellow living beings as those other than God, related creatively to by God, focuses on the interdependency of creatures constituted within interchanging and exchanging energy systems and societies in turn constituted by God's constant and providential relating to them, by way of constant direct and indirect address.

The last typology of appropriate existential hows is "practicing perseverance with fellow creatures in interactions of giving and receiving within the society constituted by God's creative address" (2009:352). This typology wants to emphasise the loyalty of particularly human beings to the well-being of fellow created living beings and (within) the created quotidian, most especially when suffering evil. This response or existential how is, like the previous two typologies, born of doxological gratitude for God's creative relating to all that is not God, and is an attempt to answer to God's call for wise action in and for the quotidian – even (most especially?) when God is seemingly indifferent to or absent from God's creative project.

In summary, these typologies attend to the past, present and future of created life, and thus seeks to respond to both it and God's call to act wisely within it by practicing wonder ("in the pastness of their present"), practicing delight (in "their present givenness") and practicing perseverance (being "loyal to the future of their present") for

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the well-being of all that is not God (Kelsey, 2009:353). This requires discipline, discernment and vision, which means to discern wise acts in service of a vision of the needs and possibilities and opportunities for the well-being of all created life. For Kelsey, this means disciplining "our perceptive and cognitive capacities so that they habitually understand fellow creatures, each creatures in itself and all together, as creatively related to by God, a picture that *refers them all to God*" (2009:353; my emphasis – NM).

In terms of humanity's responsibility towards created life and living beings other than themselves, one could, from Kelsey's arguments here, make a case for differing modes of responsibility in humanity's acts and practices toward the earth and her ecology. The three typologies explicated above must not, however, be confused as grounds for constructing a basis for ecological theology, since they fit well within a theological anthropology that argues for the eccentric existence and responsibility of human beings in particular. What the typologies might contribute for us in this chapter could be in emphasising the importance of spelling out specific, concrete and particular appropriate responses that encompass both God and fellow created beings as others. For Kelsey, these responses require much discipline, but not disciplines in the direction of achieving the undesired or undesirable. Rather, they are disciplined responses in the direction of gaining access to and being related to that which is desired in erotic love's need. As disciplines that respond to the call of desire's need of the other, these responses engage critically but fully and courageously with the other. Two related difficulties abound in appropriating the notions expressed in these responses. If they are not left to be humanity's responsibility toward the earth and her ecology, then one would need to deal with the ignorance we as human beings have regarding how nonhuman created beings respond (even before dealing with appropriate or inappropriate responses!) to all that are other to them. Secondly, we would need to take care not to assume that simply in 'being', all created (nonhuman) living beings and life automatically responds and then also respond appropriately to God in all that they do.

Probably no more than two responses to the problematic of these difficulties could be given within the context of Kelsey's work. Firstly God's relating to all that is not God forms the basis of all responses (both appropriate and inappropriate), and so this primal and initial relating ought not be confused with the responses of created living beings as to

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the ground of their reality and value. Indeed, God's relating to all that is not God provides the basis for some sort of appropriate response that would need to be given between all that is not God, human and nonhuman alike. What these responses could entail would, I would argue, differ dramatically, if created living beings are created in great diversity and if they are called to be fully actual in the concrete particularity of their very diversity. The base for such responses would be responding for the well-being and in the desiring love for the other. A second response as to the difficulties outlined above could be given. This would entail referring to the blessing of life that God confers upon all created living beings, namely in living and in bringing forth life. The act or activity in which living beings are, in which they live according to their diverse and concretely particular contexts and powers and capabilities, may itself be considered a response to God's relating to create. Whereas, again, the prime concern would be response to God (something that is followed up in a next section, on faithful trust in God), it would also involve faithful loyalty to the blessing that is conferred upon all created living beings, namely in partaking in this blessing to the well-being and in the desiring love for the other.

Created living beings are those sheerly or radically given to by God, those called to be wise in their discernment and action with the well-being of the quotidian in mind – those called to be and become dying lives. This is described as a vocation that living beings are called to fulfill by responding appropriately to the God who relates to create them, by enacting practices in eccentric faith that are expressive of trust in God and loyalty to God's creative project within their proximate, quotidian contexts. When these responses are distorted the existential hows of living beings are distorted (sins) but may also lead to the living death of distorted personal identities (sin) and structural oppression and violence (evil).

3.9   Living death: distortions of faith

Distortions of faith constitute sins in that it comprises of inappropriate responses to God's relating to create. Sins of this kind have to do with the distortion of faith's trust in God (sin in the singular) and with the distortion of faith's loyalty to God's creative project (sins in the plural). Distortions of faith are practices that are not enacted on borrowed breath. With reference to Wisdom literature, Kelsey gives a description of wise practices

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that lead to life and foolish practices that lead to death, as well as violent practices in active relations with fellow living creatures. Practices that violate created living beings lead not only to biological death, but violate creatures in a common life that is described as living death (as opposed to the dying life that God creates). The use of language is integral to all types and ranges of human violent practices and interactions in Wisdom theology in that there is a "consistent association of violent practices with false speech" (2009:402) so that "[p]ersonal bodies' violating practices are inseparable from untruthful uses of language" (2009:404). Untruthful speech is seen as being untrue in three ways, namely untrue to those being violated, untrue to facts, and untrue to those violating. With these descriptions in view, lying and untruthful speech can characterise both systemic and intentional lying and deceit.

If "[e]vil may be understood as violation of creatures", and if "evil is any violation of what creatures are by God's creative relating to them" (2009:405) then evil can also be said to consist of some features. The first is that evil is relative to the fact that and in the manner that God relates to all that is not God to constitute created life. The second is that evil is not understood as a reality in its own right, but rather as parasitic upon the reality of creatures. Thus, thirdly, evil may be as much an active as a passive condition, because violated creatures still remain centers of energy, even if it could involve a weakening of creatures' finite centers of energy. The fourth feature follows from the third, in that "evil is often a systematic distortion of creatures as energy systems" and "distortions may have, as it were, a life of their own, resistant of efforts to change them" (2009:407). Fifthly, whereas evil may damage the well-being of creatures, it cannot be said to damage creatures flourishing as God's glory. The sixth aspect stipulates that violating acts cannot be separated from untruthful language, since violent and violating acts take place in social and cultural contexts and since these contexts are conceptually formed and thus linguistically shaped (for Kelsey, of course, in reference to human beings). At this point one might ask of Kelsey how, if untruthful language may obscure from both violator and violated the consequences of the violent acts they are involved with, the violence itself may then be distinguished, if not moral, absolute and eternal principles of right and wrong, nor intentions in actions (since evil might also be unintentional, even if it could be distinguished) could assist in identifying evil? If God

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calls for wisdom, and if wisdom equips human beings at the least to sound principles and capacities for discernment, how would wisdom function to counter the above dilemma?

Kelsey introduces the concept of the fear of the Lord as distinguishing principle or core moment of discernment within relations of violation and violence. Fear of the Lord is defined as the beginning of wisdom, and foolishness the scorn of the call to be wise. Properly speaking, if evil is to be understood creature-centrically and sin theocentrically, then faith (as the appropriate response to God relating creatively) is to be understood as the fear of the Lord that leads to life; sin then, in particular, is the distortion of that life (but not to be unqualifiedly equated with an abstract or overarching concept of 'death') that leads to living death. Sin is inappropriate responses to God's relating creatively, which is a distortion of faith as the appropriate response to God's creative relating. "Sin and the evil that it causes are negative mysteries" (2009:410), especially in the lack of description of how evil came to be or entered creation. Kelsey relies on Kierkegaard's notion of sin positing itself to provide a response (but not an answer) to the question of the why of evil. He regards the wisdom of silence in particular to be appropriate, especially since all theological explanations of how sin came to be turn out to be circular in their reasoning by virtue of the logic of the doctrine of God creating a good world *ex nihilo*.

Distortion of faith's loyalty to God's creative project thus involves sinful distortions of practicing wonder in, practicing delight in and practicing perseverance with the quotidian. Firstly, delight is distorted when it becomes sentimental in its delighting in creatures and created life in abstraction from their own finitude, limitation and vulnerability. Delight becomes distorted when it is separated from either or both patience with fellow creatures and joy in fellow creatures, and when love ceases to desire them as genuinely other to the lover. Secondly, wonder is distorted when it becomes exploitative in its wonder at and perception of fellow creatures and created life in abstraction from the faithful respect for creatures' concrete particularity. So too wonder's curiosity about fellow creatures and created life becomes distorted when it is practiced in isolation from proper perception of and respect for all that God relates to creatively. Thirdly, perseverance is distorted when it becomes self-abnegating through engaging with the presently given quotidian as if it had no future. Perseverance becomes distorted when the

connection between vision and discernment is not kept intact and either or both the reality of evil in the quotidian and the reality of God's active relating to the quotidian is denied. Thus it becomes clear that "[s]ins are sins against God" (2009:417) and that what count as sins in the plural (in contradistinction to sin in the singular) consist of concrete existential hows that express disloyalty to God's creative project. These sins have consequences for human action, and may for instance work against the well-being of the quotidian. In these cases, these sins would also count as evil, as systemic violations of the integrity of created life. This understanding of sins in the plural has often led to some sort of systematisation of sins by the identification of some basic cause or motive, such as self-love (for Augustine) or pride (for Reinhold Niebuhr). However, Kelsey holds that human sins cannot be posited in a system, seeing as human existence does not operate within a system. Indeed, neither a systematic, comprehensive inventory of the variety of appropriate existential hows nor a systematic, comprehensive inventory of the variety of inappropriate or distorted existential hows can be compiled. Rather, sins characterise certain practices, and so disloyalty to God's creative project should be described accordingly.

Whereas sins (in the plural) are inappropriate responses to God's relating, expressive of distorted existential hows, sin (in the singular) is expressive of distorted personal identity. Distortion of faith's trust in God's creative relating to all that is not God (and in particular human beings) is sin against God and involves being bound in distorted identity. This Kelsey describes as living death, in trusting in the quotidian rather than God, trusting God without loyalty to the quotidian, and trusting in and loyal to oneself alone.

Firstly, human beings are bound in actively or passively distorted identities when their personal identities are defined by limitless dependence on (and even loyalty to) God's creative project in the quotidian, through which personal bodies' identities trust in the exchanges and interactions with and within in the quotidian (rather them in God's relating to them) to ground their reality, value and being. Identities become distorted when the triune God's relating to all that is other than God no longer forms the basis for either the reality or the value of created life, and so the ground of their existence could be said to be deficiently eccentric if defined by way of interdependent exchanges in the

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quotidian. This is so because "such centers of reality and value are not eccentric to the entire network of interrelations which make up the quotidian, of which personal bodies are themselves parts" (Kelsey, 2009:426 – 427), if "[w]hat is needed is a center of reality and value capable of giving reality and power without itself first to receive either reality or value" (2009:428). Thus, the first way of distortion involves loyalty to God's creative project without trust in God as the ground of reality and value.

Secondly, human beings are bound in distorted identities when their personal identities are defined by trust in God as the ground of their reality and value and being but disloyalty to the quotidian in the faithfully loyal interactions and exchanges with and within it. Whereas the first type of distortion involved personal identities being bound in living death to the acceptance and approval of the quotidian through particular relations with the quotidian, this second type of distortion involves personal identities being bound in living death to themselves in their lack of loyalty to God's creative project in the quotidian. Indeed, "[i]n their untruthfulness to themselves, to their fellow creatures, and to the ground of their reality and value, personal bodies with this general type of distorted quotidian identity violate their proximate contexts" (Kelsey, 2009:430), in manners that could be incidental, detached, condescending, sentimental, ironic, or cynical. Personal identities' trust in God must become historically concrete in space and time if it is to qualify as loyal to the quotidian as God's creative project.

Thirdly, human beings are bound in distorted identities when their personal identities are defined by faith in and faithfulness to only themselves, through trusting and being loyal to oneself alone as lifelong project. This third type of distortion is becoming of personal identities that claim to be radically self-defining, often through acts of sheer will and always through great measures of self-denial and self-delusionment. As such, "they are in bondage to the delusion that they can secure their own reality and value entirely by their own powers" (2009:432).

In a courageous move away from understanding sin (and particularly sin in the singular) according to the doctrines of original sin, Kelsey sets these doctrines aside on the grounds that "sin posits itself" and that sin is not essential to being human. Sin as distortion, then, cannot be the product of some power or capability of being human, but must be thought of as distortion of human personal identities, in which case the distortion

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that sin wreaks bears upon all powers and capabilities. It follows that "[d]istorted personal identities are incapable of undistorting themselves" so that all responses to God, for which one is accountable and responsible, will be distorted. This does not mean that the reality and value human beings have as created life is affected or in any way decreased or damaged, since the ground of their being is essentially eccentric: "As genuinely eccentric to us, the triune God gives reality and value without receiving either, and gives both before receiving any response from us to the giving" (Kelsey, 2009:426). It does, however, mean that distorted identities have no freedom in choosing the identity (since distortion cannot be undistorted, even in complete freedom) that makes the choices in the quotidian. It means that, through the inevitable interactions that constitute the quotidian and in which human beings are born into, created living beings may not be created with distorted identities but will be born into them, since the distorted responses in interactions with distorted identities in the quotidian would distort young personal identities. It means that we share guilt, not through responsibility for some universal predicament of sin, but as an objective status (rather than subjective feelings of shame) before God which describes the burden of having violated relations with God and the resulting punishing consequences. Lastly, it means that the (inevitable) reality of death is given "terrible power over personal bodies with distorted identities" (Kelsey, 2009:437) in that either human personal identities are radically oppressed through being granted no opportunity or possibility for being the agents of their own lives, or are transformed into those who struggle lifelong in a losing battle against death. All of these obscure (although they could not negate) the glory of God in human personal identities for fellow creatures. Perhaps one cannot do much more than admit to the reality of sin and evil in all of created life, and choose to give way to the mystery that is sin and particularly evil.

Thus, for all their great complexity and modes of manifestation, sins of inappropriate response to God's relating to create and distorted existential hows as enactments of these practices share one common and base feature – they are not enacted on borrowed breath. For Kelsey, faith is the appropriate response to God, and therein basic personal identities that responds in faithful trust in God and faithful loyalty to God's creative project and blessing become the dying lives that this mode of relating calls for.

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3.10   God's actively creative relating as basis for ecological theology?

In sum, how would ecological theology be able to appropriate Kelsey's substantial contributions made to the proposal that God relates to all that is not God creatively? Regarding the question of what we are as created life, God's threefold relating to all that is not God in three ways, and in this particular case relating to create all that is not God, forms the basis of the response that Kelsey gives.

What constitutes created life? It is clear from Kelsey's detailed discussion on what it means that God relates to all that is not God creatively that the question that he attempts to answer in this section, namely "What are we?", seeks to focus on the constitution of living beings as dying lives and as living, personal bodies. Constitution points to the ground or basis of life's being and value, the argument and support for its particular being and value, and the acknowledgment of its concrete being and value. As shown in chapters 1 and 2, 'life' is core to both ecological theological inquiry *and* Kelsey's way of explaining what he means by God's relating to all that is not God. As mentioned in chapter 2, the use and focus on 'life' and 'living beings' is to make for the currency of this thesis, and so a discussion on what it means to constitute life may be important here. To constitute life must, in the very first instance for an ecological theological project, admit to its created nature. To speak of life in this thesis is to speak of its being created and creatively blessed, and can be likened to how Kelsey describes the createdness of the quotidian (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on this). Indeed, one could argue that in God's own creative relating He creates all in life-giving address. God constitutes created life. God constitutes created life by relating to all that is not God; furthermore, God constitutes created life by relating to all that is not God in a very specific manner, namely creatively. The createdness of creatures point, firstly, to God's activity in relating as the ground of the reality of all that is not God, without whose active and constant relating creatures would disintegrate. It points, secondly, to God's activity in relating as the ground of the value of all that is not God, without whose constant meaning-inducing relating creatures would also disintegrate, by virtue of living beings' intrinsic value and worth being derived from God's relating to them. Thirdly it points to

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the glory of God being reflected in everything that God has created, and therefore all that is not God.

Within this mode of relating the conceptual richness and potential of the use of 'life' or 'created life' is particularly evident. The metaphor of birthing revolves around the importance of life as a particular type of existence (bodily, personally, enduringly) as opposed to non-existence or living death, as explicated from Kelsey above. The Father is the creator and sustainer of all life, which reflects the dynamics of the living God. The Spirit is the Lord and giver of life, which is personified by the life-giving power that Woman Wisdom (often imaged as a "tree of life") represents in Wisdom theology. Indeed, Wisdom itself is thought to give abundant life (2009:222). The Son as the Logos is not the static order of all created things, but the word that brings and speaks life into being.

In Kelsey's first proposal there is a close connection of life to the flow of energy and energy exchange, since creatures of God are said to be and to function in complex networks of energy systems and exchanges. Living human bodies are seen as the centers of a variety of powers, greatly shaped culturally and socially. By this Kelsey means to point to powers consistently and constantly empowered and engaged with by social interaction with other human bodies. In this sense it could equally well be appropriated with regards to creatures, even as cultural prowess in any and all nonhuman living beings is widely debated. Created life involves various centers of powers, wherein a great diversity of sources of energy and creativity feature.Thus, one could argue that part 1 of Kelsey's project supports the designation 'life' to all reality, which would include human creatures, but, in light of this wider and broader designation, need not be exhausted by it. In this way, if life is to be taken as a similar description of what Kelsey deems as all that is not God, even if it would probably not be possible to conflate the two or declare them synonymous. Rather, creatures of God are described as concretely complex and interrelated systems of energy exchange, which, for Kelsey, is the very essence of life.

The phenomenon of address in particular, as Kelsey's description of the ultimate context of God relating to create all that is not God, has much to offer an ecological theology by way of constructing a picture of the ultimate context of all that God relates to. God directly and indirectly addresses, and thereby constitutes, all of life and all living

beings – including the earth and her ecology. As those addressed by God, created life and living beings are continually and consistently called into being by the God in whose threefold relating all that is not God finds its value and meaning and reality. Living beings are therefore, firstly, those called into being by the triune God, and therefore have concretely particular vocations within God's created life and reality. As such, the agency and the capabilities and powers of living beings to respond to God's call on their lives need not rely on human living beings' own responses to God ór understanding of the responses that other living beings give to God. Secondly, then, the agency of living beings lies in the ability of living beings to respond (responsibility) and account (accountability) for their enacted practices of appropriate and inappropriate address to God. In this sense, living beings are not only called by God, but also call on God by addressing God in their various responses. This reflects the dynamic of the radical freedom of otherness and the intimate nearness of sameness that is also present in God's address to all that is not God. Thirdly, then, the vocation of living beings, the call of God on their lives (in the context of their call to life and being by God) as well as their call to God, is not merely a personal reality (much less an individual reality!), but public and communal. God's concern for all of life is public and communal and takes the form of address in this mode of relating, which defines the proximate and quotidian contexts as those given by way of life-giving birth and living bodies.

Kelsey clearly states that created, eschatologically consummated, reconciled life is not encompassed or even constituted by the created cosmos, but rather in God's active relating. In this he makes clear that creation and even life is constituted and given meaning only in God's relating to it, and not in any other motion or dynamic or reality or value – not even in creation or created life itself. The move wherein Kelsey makes use of Wisdom theology and steers clear of Genesis accounts of creation for the construction of a creation theology points to this motivation (even if his primary concern is sound methodology in this instance, in keeping the narrative logics of the three proposals of his project separate). It follows that God's relating creatively in characterised by delight, freedom and intimacy, which constitutes all that is not God in a very particular and unique manner. The ultimate context of created life, then, is described by delight,

freedom, intimacy and life, since God's own relating gives form to what gives ultimate meaning to all that is not God.

The blessing of concrete, particular, and diverse creatures by God, in being what they were created for – being alive and bringing forth life – supports the specific understanding of life as dynamic, persistent and frail. Again, as argued above, I interpret these blessings within the appropriate responses that seek the well-being of created living beings (the quotidian, Kelsey would say) and respond to fellow created beings in desiring love. Created living beings understood in their concrete particularity and locatedness within the dynamic and ordered and finite quotidian are blessed toward life in the full, namely through being alive and in bringing forth life. This does not nullify or disqualify either the ontological or moral ambiguity of the quotidian, but does strengthen the concern for an ultimate context characterised by delight, freedom, intimacy and life. The blessing of creatures toward life – within ambiguous quotidian and created lives characterised by ultimate contexts that seek the fullness of those lives – is a further implication of Kelsey's first proposal regarding how God relates to all that is not God.

The glory of God is given to the whole of creaturely reality and life, living beings and all of life. Eccentric faith as doxological gratitude describes the appropriate responses to God's glory, in the twofold sense of faithful trust in God and faithful loyalty to God's creative project. For all living beings, response to the glory of God in them is required, and may be manifested in a variety of manners and methods, corresponding to the diversity of their particular powers and capabilities.

3.11   Conclusion

In the process of inquiring whether Kelsey's theological anthropology could serve as basis for ecological theology, the core question that structured inquiry into this first proposal would be how life in the world is to be understood, namely "What constitutes created life?" It was established that God relates creatively to *all* that is not God, which structures the way in which created life is understood, particularly with regards to their proximate (quotidian) and ultimate contexts, their having and being given living bodies, their flourishing on borrowed breath, their personal and public realities of being addressed by God directly and indirectly, and the living death of distortions of faith.

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In Kelsey's project living on borrowed breath defines living beings and their contexts as created, whereby the being and meaning (or reality and value) of all of created life and created living beings are constituted. These beings are placed within ultimate and proximate contexts, which, in turn, give ultimate meaning to their lives and provide them with a limited, finite space and time (quotidian) to live their lives in. In constituting living beings, God gives them bodies of some kind, which defines them and provides them with opportunities to act as agents in their relations with and within the ambiguous quotidian, as well as with and within their ultimate context and the triune God. These living bodies are given as gifts through the process and act of birth and have particular and diverse arrays of powers and capabilities which make for the possibilities of beings to relate and to overcome the forces of entropy and death that are inherent in their creaturely, finite lives. Thus God relates intimately, delightfully and in complete freedom to all that is not God – both in living beings' having living bodies ánd in their being given living bodies. Living personal bodies are described as those bodies that function in community (2009:536 – 537),

> centers of energy constantly dependent for their reality and value on God creatively relating to them directly in their having been born as living… bodies set within creaturely proximate contexts, and creatively relating to them indirectly in their being given living human bodies for whose responses to God's creative relating within their proximate contexts they are responsible and accountable.

Created living beings are blessed with the invitations to live and to bring forth life, by means of the variety and great diversity and bio-diversity that they were created in and for. Indeed, "God's creative relating to creatures is a creative blessing in the midst of their ambiguities, nurturing them across the generations in the endlessly proliferating richness and the terrible beauty of their varieties" (Kelsey, 2009:479). They are called to live out these blessings in acts that make for the well-being of the quotidian and God's creative project. Faithful loyalty to God's creative project comes, however, with a choice to practice discipline for the well-being of created life, in acting from love's desire for and need of the other. In whichever way such discipline is exercised, delight, wonder and perseverance ought to characterise created life in proximate contexts.

Created living beings thus flourish, in the sense of both blossoming and thriving, on borrowed breath, which means not to estrange them from their own living or lives, but

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which means to bring them closer to the source of their very lives, which is the living God. Their creaturely realities and identities are defined as both personal and public, through their being addressed by God both directly and indirectly. Created living beings are called to be wise in their actions toward fellow created beings and all of created life through responding to God in eccentric hope, but through inappropriate existential hows or responses to God and all that is not God they may engage or be engaged in evil (which violates the integrity of creatures), sin (which involves distorted identities bound in living death), and sins (which entails inappropriate responses to God's creative project and the integrity of fellow beings' meaning and value). Living beings are created as dying lives, wherein it is made clear that death is as part of God's relating to finite creatures as life is. As dying, finite lives, creatures are vulnerable to the ambiguities of the quotidian and created life, which makes damage, disintegration, destruction and death of their born, actual bodies both possible and inevitable. As created beings that both express and reflect the glory of God in their createdness, living beings are also prone to distorting their personal identities and the glory of God in them through distorted relations and responses to God and fellow created beings. God's initial relating, however, constitutes them unreservedly and unconditionally, even if interdependent with all of created life and even if created as complex energy systems within interchanging and exchanging energy networks. God's relating creatively defines and constitutes all and every instance of created life and created living beings, which makes it clear that all of created life, which is all that is not God, is constituted in and as eccentric existence. Indeed it could then be said that God's totally independent and free relating to life in the world would form the basis and sustenance of all life in the world.

For Kelsey, this is what is meant by positing 'eccentric existence' or 'eccentric life' as 'living on borrowed breath'. The value, worth, meaning, reality of living beings, of the earth and her ecology, lies not in their own capacities or powers to constitute themselves, but in God's continuous and faithful maintaining of the integrity of all living beings and all of life. The value, worth and reality of the earth and her ecology lies not in herself, but outside of herself, in the threefold relating of the triune God to all that is not God. Placing the emphasis on the eccentricity of all living beings and all of created life deals appropriately with the mystery of living beings that are related to by a mysterious

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God and that are caught up in the mystery of God's purposes of creation. In this mode of relating God relates to bless the earth and her ecology creatively, which is not only distinct and concretely particular in its own right, but also takes seriously the distinct and concretely particular, fully actual existence of living beings and all of life. Life and death, dying life and living death, characterise 'living on borrowed breath' within God's relating to create, and calls for appropriate responses of eccentric faith from all that God relates to.

Chapter 4
Flourishing on borrowed time

4.1   Introduction

Chapter 4 of this thesis explores the second of David Kelsey's three proposals. Could Kelsey's proposal that God relates to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation serve in the construction of a basis for a Christian ecological theology?

God relates to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation in order to flourish on borrowed breath. Again, some remarks on the order of proposals are called for, particularly the relationship between the second and first proposals, and the relationship between the second and the third proposals.

Firstly, the relationship between God's relating to create and God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation is to be understood as requiring different conceptual frameworks or themes. Whereas God's relating to create has to do with being and metaphysical relation[87], God relating to eschatologically consummate has to do with social roles and socio-historical relation[88]. For Kelsey, these two modes of relating stand in a particular and definite order or pattern. God's relating eschatologically presupposes or assumes or rests on or depends on God's relating creatively; God's relating eschatologically introduces or brings about new creation (as promised blessing) that must, nonetheless, be consistent or identifiable or coherent with God's creative blessing (if it is to protect, and not violate, the integrity of created living beings). These two modes of God's relating to all that is not God involve God's simultaneous immanence and transcendence, and point to God's free and unconditional and initial and uncaused free intimacy with all that is other than God. Secondly, due to the complex ways in which the three stories of God's relation are interrelated, the second narrative of God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation and the third narrative of God's relating to reconcile stand in a particularly complex relationship. They are inseparable and concretely related in their reflection in the story of Jesus of Nazareth, but are also

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[87] "The distinction and relation between God and all that is not God can be clarified by drawing ontological distinctions" (2009:456).

[88] "[T]he distinction and relation between God and all that is not God can be clarified mostly in terms of analysis of social roles using the social and cultural conventions of ordinary language" (2009:456).

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distinguishable in that specifically the story of God relating to consummate created life is logically independent of the story of God relating to reconcile created life. For each of these stories the story of God relating to create life is logically prior (see chapter 3) and so core assumptions of both chapter 4 and chapter 5 would be that living beings (1) exist and (2) stand in need of eschatological consummation and reconciliation (3) in a particular order. Kelsey would argue, however, not for a complete independence of the two stories in relation to each other, but for some sort of dependence of the third story upon the second story of God's relating. He argues, "[i]f God is drawing creatures to an eschatological consummation that is a creaturely participation in the divine life, marked by holiness, and if those creatures are in fact alienated from God and are thus unholy, then drawing them to consummation does entail reconciling them" (2009:122). Moreover, "[t]he triune God relating to draw to eschatological consummation is the larger context of God relating to reconcile. Although the triune God's relating to draw to eschatological consummation and relating to reconcile are dialectically related, there is a certain priority to God's relating to draw to eschatological consummation" (2009:826).

For the purposes of this chapter, the core question that will guide inquiry will be "How ought eschatologically consummated life be?" This chapter relates to the second proposal of Kelsey's project, which seeks to elaborate on anthropological claims to be made from the proposal that God relates to all that is not God to draw it into eschatological consummation. This is specifically important to Kelsey for exploring what the possible implications could be for understanding our proximate and ultimate contexts, as well as what it would mean to flourish in hope (in contradistinction to the first proposal's flourishing in faith and the third proposal's flourishing in love). In what follows, we give a detailed account of Kelsey's second proposal of God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, which has to do with the ultimate and proximate contexts of this mode of relating (and in particular with the *missio Dei*), flourishing on borrowed time, the nature of eschatologically consummated living beings, and the living death of distortions of hope and personal identity. This will be followed by an appropriation of the proposal of God relating to all that is not God to eschatologically consummate, where after we will conclude and summarise with responses to the question

as to how eschatologically consummated life ought to be is to be understood in Kelsey's project.

4.2   God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation

'The Spirit, sent by the Father with the Son, draws creation to eschatological consummation' is the *taxis* employed to describe the divine perichoretic dynamic in the triune interrelationships in this second manner of God's relating. Firstly, the Spirit, as the "lord and giver of life" (according to the Nicene Creed), stresses God's self-consistency, freedom and self-determining intent in drawing all living beings into eschatological consummation. Secondly, the Father sends the Spirit and reminds that the creation of living beings is ontologically prior to eschatological consummation, since God cannot consummate that which God did not already create. Thirdly, "the Son's life defines the life into which the Spirit draws creatures" (2009:127), which is the way of the cross that draws creatures into the wisdom of "the giving and receiving that constitutes divine life" (2009:127), and makes for the flourishing of living beings. Kelsey describes these movements by employing the preposition 'between' in order to express both the "radical otherness" and the "radical nearness" of God's relating to eschatologically consummate (2009:128), but consistently reverts to using 'circumambient' to give expression to "the distinctive ways in which God is at once radically other than creatures and intimately near them in drawing them to eschatological consummation" (2009:127).

Kelsey's second proposal gives account of the second mode of God's relating to all that is not God, namely through drawing all living beings into eschatological consummation. This entails both the tension of already inaugurated, not-yet fully actualised being and eschatologically blessed life. Indeed, instead of God's relating creatively's blessing of creatures to be alive and to bring forth life, God relating to draw into eschatological consummation entails the blessing of new creation, "a new age of justice and communion with God" (2009:442). Furthermore, this blessing is given by the triune God whose three persons relate perichoretically in themselves to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation. This pertains, like God relating creatively, to all that is other than God, of which humanity forms part. Indeed, "[i]t is the perichoretic triune God that draws creation – and humankind as part of creation – into an

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eschatological consummation" (Kelsey, 2009:125). However, this manner of relating is to be distinguished from God relating creatively or God relating to reconcile, in that it describes a particular set of stories in which God relates to all that is not God in drawing them into eschatologically blessed and consummated life. This being-drawn provides a second angle on thinking for constructing a basis for ecological theology from Kelsey's project, and so pays attention to the ultimate context of living beings' being-drawn into God's divine, loving life. The proposal of God relating to draw living beings into eschatological consummation has to do with the *missio Dei*, the mission of the triune God to the world and all that is not God, which is the heart and substance of proximate and quotidian contexts of being-drawn. The realities of God drawing all that is not God into eschatological consummation involve finitude and being called to flourish on the borrowed time of eschatologically blessed life now already inaugurated, but not yet fully actualised. God's relating in this second mode of being-drawn calls for certain appropriate responses which, when distorted, become the sin, sins and evil of distorted existential hows and living death in quotidian and eschatologically blessed life. All of these themes are integral to how we ought to be as eccentrically grounded living beings, and form the basis of what I argue to be the constitution of eschatologically consummated life as eccentrically grounded living beings related to by God by being drawn into eschatological consummation.

4.3 The ultimate context of God relating to draw into eschatological consummation

In the second part of his book, Kelsey describes the ultimate context of God relating in this way as 'living on borrowed time', which is defined by the perichoretic pattern of the triune God's own interrelations, introduced by the *taxis* 'Spirit sent by the Father with the Son'. The "significance of the Spirit's presence is thoroughly eschatological", which means to point to the Spirit's involvement in both the dawning and the in-breaking of the end time (2009:443). Kelsey suggests that the adjective 'circumambient' perhaps best describes the manner of the Spirit's relating to all that is not God, in that it acts as condition for human created life, is public, and is commonly shared (in community) but not individually owned or controlled. The presence of the Spirit in believers' lives is

described according to a bipolar pattern, in being both intimately interior and eccentrically exterior to their environing contexts. The enactment of practices wherein and through which the Spirit works are thus complex and socially established within communities, so that "[l]earning to be part of the common life of such community means learning to cooperate in one's own way in such practices" (2009:445). These practices are described as existentially shaping, personally empowering and identity defining, and are expressive of the ultimate context of living beings as those related to in circumambience. If the ultimate context of created life is defined by the Spirit, as the "lord of the time of the eschaton" (2009:446), sent by the Father with the Son, then it could be said that not only does the Spirit invade history, but that the *eschaton* invades time. Indeed, the *eschaton* "draws us into the time of which the Spirit is Lord", "the end time, the last time, the time of the triune God's eschatological kingly rule come circumambiently in our history" (2009:446). In sum, within this mode of relating, the ultimate context of all living beings related to by God is living on borrowed time.

The Spirit sent by the Father brings forth free eschatological blessing, not to be confused with the creative blessing of chapter 3. In the New Testament the circumambience of the Spirit has to do, firstly, with blessing of all that is not God.[89] As mentioned, Kelsey speaks of two modes of blessing that are distinct but interrelated, namely creative and eschatological blessing, that are tied somehow to time and the conditions of history – "creation as the blessing expressed by stories of a primal time, and consummation expressed by stories of the blessing of the end time" (2009:447). The two modes of blessing share great similarities. The creative and eschatological modes of blessing are described as "equi-primordial"[90] and yet separated by a very long time in their actualisation. Both are products of the complete divine freedom of God's relating to all that is not God, and, as such, are freely given. Neither can be brought about by any

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[89] Claus Westermann (Kelsey, 2009:447 – 450; quoting Westermann, 1972; 1974; 1978) mentions two distinctive ways in which 'blessing' is understood in Scripture. The first is as distinct from God's acts of deliverance, namely as being continuous and creative in contrast to being particularly related to specific persons, communities, places, times and events. It is Kelsey's conclusion that acts of blessing are not conceptually tied to acts of deliverance, but that acts of deliverance do indeed rest upon the assumption of creative blessing. The second way in which blessing is understood is as universal in scope, namely as the blessing of all that is not God through God's relation.

[90] By which Kelsey means to emphasise that "God commits Godself to it [eschatological blessing] concurrently with creating" (2009:450).

kind of effort on the part of living beings, or earned as some reward for goodness. However, creative and eschatological modes of blessing also differ greatly. Whereas God's self-commitment to creative blessing involves God being committed to the well-being of his creative project, and through it to the integrity and well-being of every and all living beings, God's self-commitment to eschatological blessing lies beyond creatures' own power and capacities, and so beyond the concrete particularity of created life that is such a core part of creative blessing. These Kelsey describes as logically and morally distinct from one another. Another way in which eschatological blessing is understood as different from creative blessing is in its being "historically tensed", namely through the tension of blessing already actual, in effect in history, and yet not fully actualised in history, part and parcel of a process of becoming. Kelsey does not understand the inauguration of eschatological blessing to be abstract or purely hypothetical, but identifies it most strongly with the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, so that "eschatological consummation consists in being drawn as adopted, newborn children into the same relation that Jesus has with the One he calls 'Father'" (2009:449). However, modes of creative and eschatological blessings cannot simply be equated with God's transcendence and immanence respectively. In a similar argument to that of chapter 3, God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation needs to rely on an understanding of God's immanence and transcendence that is dialectically and intimately interrelated.

The Spirit sent with the Son introduces the advent of promise, in that "God relates to us in this mode in a particular, peculiar, concrete way as the advent of the fulfillment of an open-ended promise by God to all that is not God" (2009:451). In the New Testament the circumambience of the Spirit has to do, secondly, with promise to all that is not God. As such it is most intricately tied to the life, ministry and death of Jesus Christ, with whom its relation takes logical priority when relating to human and nonhuman communities. This entails the Spirit's complete and utter freedom which, for Kelsey, means that Jesus Christ the Son gives content to the radical and utter freedom of the Spirit, albeit not in an arbitrary or random manner. In order to explain this, Kelsey mentions three features of Jesus' own unsubstitutable personal identity (see chapter 2 for a description of 'basic unsubstitutable personal identity'). Firstly, since "God's resurrection

of the crucified Jesus simply is the inauguration of God's long-promised blessing of eschatological rule" (2009:451), Jesus' identity embodies God's power and glory in God's eschatological rule through weakness rather than violent force. Secondly, "the resurrection of Jesus is characterized as the inauguration of eschatological time proleptically present, the eschaton present ahead of time" (2009:453), and so a distinct, discontinuous relationship between the *futuram* of the possibilities of the creaturely present and the *adventus*[91] of eschatological promise is introduced through the resurrection event. Thirdly, the tension of the "already" and "not yet" (or, in Kelsey's words, 'now actual' and 'not-yet actualised') in eschatological blessing takes the form of a promise, if "[a] promise is an utterance, a speech-act using ordinary language" (2009:454) that can be described as performative, self-involving and causal. Kelsey argues that the selfsame logic of promise is brought to bear when God promises all that is not God eschatological blessing. In the Christian theological tradition, the resurrection of Jesus Christ functions as sign of God's promise both already kept and still to be kept, in that it is an implicit rather than an explicit promise. What makes the hope in the implicit promise of Jesus' resurrection appropriate is in that "like all promises, it creates a new social context for those to whom the promise is made" (2009:455). The implied promise has content, which is open-ended rather than determinate, so that the character and logic of promise describes the ultimate context of living beings related to eschatologically by God.

Whereas the medium of promise defines the ultimate context of God relating eschatologically through identifying with the explicit and implied promises inherent in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, Kelsey again employs the medium of promise to define and formulate what is meant by the proximate context of God relating eschatologically. For these purposes, and within this understanding, Kelsey interprets the triune God's relating to the concrete realities of everyday life as the mission of the triune God, which infuses the life and being of living beings with theological meaning appropriate to his project.

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[91] Which designates the arrival of the future as "an invasion of or an irruption into the present" (2009:453).

4.4 Quotidian and proximate context of the *missio Dei*

For Kelsey, the proximate context in God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation is defined in terms of its socio-historical realities. Especially the meaning and movement of history plays an important part in thinking on anthropology (and, arguably, in ecology too). In Kelsey's own words, "[p]erhaps the most important anthropological question about our proximate social contexts is whether historical change – social, cultural, political and economic – is meaningful" (2009:478). Kelsey answers his own question in the (qualified) positive with reference to God's eschatological blessing that induces and infuses meaning in history. Six features of proximate contexts are identified, with regards to the discussion on the ultimate context of God's relating eschatologically.

The first feature of proximate contexts is that living beings live on borrowed time within them. Indeed, it is within these limitations of space and time that the ultimate context of all that is not God comes to define proximate contexts as finite (created life as living on borrowed breath) and as the objects of the triune God's mission (eschatologically consummated life as living on borrowed time). In an intriguing move, Kelsey argues that "human creatures both have and are their own time and space" (2009:480) but are nonetheless caught up in the dynamic and purpose of the *missio Dei*. Kelsey describes the goal of the *missio Dei* as an eschatological, divine blessing that is not to be confused or seen as synonymous with creaturely blessing. In contrast to the uncaused, undeserved, and constant creative blessing of living beings mirroring God's glory, which does not extend beyond their own created lives, eschatological blessing is proleptically promised in history by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and does extend beyond the created lives of living beings. This does not mean to make up for some lack or evil in the initial creating of life and living beings, does not violate the integrity of creatures, and cannot be caused or brought about or initiated by or through the powers and capabilities of created beings. Instead, the gift of eschatological blessing is given as "radically new gift of unanticipated, unearned and unplanned possibilities" which seeks to understand the world of a being as "the context for a new start, a new life" (2009:480) and the proleptically present time as "the time for a radically new start and new life" (2009:481).

The second feature is God's public engagement with living beings, in that it "takes place in public and shapes all humankind's public proximate contexts" (2009:481). The actualised content of the *missio Dei* is characterised by love, peace and justice. Kelsey sees the triune God's relation to human beings as an engagement with a community of personal bodies and not abstracted or individual powers or capacities or capabilities. The community of personal bodies are not synonymous for 'church' in Kelsey's thought, and he would rather formulate the Spirit's public working in relation to the Spirit's public working in the church of Jesus Christ in the following manner: "the eschatological *missio Dei* takes place in the public aspect of our common life, which includes, no doubt in a special way, the common life of the smaller public called 'church'" (2009:483).

The third feature entails the double ambiguity of contexts. Since the eschatological *missio Dei* is given form and meaning in proximate contexts, themselves morally and ontologically, the *missio Dei* is ambiguous in a first sense. A second sense in which it is ambiguous is in the response of proximate contexts' relation to God, in that it entails a combination of appropriate and distorted responses. Kelsey defines God's eschatological promise of blessing by way of this ambiguity, so that God's absolute promise also implies a contingent promise. Whereas God's absolute promise is for all that is not God to be drawn into eschatological blessing and consummation, God's implied promise is for transformation of the distortions of living beings. However, Kelsey understands from Pauline apocalyptic texts that proximate contexts and their eschatological blessing are in struggle against each other and in conflict with one another. Consequently, he does not think of this process of transformation as entailing an inevitable systematic and historical move towards greater moral improvement and ontological actualisation. Rather, God's relating to creatures eschatologically is hidden in these very ambiguities both metaphysically and christologically, "in the weakness of the crucifixion" (2009:486). God's promise of eschatological blessing is not to be understood as an internally driven historical process, but as a dynamic that may move against or with historical processes and contexts instead. This of course complicates (or 'complexifies', in Kelsey's words) already ambiguous proximate contexts to an even greater extent.

The fourth feature has to do with contexts that are described as "doubly tensed" (2009:479). A structural tension permeates proximate contexts, in that proximate contexts participate in the old creation and the new creation simultaneously. A historical tension is felt in the new creation aspect of the structural tension between the two worlds or creations. The structural tension of proximate contexts involves "[t]he *missio Dei* to displace the old creation with the new [that] is not yet complete" (2009:488), in the mystery of God's eschatological purpose(s) for creation. In the New Testament, Paul's use of apocalyptic imagery and metaphors gives voice to the radical changes brought about by God's mysterious eschatological purposes for creation – especially in its concern for the structure of the cosmos, rather than for the logic of history. This is not to be confused with structuring one's lived world on the bases of the contrastive and complementary pairs of cosmological elements or principles that the ancient world (which is reflected in biblical texts) believed constituted reality. Instead, "[t]he new creation is structured and constituted by Jesus Christ himself" (2009:492), which, by virtue of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, is to be understood as "a lived world constituted by living in the time of and by the power of the eschatological Spirit… in conflict with the old, but still obtaining, world" (2009:493).

The fifth feature involves the promise of contexts. The second, historical tension of proximate contexts has to do with the new creation as "the eschatological blessing inaugurated in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus" (2009:494), a tension that pertains to God's raising Jesus from the dead in a particular proximate context. The resurrection signifies the future of Jesus' intimate relationship with God, points to the beginning of the fulfillment of "a blessing for which all creation is destined" (2009:495), includes humankind in the participation of Godly childhood, and emphasises that creatures be blessed in their creatureliness. The promise of contexts, thus, does not lie in their own capacities for self-transformation or self-transcendence or even self-actualisation, but has promise exactly due to the presence of the risen Christ in them. Calling upon the nature of promise, as performative, self-involving act, Kelsey argues that the act of promising creates and constitutes a new contextual reality – a new life or world for the parties involved, so to speak. In Kelsey's own words, "[t]hus, in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus Christ, God not only keeps the promise of eschatological blessing, but in so doing

God unilaterally constitutes a new social reality, a new lived world, an objectively new creation, that embraces humankind with God as adopted children sharing in Jesus' relation with God, a community to whose flourishing God is self-committed by the very act of making the promise" (2009:496).

Finally, the sixth feature describes the relativised values of contexts. If, for Paul, life in the power of the Spirit is life in the crucified and risen Christ, then even the best values and principles of proximate contexts are relativised. Life in the Spirit and in Christ is "new life lived in the way of the cross" (2009:493). As such, 'promise' functions within proximate contexts as both God's graciousness and God's judgment. God's graciousness is a gift born of God's free initiative and love, while God's judgment entails ultimate and final judgment on contexts and on the responses of living beings that participate in the dynamics and energy exchange with and within those contexts. Love, the triune God's own life, characterises the communion God has with all that is not God: "this communion is freely shared by finite creatures *in their own finite and creaturely ways*, unexacted and unearned from God" (2009:497; original italics). However, God's judgment on proximate contexts involves not the contingency or relativity of their createdness, but rather inappropriate responses to God's act of promise and "idolatrous reliance on culturally relative values to generate such a[n eschatological] blessing on their own, were they only practiced in undistorted and wholehearted ways" (2009:499). Thus, the value and values of proximate contexts are relativised by (but not rejected, subsumed or absorbed into) the life of God, which is divine love, in communion with the living God whose promises exact expectation and hope from created beings and truly create and constitute new realities.

In summary, the second way in which God relates to all that is not God has to do with God drawing all that is not God into eschatological consummation and eschatological blessing. This relation involves the medium of promise, whereby new realities are created not merely in what it promises, but within the very act of promise itself. Proximate contexts are not brought to fulfillment by means of their own inherent movements to greater actualisation or transcendence, or in any way by the possibilities or capabilities or dreams or visions or plans embedded in them. The fulfillment of proximate contexts takes place solely and only through God's promise of eschatological

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consummation and blessing that breaks proleptically into the present time and transforms it. The triune God's mission is hidden in the multiple complexities and ambiguities of proximate contexts, embodied and concretely enacted in the person and life (ministry, crucifixion, resurrection) of Jesus Christ, who seeks to draw created living beings into eschatological consummation by way of the cross. Therefore the *missio Dei* cannot serve to anticipate or discern a greater goal or meaning behind the dynamics of nature or history or life, by virtue of its mysterious hiddenness. What Kelsey does mean in referring to proximate contexts defined by the *missio Dei* is God drawing all that is not God into eschatological consummation, "by the creativity of God's free love", so that "what has been distorted will be transformed, the threat of meaninglessness overcome, and living deaths liberated into true life" (2009:500).

Interestingly, in this second proposal of his project Kelsey gives almost no attention to the way that God's promises impact upon or function within the quotidian. The quotidian, as the created everyday life of living beings, is an instance or finds its place within the proximate contexts of God's relating, but seems to have special significance or mention (as it does in Kelsey's first proposal) in this second part of Kelsey's book. Perhaps the moral and ontological ambiguities of promixate contexts related to in this manner would make such an endeavour not only dangerous (by way of seeking to describe ambiguous contexts too closely) but also irrelevant. Kelsey describes both the ultimate and proximate contexts of all that is related to in this manner by way of promise – specifically, by way of the ultimate context of God relating to draw all of life into eschatological consummation in every instance, which is the drawing force of all reality and life into the eschatological blessing and consummation that God gives. In this part of the Kelsey's second proposal, the socio-historical reality of the *missio Dei* and the transformation of contexts that is involved in it describe much in the way of the ultimate context of living on borrowed time. However, for Kelsey living is not truly living without flourishing, and so God's promises are taken to point above and beyond – to the flourishing of all of life, on borrowed time.

4.5   Flourishing on borrowed time

The ultimate context of all that is not God, when eschatologically related to by God, is promise, for which the appropriate response is eccentric hope.

Firstly, hope in the Spirit with the Son emphasises "the singular *way* in which the triune God goes about drawing us to eschatological blessing" (2009:501; original italics). The ultimate context of living beings proleptically breaks into the present time of the quotidian, for and within which hope is the appropriate response. The resurrection of the Crucified Son makes concrete the breaking in, and as such it is the circumambient Spirit of Christ that draws all humankind (and arguably all of life) into eschatological consummation. Hope, as appropriate response, is "an attitude of expectancy that a good and desired transformation of our quotidian contexts, now actually begun, will be fully actualized" (2009:501 – 502). Kelsey describes this attitude as "joyous hopefulness", which is not a private or interior disposition or a particular mode of consciousness or affective state of euphoria or optimism, but a "settled and long-lasting attitude" (2009:502 – 503). Joyous hopefulness, as expressed by complex personal bodies with diverse powers and capabilities, must itself be complex, if it is to be true to both the agents expressive of it and the complex (ultimate and proximate) contexts that it seeks to respond appropriately to. It is at once also unified as attitude, in its response to God's singular way of relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation. Diverse, public and celebratory practices point to the eschatological flourishing of the quotidian, and are responses constitutive of this one attitude.

Secondly, hope in the Spirit sent by the Father responds to and corresponds with both blessings sent and with hope itself as "a gift given" (2009:504). Again, this hope is eccentrically grounded and to be understood theocentrically, in that "the possibility of such hope lies solely in the actuality of God keeping God's promise" (2009:504). Thus, this hope happens amidst dying life and living death, not in denial or evasion or ignorance of these realities. For Kelsey, hope is, amongst other things, resistance: a disposition to act in a way that creates hope in the midst of chaos, oppression and suffering. Mostly, hope is understood to be a response to the promise of "God's actual inauguration of the eschatological kingdom" (2009:505). Thus, hope as gift is given

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through the Spirit who at once relates as radically free and deeply intimate God to all that is not God.

Hope as gift is the hope for participation in God's glory, in the expected fulfillment or actualisation of promised eschatological blessing. Kelsey describes God's promise as open-ended, whereby he means to describe the attitude of joyous hopefulness as open-ended as well. He refers to two biblical images that help to give body to what is meant by actualised eschatological blessing or glory. The first image he employs is that of the risen Jesus, the bodily agent that is identifiable (through his bodiliness) and yet mysterious (through his transformation) in the resurrection. The second image is a description of the end time as universal and cosmic – of judgment, destruction and suffering in the old creation and peace, prosperity and well-being in the new creation. He describes these two images as apocalyptic images, "images of transformation" (2009:507), prevalent in both Old Testament and New Testament texts.

These images suggest for Kelsey a number of features regarding eschatologically consummated life. The first is that, even when transformed, created life still remains created life, in that created beings are still limited to strictly "creaturely participation in God's life" (2009:507). Created beings remain finite, both in their dependence upon God for their reality and value and within their interdependence with fellow created beings in community. A second feature, then, is the inherent sociality of created beings, in that "they remain inherently social creatures whose personal identities are constituted by their interrelations with others in community" (2009:508). Kelsey describes communion that is normed by the *taxis* 'the Spirit sent by the Father with the Son' as the kingdom of God. A third feature is in eschatological transformation that works proleptically, namely that "new birth" and "new creation" is already taking place within the old life and world. Again, Kelsey stresses the open-enededness of the promise of God to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, and the appropriateness of hope and expectancy that God is both keeping to his promises in future and now already. It is, however, misplaced to contrast individualistic and communal notions of eschatologically glorified life, since "the central content of hope… is communal and cosmic in character" (2009:509) and yet concretely particular (and personal, if not individual) in the resurrection of Jesus. Fourthly, "eschatological transformation of personal bodies in and

with transformation of their communal lived worlds is at once an unconditional gift of love to them and an irreversible judgment upon them" (2009:509). With these features in mind, Kelsey describes hope as an appropriate response to what God promised (in relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation), as joyous hopefulness for "a distinctive type of communal life (proximate context) in communion with God (ultimate context)" (2009:510). For Kelsey, it is only within this wider scheme and interrelations that hope for a distinctive type of individual life is given meaning. Again, God's own life forms the context for the appropriate response of created beings to God, if eschatological transformation, fulfillment and actualisation describes "a peculiar type of communion in community", "a creaturely participation in the very quality of God's own life" (2009:510). God's own life gives as much content to the open-ended divine promise (to which hope is the appropriate response) as Kelsey would dare give in describing the actualisation of eschatological blessings for created beings.

Similar to human creaturely flourishing in faith, in response to God's relating to all that is not God creatively, human eschatological flourishing in hope retains the theocentric focus on 'flourish'. Appropriate existential hows of flourishing personal bodies may encompass a great variety of practices and enactments, and may exercise a great variety of powers and capabilities in a great variety of contexts to give form to the practices that seek to celebrate the eschatological flourishing of the quotidian and personal bodies and created beings within the quotidian. These practices are enacted within the old world or life, which itself is "invaded by the eschatological time of the new creation" (2009:512). Practices of joyous hopefulness therefore need to respond both to the "actual now of not-yet-actualised borrowed time and to the not-yet of borrowed time in which it lives now" (2009:512). Thus, in response to the core question of the second part of his project, namely "How are we to be?", Kelsey responds by focusing on two aspects.

The first aspect has to do with practicing joyous hopefulness in the actual now of not-yet-actualised borrowed time. These practices strive to be true to the *missio Dei* in concrete, proximate contexts, and in particular to stimulate the flourishing of the quotidian through the liberation of socio-political proximate contexts. Liberation, political and contextual theologies are an expression or analysis of such practices, and

characteristically seek to delineate and deconstruct the complex interactions and interdependencies of the variety of political, social, economic and cultural powers inherent in proximate contexts and quotidian worlds. More specifically, the distribution and attribution or denial of such power amongst groups of people based on factors such as race and/or gender indicate the systemic well-being and societal flourishing of a given context. It is in hope's faithfulness to liberating practices of social change, critique of distorted proximate contexts, and utter realism of quotidian worlds that appropriate responses to the *missio Dei* are formulated. Knowledge of the distribution and interrelations of powers and power structures inherent in proximate contexts (contributed by Latin American liberation theology) and realism or consciousness of the various specific modes of suffering brought about by oppressive power structures (contributed by Asian liberation theology) are core to eschatologically hopeful practices. Kelsey describes the process whereby personal bodies enact these practices as "sanctification", as "being made holy", as "the eschatological flourishing of entire personal bodies, in community in their shared lived worlds", and as lives "lived in a new creation socially constructed by the dynamics of a giving and a receiving" (2009:515). Correlatively, the disciplines of thinking historically (as critically questioning historically formed assumptions regarding the realities of proximate contexts) and cultivating affections (as learning particular emotions in response to historical realities, and especially compassion and wholehearted wishing in response with those suffering, oppressed and marginalised) are core, if sanctification is "learning to enact appropriate responses to the triune God drawing humankind to eschatological consummation" (2009:517). Kelsey mentions a third discipline, namely cultivating imaginative (in addition to the intellectual and emotional, respectively) powers in the process of humankind's sanctification.

The second aspect has to do with practicing joyous hopefulness in the not-yet of borrowed time's actual now. Enactments of hope in response to the here and now of quotidian worlds in bondage to suffering and oppression do not necessarily involve liberation of lived worlds from the various forms of oppression and suffering it may be bound in, and are not defined by means of their concern for the well-being of the quotidian (contra appropriate disciplines of faith and faithfulness involving faithful trust of God and faithful loyalty to the quotidian). Rather, appropriate responses of hope and

joyously hopeful practices "are celebratory of the quotidian's eschatological flourishing" (2009:518), "appropriate to the odd way God does keep the promise of eschatological blessing" and "celebratory of all signs of the inbreaking of eschatological glory into our quotidian worlds, of the new creation into the old" (2009:519). Since joyously hopeful practices are not qualified through its attempts to transform or liberate the proximate contexts and lived worlds of created beings, and since they take the form of promise, these practices point rather to the eschatological blessing and transformation that God already grants to all that is not God in triune self-commitment. Furthermore, joyously hopeful practices as celebratory practices are expressive not only of eschatologically blessed life, but of eschatologically blessed communal life, and are thus practices enacted in public, practices engaged in the everyday world of quotidian worlds. Kelsey describes these practices as eucharistic practices, as enactments of joyous hopefulness within the overlap between old and new creation. As such, these practices are described by way of being "a continual struggle" that requires "capacities for spiritual discernment". These capacities include conceptual mastery (learning of concepts that are existentially forming), conceptual formation ("formation of personal bodies' affections", including righteous anger) and the discipline of the passions of personal bodies (2009:520 – 522). Moreover, joyously hopeful practices are deeply passionate. Hope's intense and persistent passion is a stable and long-lasting desire for justice and community in quotidian communities, is publicly and actively engaged in proximate contexts, and is "a courageous love for God's promised eschatological blessing" (2009:523).

Hope, which responds to God's promises of eschatological blessing and actualisation, are expressed through a number of appropriate practices that shape the intellectual, emotional and imaginative powers and capabilities of human creatures, with the aim of empowering them for spiritual discernment and hope's passion within their proximate contexts. Ultimately, these are aspects of the process of sanctification or eschatological flourishing of personal bodies within their flourishing lived worlds – and, in particular, appropriate practices that point to the nature, being and life of eschatologically consummated living beings.

4.6　Eschatologically consummated living beings

Thus far in this chapter, the question of how eschatologically consummated life ought to be has formed the main focus of the discussions. In line with Kelsey's own method of discussion of all three core questions in each part of his work, what constitutes created life and who reconciled life is will also need to receive attention in this part of my discussion on his proposals, albeit to a lesser extent than the core question.

Who reconciled life is, is answered in Kelsey's first proposal in terms of vocation, through the medium of direct and indirect address. Whereas considerable epistemic (and, one might add, ontological) distance is inherent in the mode of God's relating creatively, "God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation allows minimal epistemic distance" (2009:526) if the triune God's manner of relating to all that is not God is 'circumambient' in this instance. God's self-commitment to draw into eschatological consummation is as primordial as God's creative relating, and thus itself uncaused, completely free and utterly original. Like God's creative blessings, God's eschatological blessings are not given in response to the goodness or appropriateness of the responses of that which is not God. Even more, Kelsey is of the opinion that "all that God draws to eschatological blessing is distorted and alienated from God" (2009:527). Creaturely reality remains finite and fragile in its eschatological consummation, since God eschatologically blesses what is initially created and constituted by God. Kelsey proposes a double answer to the question of who reconciled life is in being related to by God eschatologically.

The first answer he gives is "*those who have been elected for eschatological consummation*" (2009:527; original italics). Kelsey describes this sense of being related to eschatologically as God's "yes", which, as he shows, can be interpreted in two ways. Whereas the first is understood as the traditional connotation of being chosen for a specific role or task, in contrast to other candidates or tasks, the second way in which election for eschatological consummation might be understood has to do with human persons' being 'in Christ'. The latter way of understanding election can have two forces of meaning, namely election of sinfully distorted beings for salvation and election for eschatological glory and blessing. For Kelsey, the elected benefit "from the work of Christ which makes fellowship with God possible for the sinfully distorted" (2009:529)

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and through being chosen for "life in the new creation liberated from the elemental substances that order and rule the old creation" (2009:530). It is in this latter sense that Kelsey finds an answer to the question as to who we are as eschatologically consummated beings, since election in this sense offers an identity description. Four important nuances are identified. The first is eschatological joy at the gift of a personal identity[92], "a mood all personal bodies are invited and permitted to have simply in the living of their quotidian lives" (2009:531). The second is the pre-destination of human beings for eschatological blessing, if God's election takes place logically prior to their existence and any response to God's relating that may be offered, and if eschatological blessing is rooted in God's self-commitment to relate to all that is not God eschatologically. The third is the cosmic scope of eschatological blessing, if "all creation is, in some way, elect for eschatological blessing" (2009:532). The fourth is predestination for eschatological blessing and consummation and glory being inherent in the personal identities of personal bodies, rather than being either inevitable "fate" ór chosen identity. Whereas human persons can choose to live upstream or in cross-grain to their sheerly given personal identities as those already eschatologically consummated, even living in such a way does not warrant that persons "thereby lose their identity as ones elected by God for eschatological consummation" (2009:532).

The second answer he gives is "*those to whom the catastrophe of final judgment is happening*" (2009:527; original italics). Kelsey describes this sense of being related to eschatologically as God's "no", which takes the form of "a disclosure revealing unambiguously the real condition of personal bodies in their quotidian communities shaped by sinfully distorted personal identities" (2009:533). This judgment is an absolute finality for the old creation, so that by bringing something to an end it brings something new forth. The "yes" of God's election and the "no" of God's judgment cannot be construed as mutually exclusive, however, even if personal identities are themselves self-contradictory. The finality of this judgment lies also in the disclosure of the self-contradictoriness of personal bodies. However, God's "no", which Kelsey describes as "derivative" or contingent upon sin, presupposes God's "yes", which Kelsey describes as

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[92] Kelsey describes this by way of Bonhoeffer's notion of "*hilaritas*", which is bold and defiant self-confidence and certainty of goodness amidst the critique and disapproval of popular opinion, culture and the world (2009:531).

"fundamental", seeing as God's very act of relating eschatologically entails election for eschatological blessing. Interestingly, Kelsey argues that "for those who are being judged by God; the worst has happened. There is nothing more terrible left to fear in their lived worlds, nothing worse to protect themselves against, to disguise, or to deny" (2009:535). The personal identities of the judged are defined as living on borrowed time, which frees them from practices of continual self-preservation and self-protection and opens them up for living courageously in joyous hopefulness.

The life of living beings must therefore be, with regards to the first and second proposals under discussion, continuous. That which is eschatologically consummated by God must be identical or continuous with that which is creatively related to by God, even if radical changes and transformation are brought about by eschatological consummation, blessing and glory. God relates to created beings proleptically by drawing them into the borrowed time of eschatological blessing, brought about and characterised by the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. This does not imply that God violates the integrity of created beings, since being related to by God is inherent in what constitutes created beings. Indeed, "[t]he intimacy of God's creative relating constitutes personal bodies in their specific modes of freedom and liberty" so that "[i]t is to that same kind of creature in its wholeness that the triune God relates to draw it to eschatological consummation" (2009:538). God's eschatological promise is inaugurated, but not yet fully actualised, by and in the person of Jesus Christ. Kelsey does not attempt to clearly limit eschatological consummation to human creatures[93], but attempts to maintain the open-endedness of God's promise of eschatological blessing and glory in his project, also within this specific proposal. Kelsey proceeds by interpreting the (profound) changes that eschatological consummation effect upon creaturely beings' bodies as modes of actuality. Since created beings are increasingly drawn into eschatological consummation by God, their modes of existence are increasingly actualised, culminating in fully actualised eschatological consummation that is characterised by the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. However, created beings remain creatures regardless, "radically dependent on God for their reality and value" since "[b]eing-related-to-by-God will still be intrinsic to what they are"

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[93] As evident in certain parts of his argument, such as the following: "God's ongoing drawing of human creatures (*but not only human creatures*) to eschatological consummation occurs on borrowed time" (2009:538; my emphasis – NM).

(2009:539). Kelsey argues that it is only by means of high levels of abstraction and metaphorical language that one might be justified in giving content to the characterisation of fully actualised created beings. He (2009:539) describes these as

> finite centers of energy that have an array of affective, cognitive, rational, self-regulative, and expressive powers by whose exercise they are interrelated in a community constituted by mutual love that is richly expressive of love, joy and gratitude to God in which they reflect God's glory.

Hereby it becomes clear that bodiliness need not be physical or perfect[94], but is described by Kelsey as finite. Here Kelsey warns of the dangers of playing games of theological science fiction or science fantasy or speculation, since they are entertained to the detriment of sound secondary theology. Rather, he proposes that one admit and consent to the serious conceptual challenges of giving a systematic exposition of fully actualised, eschatologically consummated personal bodies or in explaining how these very bodies could have finite, creaturely powers and capabilities in the absence of organic physical bodies. This would be especially important in a credible ecological theology that would seek to say something about eschatologically consummated or eschatologically blessed living beings and life. Here it might be sufficient to emphasise the open-endedness of God's promise with regards to concretely particular, fully actual living beings and the importance of keeping the integrity of living beings intact in thinking on God's relating in this manner. Therefore, whatever the specifics may be, God relates to bless living beings eschatologically, and does so in keeping with his promise to eschatologically bless and glorify all living beings. In other words, God relates to bless living beings eschatologically by drawing them into the life of God in a way that does not violate their creaturely integrities.

Kelsey's second proposal entails the eschatological consummation and blessing of all that is not God through God's continuous relating to them. It is particularly Kelsey's engaging discussion on resurrected bodies and eschatology, where he pays the problematic of deliberation on eschatologically consummated life and bodies heed, that invests critical thought in the implications of this manner of relating for living beings. In

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[94] He argues that there are no theological grounds or warrants for presupposing bodies without disabilities or imperfections, if eschatologically consummated bodies are concretely particular – even if they are described in Paul as "spiritual bodies".

this chapter he focuses his arguments christologically, so that accounts of Jesus' resurrection and post-crucifixion appearances form the core of his arguments here.

Firstly, paradigmatic patterns in encounters with the resurrected Jesus are important, in that "[c]anonical biblical narratives of encounters with the risen Jesus… exhibit a complex pattern of continuity and discontinuity between Jesus' pre-Easter and post-Easter 'bodies'", and so understand Jesus' own resurrected body by means of discontinuity in continuity (2009:543). Both are essential to the personal identity of the encountered Jesus, if continuity is fundamental in the rendering of personal identity and discontinuity is essential in specifying the mentioned continuity and indicating the change that eschatological consummation brings about. Within the larger narrative of the imminent inbreaking of God's kingdom, encounters with the risen Jesus point to Jesus' mission in proclaiming the blessing and judgment of God's eschatological reign. Jesus is raised *into* the borrowed time of God's eschatological reign and so encounters with the risen crucified Jesus have cosmic significance. Moreover, "[b]odily resurrection as eschatologically transfigured or glorified bodies is social and communal" (2009:546) but, if modeled on Jesus' resurrection, does not necessarily require that bodies be perfect, "that is, absolutely complete… human bodies lacking all bodily imperfections" (2009:549).

Secondly, if the significance of the crucified Jesus' resurrection is cosmic, then "the bodily resurrected Jesus at once inaugurates and lives within his, and our, eschatological proximate context, a new creation, a new heaven and earth" (2009:549). Kelsey emphasises that this new heaven and new earth must be as concretely finite as the quotidian lived world, if it is ontologically other than God and dependent upon God's continuous relating to constitute and sustain and maintain it. However, it is also wholly other and 'more than' the creaturely quotidian, if it is characterised by the justice, peace and love of God's eschatological reign and of the life of the triune God. However, this new creation cannot be construed as a totally new, second creation, if the logic of Kelsey's proposals is brought to bear so that, consequently, eschatological blessing is in some way reliant upon creative blessing (but creative blessing not reliant upon eschatological blessing). Kelsey distinguishes between the constitution of the two creations by making use of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing) to refer to the first

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creation of the old world (and God's relating to all that is not God creatively) and *creatio ex vetere* (creation from the old) to refer to the second creation of the new world (and God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation). Thus, God's relating to all that is not God in eschatological blessing is gracelike, giftlike and complex. The proximate context of the bodily resurrected Jesus is defined and constituted by God's relating to all that is not God eschatologically and actually inaugurated through the inbreaking of God's eschatological reign.

Thirdly, the triune God who relates to the resurrected crucified Jesus in his "'physical' bodily humanity" is the self-same God who relates to Jesus in his "glorified bodily humanity" (2009:551). Thus, "[t]he ultimate context of the risen human Jesus, and of all human beings whose eschatological consummation is fully actualised in glorified bodies within the proximate context of the new creation of God's eschatological reign, is the triune God relating to him and to them in eschatological blessing" (2009:551).

Fourthly, it is possible to conceive coherently of actual living human personal bodies whose eschatological consummation is fully actualised as "integral, relatively self-regulating and self-directing set[s] of energy systems having the functions and organization essential to life" (2009:554). Kelsey describes these as bodies that are dependent upon their proximate contexts for their sources of energy and life, as beings interdependent upon relationships with other created beings, which provide needed sources of energy. Eschatologically consummated bodies are personal beings finite by virtue of God's relating to them and by virtue of their being conditioned or limited by the relationships with other beings, in that they are dependent upon the giving and receiving of energy within those relationships. These bodies are dependent upon outside creaturely sources of energy – and thus "inherently mortal" (2009:554), "vulnerable to disintegration and death" (2009:555) – but 'imperishable' in not dying or disintegrating due to God's faithful sustenance of life and living beings. They are finite bodies that are not, however, dependent upon predation for life-giving sources of energy, and, as living, non-carbon-based physical bodies, do not have the occasions for pain[95] or grief[96]. Such

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[95] In that "they do not have the biochemical basis for it" (2009:555).

[96] Since no living beings die, in the proximate context of eschatologically consummated beings, which is the new heaven and new earth.

unsubstitutable personal bodies are both recognisable and unconditionally, unqualifiedly worthy of respect, being living bodies with their own singular personal identities (as those having had DNA of particular species). Living bodies are shaped by both bodily and mental, social, cultural, expressive energy systems, in interrelation with their particular personal unsubstitutable identities and, as glorified bodies, endlessly "change, grow and deepen in their creaturely participation in the communion-in-community that constitutes the life of the triune God" (2009:557). As created, glorified, reconciled bodies, these bodies are located within the three modes of God's embracing relating to all that is not God. As bodies, (whether physical or spiritual) related to by God, living beings are constituted by God's unqualified freedom and immediacy in relating, deemed good by God, and are freely given gifts.

Fifthly, Kelsey does not make the choice between the traditional categories of "realized" and "futurist" eschatologies, and does not see his proposals as subscribing to either of these descriptions. He prefers to describe eschatological consummation in reference to its promissory inaugural and actualisation aspects, in that "[t]he inauguration is 'realised', but the full actualisation is 'future'" (2009:557), but emphasises that even these interpretations "remain formal and abstract proposals" (2009:558).

In an excursus on theological loose ends within his second proposal, Kelsey argues that interconnected questions of the freedom of the resurrected and the continuity in discontinuity of eschatologically consummated bodies be left open. It is important for Kelsey to place particular emphases on the importance of affirming the bodied, creaturely continuity of eschatologically consummated living bodies, the necessity of communication (if eschatologically transformed bodies are to remain in some kind of community in communion) and the inevitability of creaturely finitude of all that is not God. Indeed, life, as all that is not God constituted by God's relating to it, "continue[s] to be subject to the logical and ontological possibility of ceasing to be" (2009:561)) of all that is not God.

Eschatologically consummated living beings are those elected and judged by God, those called to be and become dying lives – and thereby called to respond appropriately to the God who relates to draw them into eschatological consummation, by enacting joyously hopeful practices in eccentric hope within their proximate, quotidian contexts.

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When these responses are distorted the existential hows of living beings are distorted (sins) but may also lead to the living death of distorted personal identities (sin) and structural oppression and violence (evil).

4.7   Living death: distortions of hope

Distortions of hope constitute sins in that it comprises of inappropriate responses to God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation. Recalling chapter 2, the dying lives of personal bodies are turned into living death when the creaturely integrities of living beings are violated (in being an evil) through distorted existential hows (in being sins), which defines personal identities as distorted responses to God themselves (in being sin) – and therefore comprise of practices that are not enacted on borrowed time. For this second mode of God's relating to all that is not God, distortions of the appropriate response of joyous hopefulness, in both the not-yet of eschatological blessing and the now of eschatological blessing, constitute sins in the plural. Essentially, the enactments (in Kelsey's words, "existential hows") or set of practices of which these responses consist are distorted, and could, in accordance with the indefinitely large number of possible appropriate responses, themselves consist of an indefinitely large number of distorted and sinful practices. These responses may be conscious or unconscious. However, "[w]hat makes existential hows sinful is not their conscious intent but a formal or structural distortion that manifests the inappropriateness of the response they express to their ultimate context" (2009:568). With regards to God's relating to eschatologically consummate, joyous hopefulness is distorted when the motivation for the hope and the occasion for the joy of living beings is not born of the triune God's relating to eschatologically consummate and bless all that is not God, in the peculiar and proleptic way that God answers to the promise of eschatological blessing and which is manifested in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus joyous hopefulness has a formal structure that has to do with both the actually inaugurated now of eschatological blessing and the not yet fully actualised now of eschatological blessing. When the appropriate response of joyous hopefulness, by its ground or by its structure, is not kept intact, "distorted, deformed, counterfeit versions of existential hows" (2009:569), or what Kelsey calls sins, are enacted. Kelsey follows the formal structure of

the appropriate responses and existential hows to this manner of God's relating to distinguish between three modes of distorted hopeful practices.

The first set of distorted hopeful practices is based on the not-yet of eschatological blessing, and so Kelsey distinguishes between active and passive, as well as theocentric and non-theocentric distortions of joyously hopeful practices. Again, "[t]hese distortions of hopeful practices are formal and structural, not subjective" (2009:569) and so the distortions of these practices are defined by that to which they are responsive.

Active distorted hopeful practices are defined by Kelsey as hoping "to overcome particular injustices in their lived worlds and to liberate them from particular kinds of oppression" (2009:569). As such, these practices may be non-theocentric or theocentric.

In their non-theocentric form, these practices typically confuse human flourishing with human well-being, and so confuse expectancy of eschatological flourishing in their proximate contexts with expectancy of improving the well-being of the quotidian. Kelsey sees this distortion as a hope based on a utopia, "no place", "a wholly ideal future possibility", "the present's inherent *futuram*". Such hopeful responses ultimately become responses, not to God's relating to consummate eschatologically, but "to utopian ideal possibilities" (2009:570). Such responses may bring about great transformation in societies, transformation, even, "of eschatological dimensions" (2009:571), but Kelsey sees their distortion not in what they hope to accomplish (which could be motivated by the same ends and purposes of appropriate responses and hopeful existential hows), but in what they hope. These responses are distorted, not in their investing in and envisioning of a just and liberated society, but in *not* being defined by the already, proleptic and dramatic inbreaking of God's eschatological transformation (*adventus*) into present lived quotidian worlds. Furthermore, these practices might either be "insufficiently realistic about the ambiguities of their proximate contexts" (2009:572) or cynical in their "use [of] all available means to achieve utopian ends" (2009:572).

However, in their 'utopian distortion', active distorted hopeful practices may be theocentric as well, so much so that they are hopeful in the not-yet full actualisation of God's eschatological blessing – but distorted, nonetheless, in their not being particularly hopeful with regards to the now full inauguration of God's eschatological blessing. This

leads them to resort to moral, "spiritual" or even escapist practices that may endanger the well-being of proximate contexts in the very acts that seek to build the eschatological kingdom of God.

The first type of distorted hopeful practices also includes passive distorted hopeful practices, which again might have non-theocentric or theocentric foci, characterised by "awaiting some future radical change" (2009:574) but not particularly engaged or actively involved in bringing about some measure of such transformation. Kelsey regards the strategy of waiting not in itself sinful[97], but as being "at risk of becoming indifferent to the well-being of their proximate contexts" or even legitimating "world-ignoring" and "world-rejecting" practices and orientations to the quotidian (2009:575). Even if such a theocentric focus is not maintained, non-theocentric passive hopeful practices may be distorted by being "practices of sheer waiting" (2009:575), through being vaguely expectant of some future transformation of the quotidian. Kelsey goes as far as describing a world in which waiting is characterised by vague expectancy as 'living death', in that active engagement in the quotidian to bring about change is exchanged for waiting in the meanwhile for some future change to occur.

The second set of distorted hopeful practices is based on the now of eschatological blessing. Enactments of joyous hopefulness distorted in this way tend to have great regard, loyalty and love for the integrity and value of the quotidian, with a focus on the now of quotidian life but not on the not yet of quotidian life. Similar to the first set of distorted hopeful practices, "the energy behind this type of distorted practice is grounded in the assumption that human persons' dignity and value are diminished when their well-being is diminished" (2009:578). However, for Kelsey the dignity and value of living beings are not necessarily tied to their well-being, but rather to their glory – that is to say, their flourishing. As urgent and important as it may be to counter injustice and practices that violate the integrities of created beings, theocentric hope is anchored not in the socio-culturally determined norm of 'well-being', but in God's relating to bless creatively and eschatologically all that is not God. As such, Kelsey again distinguishes

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[97] In fact, he admits that waiting may in some instances be an 'appropriate strategy' to protect and celebrate the well-being of the quotidian.

between active and passive, as well as theocentric and non-theocentric, distortions of joyously hopeful practices.

Active distorted responses to God's drawing all that is not God into the not-yet of eschatological consummation may be expressly theocentric, through being grounded, not "in God's actual *proleptic* inauguration now of God's future (*adventus*) eschatological blessing that is not yet fully actualized" (2009:579; original italics), but in what Kelsey calls 'creaturely resources'. This includes optimism and moralism, which Kelsey understands respectively as expecting the best, according to the meaning of the Latin *optimus*, and assuming that both God's will for socio-cultural change in the quotidian is clear (as well as the means to achieve this). In particular, these sins are regarded as Christian sins, "[t]o the extent that their Christian specificness shapes, focuses, and intensifies the energies with which they are enacted" (2009:580).

Active distorted practices of hope need not be theocentric, however, especially when it comes to optimistic practices. Non-theocentric optimistic practices may seek to address and repair (especially moral) social, cultural, political, economic and other societal challenges and problems as rigorously as theocentric optimistic practices, and may, in its efforts for acute and precise analyses of lived worlds' challenges and problems, even give way to pessimism. This Kelsey describes as expecting the worst, according to the meaning of the Latin *pessimus*. Both optimistic and pessimistic practices are inherently unstable, both in their urgent realism and in the easiness of their shift from the one to the other, and "tend to become self-protective and exclusionary" (2009:581), especially with regard to the utter realism within which these practices operate and the limited resources available for social-cultural-political change and improvement or liberation from oppression and injustice. However, Kelsey does not regard practices as sinful by virtue of their optimism or pessimism. Rather, they are sinful in that they "can be based only on assessment of resources provided by the quotidian now, and not on God's inauguration of God's promised eschatological rule" (2009:582).

Furthermore, the second type of distorted hopeful practices also includes passive distorted practices, whether theocentric or non-theocentric. Non-theocentric, passive distorted practices become sentimental and complacent when their realism (or non-realism) leads them to assume that changes that are needed in their proximate contexts

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and quotidian worlds need not be radical or deep, but can be enacted "in denial of, or in willful ignorance of, the complexity and power of the systemic evils they seek to transform" (2009:582). Such practices are not sinful in their sentimentality (although Kelsey could see this as a possible causes of evil), but rather in their structural inappropriateness as responses to God's relating to draw living beings into eschatological consummation.

Over and against these, theocentric passive distorted practices are described as 'triumphalist', 'inherently conservative' and 'sectarian' or even 'utopian'. Their distortion lies therein that "[t]hey are explicitly expressive of personal bodies' response to God drawing them to eschatological consummation, but as though consummation were now already fully actualized so that there is no longer any not-yet" (2009:583). Again, these responses or existential hows are sins by way of their distorted practices and inappropriate responses to the full complexity of God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation.

The third set of distorted hopeful practices is expressive of despair (without hoping, according to the meaning of the Latin *desparare*), which Kelsey describes as "an orientation that personal bodies have to their proximate and ultimate contexts that is wholly without hope in their ultimate context and without hope for their proximate contexts" (2009:584). Kelsey sees despair expressed in desperation and depression, and, again, it may involve both theocentric and non-theocentric practices. In particular, theocentric desperate practices are responses to a God understood to be apathetic, indifferent or even hostile to living beings. Such practices express no expectation or expectancy for creaturely flourishing, whether involving eschatological or creaturely blessing and well-being.

Non-theocentric desperate practices aim, as do theocentric desperate practices, at preserving the well-being, dignity and value of living beings within proximate contexts that are regarded as imminent threats to these, and possibly hostile environments for cultivating the well-being of living beings. Whether non-theocentric or theocentric, Kelsey consents that desperate practices are complex but nonetheless distorted and inappropriate responses to God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation.

For their great complexity and modes of manifestations, the sins of inappropriate response to God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation and distorted existential hows as enactments of these practices share one common and base feature. In Kelsey's words, "[t]hey are not enacted on borrowed time" (2009:586), since they "seek to actualize on their own an eschatologically radical transformation of their proximate contexts; or they seek to preserve what they conceive to be an already fully actualised, eschatologically radical alteration of their quotidian; or they seek to survive in proximate contexts of whose radical transformation they despair" (2009:587).

Two features of sins in the plural deserve attention here. The first is that, echoing chapter 3, no single root or underlying principle for sin can be identified, and Kelsey himself opts for sketching rough typologies to make sense of the complexity undergirding his discussion of sin, sins and evil, as it relates to his core proposals. Secondly, he distinguishes between 'ordinary, immoral acts' and 'Christian theological, sinful acts'. Whereas sins are sins by virtue of their inappropriateness in relation to God, immoral acts are immoral by reference to fellow created living beings (and, one might add, socio-cultural norms) and by reference to acts that cause evil (structural, direct or indirect violation of creatures' integrities). For Kelsey, these might overlap[98] but cannot be understood as synonymous[99]. Even if all immoral acts can be understood as sinful, all sinful acts are not necessarily immoral – but would still be sinful by virtue of their distortion of the appropriate responses of joyous hopefulness.

Whereas sins (in the plural) are inappropriate responses to God's relating, expressive of distorted existential hows, sin (in the singular) is expressive of distorted personal identity. However, Kelsey is careful to distinguish between quotidian personal identity[100] and basic personal identity[101], if quotidian personal identity (which is self-determined) is to be measured against basic personal identity (which is given, determined

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[98] In that "certain human actions, attitudes and affections may equally well be characterised interchangeably as 'immoral' or as 'sinful'" (2009:588).

[99] Indeed, "some human actions, attitudes and affections must be judged to be sinful even when they would not normally be judged to be immoral" (2009:588).

[100] Which he understands as "defined by how we respond to our proximate contexts" (2009:590).

[101] Which he understands as "given by the ways in which the triune God relates to them [in community]… defined eccentrically by God relating to me" (2009:590).

eccentrically) – and thus if the living death of sin (in the singular) is to be made possible. The relation of the evil of living death and the sin and sins that may bring about that evil lies, for Kelsey, in the relation of personal bodies' identities to the performative, particular act of acknowledgment of God as the ground of their identities. Living over and against, 'at cross-grain' to, their actual personal identities is made possible by misconstrued acknowledgment of what the ground of their identities is. Apart from acknowledgment as a mode of response, whether appropriate or inappropriate, to God's relating to all that is not God, living death entails a second aspect that defines distorted personal identity. Kelsey describes this as "the bondage incurred by personal bodies' inappropriate acknowledgments of their election for and judgment by eschatologically radical transformation" (2009:591). Since personal bodies' basic identities are defined by particular, concrete instances of election and judgment, personal identities are to be joyously hopeful identities by virtue of being defined by the triune God's eschatological blessing. For Kelsey, bondage to distorted identities can be distorted in three ways, if the balance of acknowledgment of both election and judgment (and the appropriate relationship between these) in eschatological blessing and consummation is not maintained.

The first mode of distortion is acknowledgment of election without judgment. In particular, the acknowledgment of the election of a personal body for a specific, social role or function distorts the personal identity in such an instance, since the identity comes to be defined by (and bounded to) the particular role or function – instead of being defined by God's drawing of them into eschatological consummation. This bondage cuts in two directions: through limiting the roles and functions of a given identity to those that are predetermined by society (and thus prior to a given identity) and through limiting the number of roles and functions (as well as prioritising these roles and functions) that a given identity can fulfill simultaneously in a society.[102] Acknowledgment of election for eschatological consummation, in contrast, does not prioritise or limit the social roles and functions that can be fulfilled in societies. Rather, all social roles and functions are acknowledged as part of a given identity, without assigning a particular role or function as definitive or basic to a given personal identity. Election that admits and adheres to the

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[102] "Every personal body in fact fills a multitude of social roles and functions" (2009:593).

reality of God's judgment in eschatological consummation, over and against election that does not acknowledge this, is liberating, since "those who have been elected have therewith also undergone the worst possible crisis; there is no more ultimate calamity left to fear" (2009:594). Distorted personal identities may be elected for particular social roles and functions by society (which can be experienced as 'fate') or by themselves, but either way the social pressure to make for the well-being of the quotidian entails structural distortion of personal identities. These roles are not given roles, but imposed roles – whether imposed by society or by self. As such, they distort the personal identities of those upon whom they impose, and bind them into the living death of distorted hope and of confusing "election by God to a social role making for the quotidian's well-being with election by God for the radical transformation that comes by eschatological consummation" (2009:596). Acknowledgment of election by the triune God's eschatological consummation admits to the reality of the judgment already passed upon the lives of personal identities, so that personal identities need not be bound to or defined by the quotidian, whether by means of predetermined or self-determined social roles or functions or any other measure. This does not relieve personal identities from fulfilling particular (and often highly ambiguous) social roles and functions, or being responsible for and toward evaluations of those roles and functions by virtue of some standards of excellence. However, not imposed roles and functions nor given evaluations of the fulfillment of these various roles and functions need bind hopeful personal identities into the living death of distortion and despair, if basic identities are defined and constituted by God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation.

The second mode of distortion is acknowledgment of final judgment without election. Kelsey describes this as 'optimism', which, he says, is in itself a particular type of hope – a type of hope that holds that historical progress is inherent in the quotidian, so that societies may become increasingly just and good. However, "optimism [remains] a distortion of eschatological hopefulness" (2009:598), since optimistic worldviews leave no room for the acknowledgment of election in ultimate and proximate contexts and constitute personal identities that are distorted by means of being in bondage to a final judgment or some ideology regarding the quotidian. Kelsey sees particular similarities with the modern period through its obsession with overarching and all-encompassing

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theories and narratives in seeking to provide history with some dynamic, coherency and stability, and emphasises the danger of such optimistic meta-narratives. Indeed, personal identities defined in this way are bound in living death, since "[p]ersonal identities defined optimistically are perpetually at risk of invalidation by random and arbitrary conflicts in the interactions of finite creaturely centers of power" (2009:599).

The third mode of distortion is acknowledgment of election for negative final judgment only. This type of distortion is characterised not by optimism, such as the second mode of distortion, but by pessimism – indeed, by "the negative judgment that there are no sure grounds on which to expect the long-term well-being of personal bodies and their proximate contexts" (2009:600). This means that personal identities might either be minimally hopeful with regards to being open to the possibilities of radical change and improvement in the quotidian, or be totally despairing with regards to being wholly closed to any possibilities of radical change and improvement, even transformation, in the quotidian. Even more, if judgment is seen as absolutely final in its evaluation of the responses and nature of personal identities, then distortion of hope into pessimism would again violate the careful relationship of election to judgment in eschatological consummation and blessing

On the whole, sin (in the singular) entails the distortion of personal identities, which binds these to living death, as beings curved in on themselves (*incurvatus in se*). For Kelsey, sin is bondage, and the living death of bondage obscures (but "does not necessarily wholly annul") "the reflection of God's eschatological glory in personal bodies" (2009:602), so that personal bodies are not able to respond to one another in passionately joyful, appropriately eccentric hope. Thus, for their great complexity and modes of manifestation, sins of inappropriate response to God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation and distorted existential hows as enactments of these practices share one common and base feature – they are not enacted on borrowed time. For Kelsey, hope is as much part of the appropriate response to God as faith, and therein basic personal identities that respond in joyous hopefulness to God's relating to draw them into eschatological consummation and blessing become the dying lives that this mode of relating calls for.

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4.8   God's active relating to eschatologically consummate as basis for ecological theology?

In sum, how would ecological theology be able to appropriate Kelsey's substantial contributions made to the proposal that God relates to all that is not God to draw all that is not God into eschatological blessed and consummated life? It is my contention that this mode of relating is appropriated with less ease than the proposal of God relating to create, but with greater ease than God relating to reconcile. Again, the concern for 'life' and 'living beings' in this study will be reflected here, as is particularly evident in the discussion of the continuities and discontinuities of created and eschatologically consummated life. Regarding the question of how we ought to be as eschatologically consummated life, God's threefold relating to all that is not God, and in this particular case relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, forms the basis of the response that Kelsey gives.

How ought eschatologically consummated life be? It is clear that the question aims to address both present and future dimensions of being, and, to do so, in the process necessarily implies past dimensions of being. Kelsey's response to his theological anthropological question "How ought we be?" therefore takes seriously the present in all its dimensions – the assumed createdness (past), the already of eschatological blessing (present) and the not yet of fully actualised eschatological consummation and transformation (future). Again, this section emphasises Kelsey's own use of 'life' within his project, and particularly points to God's own life into which all of life is drawn. The question as to how eschatologically consummated or blessed life ought to be does not say something of the constitution of life, as in chapter 3, or of the restitution and restoration of life, as in chapter 5, but speaks to the dynamic tension between *futuram* and *adventus* that life is caught up in and (re)defined by. God blesses life. God blesses life with eschatological blessing, in addition to constituting life and blessing living beings with creative blessing. Therefore the glory of God is reflected in all living beings and in all of life – indeed, living beings are drawn into God's own triune life and called to participate in the glory of God. For an ecological theological project, both the absolute promise of eschatological blessing and the implicit promise of transformation in the present and in

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the future are core to an understanding of life that is being constantly and persistently drawn into eschatologically consummation.

If "consummation is grounded in the eternal relations that constitute the triune God's very life" so that the "free enactment of love… draws creatures to participate in creaturely fashion in the triune God's own powerful life" (2009:126), then eschatological consummation is first and foremost about participating in the divine life of the triune God. Eschatological blessing, like creative blessing, is freely given. Furthermore, if God relates to all that is not God, then all are drawn into participation with the triune God. The participation in the Godly life is not a simple equation with divinisation or *theosis*, but has to do with particularly the *missio Dei.* God reaches out to all that is not God, including all living beings, and draws these into eschatologically blessed and consummated life. Eschatological blessing is brought about through the working of the Spirit in particular, and is not to be confused and conflated with ór dichotomized and separated from creative blessing. The act of being-drawn does not rely upon any capacity or power or ability of a living being – nor does it prioritise living beings according to any perceived intrinsic value or worth of a particular living being within this act of being-drawn.

The action of God's drawing has a particular intent, and therefore entails a drawing of living beings not into an abstract, vague eschatological, 'futuristic', probably life, but into a particular kind of life. The particularity of this life is rooted in some sort of ontological actualisation or even transcendence – a life that is already and not-yet in the same instance, and thus requires some measure of waiting upon the promises of the triune God. The Spirit acts in utter freedom to bring about eschatological new creation and new life, which is defined by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Son. The advent of promise, which the Spirit introduces, has to do with both the possibilities of the present (*futuram*) and the inbreaking of the God's eschatological reign into the present (*adventus*). This is an interesting dynamic in Kelsey and perhaps important for ecological theology, for whereas the contributions of eschatology can be thought to counter simplistic understandings of ecological theological concerns for life here and now, in a specific place and space, through some measure of escapism or denial of present realities or belief in the replacement of all that exists, Kelsey's description of both *futuram* ánd

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adventus has to do with the present here, even as it functions within the tension of the already-not yet of eschatological consummation. The advent of promise entails the weakness of the crucifixion (as opposed to violent force in the life and death of Jesus), discontinuity (as opposed to continuity between *futuram* and *adventus* in the resurrection of Jesus) and implicit transformation of all living beings (as opposed to the explicit or absolute promise of drawing all that is not God into eschatological blessing). Therefore, the narratives of Jesus form the content of both the eschatological blessing and the implicit promise that is brought about through God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation.

Since the medium of promise works within the ambiguities and vulnerabilities of everyday, quotidian, proximate life (much like the 'circumambience' of the Spirit in this regard), promise has to do with hope. Within the limitations of space and time, living beings are portrayed as finite beings and as the objects of God's mission. The medium of promise points to God's public engagement with all of humankind[103], but necessarily also to communities of living beings, if God relates to *communities* in this way, on the one hand, and if God relates to all that is not God, on the other. The presence of Christ *within* ambiguous and vulnerable proximate contexts transforms them into new worlds or lives for living beings within them – and it is within this that hope lies. Eccentric hope is joyous hopefulness as gift given and as resistance, as communal and as cosmic, if it is to be hope for participation in God's glory. Thus, whereas created life expresses the glory of God, eschatologically consummated life participates in the glory of God.

The phenomenon of promise in particular, as Kelsey's description of the ultimate context of God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, has much to offer ecological theological thinking, by way of constructing a picture of the ultimate context of all that God relates to. The implications of holding that the eschatological blessing of the triune God, who relates to all through the circumambient Spirit, is freely and fully given to living beings – including the earth and her ecology – through the medium of promise have two edges. Firstly, if the nature of promise is such that it creates an alternative social context, one defined and given content by the life and

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[103] Kelsey himself does not equate 'church' with the public engagement that he describes, even though he includes 'church' in this engagement.

death of Jesus Christ and characterised by the hope of this content, and the promises of God pertain within God's relating to all that is not God, then the promises of God impact upon all that is not God, whether directly addressed to specific agents or not. The open-endedness of God's promises, furthermore, allows for wider application, which may include the earth and her ecology. God's self-commitment to the well-being and integrity of living beings itself takes on the form of promise, and, I would argue, structure and direct specific and less specific promises made by God.

Secondly, the Christological intent with which Kelsey approaches the promises of God (and, consequently, the content of eschatological blessing) also contributes to constructing a picture of the ultimate context of all of life. Particularly, it is clear from Kelsey's argumentation that not merely cosmic Christologies would be appropriate in an ecological theology, but all Christology that functions from the promises of God. One might argue, on this basis, that an adequate ecological theology would be able to incorporate and employ Christology in the broad, if it admits to the agency of the medium of promise in constructing and defining contexts. Thus, for an ecological theology that is informed by the context-defining medium of promise and the eschatological blessing (over and above creative blessing) that finds content and intent in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's relating to draw all into eschatological consummation takes seriously God's concern for the well-being and integrity of all of life. Where this concern takes the form of promise within the ultimate context of all that God relates to, the socio-historical reality of the *missio Dei* is taken to define the quotidian and proximate contexts of all that is drawn to God in eschatological consummation.

Indeed, God's own life forms the context for the appropriate response of living beings to God, and therefore the deep passion of hope has to do with courageous love for God's eschatological blessing. Kelsey describes the appropriate response to God's relating to draw living beings into eschatological consummation as 'joyous hopefulness', which has to do with practicing this attitude through a multitude of different disciplines in both the actual now ánd the not yet of eschatological blessing. Eschatological blessing is God's 'yes' (election for) and 'no' (judgment because) to living beings, and therefore serves to describe living beings as those who are liberated to live within the new life of eschatological blessing, one free from the self-contradictoriness of finite, ambiguous,

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vulnerable lives. Therefore inappropriate responses to God's relating in this manner, whether it be optimism or pessimism, must be living death – the opposite to the true life or dying life that creatures are drawn into. For Kelsey, eschatologically consummated life must be continuous with created life, and is therefore itself considered created and finite, dependant upon God's relating to it. Indeed, since the God who relates to all living beings to create is also the God who draws all that is not God into eschatological consummation, the personal identities of created and eschatologically blessed living bodies will be the same, even if constituted in both continuity ánd discontinuity.

If there are no discrepancies or divisions between created and eschatologically consummated living bodies and beings, then there is also to be no separation of the already and the not-yet of eschatological consummation. Keeping intact the structure of already and not yet in this mode of relating is core to Kelsey, since it is only in this double tensed depiction of the realities of living beings that a fair representation of God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation is given. The living death of violated and distorted personal identities of living beings (sin), distorted existential hows (sins) and the systemic evil that consistently undermines and violates the glory of God in created, eschatologically blessed living beings (evil) are contra to the flourishing and the glory to which God calls all that is not God. The importance of maintaining the double tensed description of eschatologically consummated life is apparent in Kelsey's description of active and passive, theocentric and non-theocentric distortions, where the focus on either the not yet or the actual now of eschatological blessing and glory and consummation in the present is too strong (and he includes altogether despairing practices in these descriptions) which results in imbalanced, distorted versions of appropriate responses of 'eccentric hope'.

4.9   Conclusion

In the process of inquiring whether Kelsey's theological anthropology could serve as basis for ecological theology, the core question that structured inquiry into this second proposal would be how life drawn into fulfillment, actualisation and eschatological blessing is to be understood, namely "How ought eschatologically consummated life be?" It was established that *all* that is not God is drawn into the life of the triune God, which

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structures the way in which eschatologically consummated life is understood, particularly with regards to their proximate (quotidian) and ultimate contexts, their flourishing on borrowed time, their being eschatologically consummated living beings, and the living death of distortions of hope.

In Kelsey's project, living on borrowed time defines living beings and their contexts as finite and as objects of the *missio Dei*, whereby the eschatological, proleptic inbreaking of God's reign comes to define eschatologically consummated or eschatologically blessed life and the ultimate context of God relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation. The Spirit is both intimately interior and eccentrically exterior to all living beings and all of life, and invades history as the *eschaton* invades time. In the first mode of relating, the triune God creates life and the possibilities of living, bringing forth life and bringing life to an end (through death and predation). In this second mode of relating God draws all of life into his own, divine, triune life of love. All of life is drawn into the triune life of God in a move that involves both *futuram* (as the possibilities of the present) and *adventus* (as the proleptic inbreaking of God's eschatological reign into the present). God blesses both particular living beings and context ánd all of life, which introduces the advent of performative, self-involving *promissio* in and through the resurrection of Jesus. The advent of promise, however, has not only to do with the absolute promise of eschatological consummation, but also with the implicit promise of transformation. Proximate (quotidian) contexts are defined by the ultimate context of promise, and are therefore understood as finite and as the public, communal, ambiguous contexts and objects of the *missio Dei*. The new life of new creation is to be understood christocentrically, since it is the presence of the risen Christ within proximate contexts that brings about transformation and blessing in the quotidian.

The flourishing of all of life has to do with living beings becoming the dying lives responding in eccentric hope to God relating to consummate all that is not God eschatologically. The appropriate responses to God relating in this way are responses enacted in the attitude of 'joyous hopefulness', shaped by the gift of hope for participation in God's glory. Indeed, whereas eccentric faith responds to all living beings, all created life, reflecting the glory of God (chapter 3), eccentric hope is participation in the glory of God. Practicing joyous hopefulness in the actual now of not-yet-actualised

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borrowed time and in the not-yet of borrowed time's actual now requires disciplines of thinking historically, cultivating affections, cultivating imaginative powers, and disciplining the passions of personal bodies.

In answer to the question of how eschatologically consummated life ought to be, Kelsey maintains that the identity of living beings has to do with both election (God's 'yes') and judgment (God's 'no'). Eschatologically consummated life is *elected life*, chosen for a specific role or task, as well as *judged life*, revealed for what it really is by virtue of the sin and evil that it is caught up in. Kelsey does not divorce eschatologically blessed life from creatively blessed life, and therefore living beings and all eschatologically consummated, blessed life remains finite and fragile, in addition to being products of gracelike, giftlike, complex eschatological blessing. Indeed, created life and eschatologically consummated life is continuous, even as eschatologically consummated life is transformed life. Eschatologically blessed life is finite, but by virtue of being dependent upon God and interdependent on all living beings, on the earth and within the earth's ecology, yet imperishable – a life that Kelsey describes as being characterised by no predation, no pain, no grief, by being recognisable, being worthy of respect, being changing and changeable, and by being shaped by context.

Whereas living beings flourish on borrowed time when they enact appropriate responses and therefore come to be defined as dying lives, inappropriate responses to God relating to draw into eschatological consummation become distorted in their personal identities and therefore come to be defined as living death. Inappropriate responses may be conscious or unconscious, and can entail a variety of active, passive, theocentric and non-theocentric distortions of joyously hopeful practices – either by being singularly based on either the not yet or the actual now of eschatological blessing, or being based on neither. The distortion of personal identity (sin), distorted existential hows (sins) and violation of the integrity of living beings (evil) may involve various modes of inappropriate responses to God – whereas, for instance, all immoral acts and decisions are necessarily sinful for Kelsey, not all sins are necessarily immoral. Attitudes that are shallowly optimistic, pessimistic or altogether despairing bear distorted responses that are not only inherently unstable but also not reflective either of the well-being of living beings or of living beings participating in the glory of God. Acknowledgment of

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election without judgment, acknowledgment of final judgment without election and acknowledgment of election for negative final judgment only are inappropriate responses to the second mode of God's relating. Exactly because both election ánd judgment has to do with comfort in Kelsey, distortions of this kind is the bondage of living death, the living death of living beings curved in on themselves.

For Kelsey, this is what is meant by understanding 'eccentric existence' or 'eccentric life' as 'living on borrowed time'. The value, worth, meaning, reality of living beings, of the earth and her ecology, lies not in their own capacities or powers to draw themselves into the deeply meaningful and transformative reality of eschatological consummation, but in God's continuous and faithful maintaining of the integrity of all living beings and all of life. All living beings are eschatologically blessed and eschatologically transformed within the tension of the already (actual now of eschatological blessing) and the not yet (not yet fully inaugurated eschatological blessing). Placing the emphasis on the eccentricity of all living beings and all of eschatologically blessed life deals appropriately with the mystery of living beings that are related to by a mysterious God and that are caught up in the mystery of God's eschatological purposes of recreation. In this mode of relating God relates to bless the earth and her ecology eschatologically, which is not only distinct and concretely particular in its own right, but which takes seriously the distinct and concretely particular, fully actual existence of living beings and all of life as well as being continuous with created life. Life and death, dying life and living death, characterise 'living on borrowed time' within God's relating to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, and call for appropriate responses of eccentric hope from all that God relates to.

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Chapter 5
Flourishing by another's death

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5.1   Introduction

Finally, Chapter 5 of this thesis explores the third of David Kelsey's three proposals. Could Kelsey's proposal that God relates to reconcile all that is not God serve in the construction of a basis for a Christian ecological theology?

God relates to reconcile all that is not God to flourish by another's death. The order of the proposals of this argument again requires some attention, in particular the relationship between the third and first proposals, and the third and second proposal, building on what was already said in the previous chapter. Firstly, God's relating to reconcile assumes or rests upon the assumption of God relating to create, since "[i]f God has not first created… there would be absolutely nothing either to consummate or to reconcile" (2009:121). However, this relationship is not symbiotic, in that God's creating in no way assumes or relies upon either God consummating or God reconciling for God to create. Secondly, God relating to reconcile is understood to be complexly related to God's relating to consummate eschatologically, in that "[b]oth are concretely enacted in the selfsame story about Jesus" (2009:122)[104] and thus, for Kelsey, inseparable. Kelsey takes particular care in constructing the relationship between his third and second proposals (2009:826):

> while they are irreducibly distinct from each other because the narratives most adequately describing them have irreducibly different logics, their narrative logics also make clear that God relating to reconcile presupposes both a need for reconciliation and that God relates to draw to eschatological consummation, whereas God relating to draw to eschatological consummation does not presuppose God relating to reconcile (nor does it presuppose that there is any need for reconciliation).

Thus, whereas stories of God relating to consummate are logically independent of stories of God relating to reconcile, God's reconciling work does in some way seem to be dependent upon God's eschatological consummation. Thus, God's reconciling work accounts for God relating in a very distinct and particular way to all that is not God – not to be confused with or collapsed into the stories of God's creating or God's

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[104] "[T]he two modes of divine relating are concretely enacted by God in one and the same sequence of events" (2009:608).

consummating – but assumes both of these stories, and so are logically dependent upon God creating and consummating all that is not God. The proposal that God relates to all that is not God in reconciling all that is not God to God has to do with the life and death of Jesus Christ which has to do with all of life.

For the purposes of this chapter, the question that will guide inquiry will be "Who is reconciled life?" This chapter relates to the third part of Kelsey's project, which pays attention to the implications for theological anthropology in claiming that God relates to reconcile all that is not God to God. This chapter provides a detailed account of Kelsey's third proposal of God relating to reconcile all that is not God to God, which considers the ultimate and proximate contexts of this third proposal, flourishing by another's death in love, the freedom of living beings being-related-to by God, and the living death of distortions of love and personal identity. This will be followed by an appropriation of the proposal of God relating to all that is not God to reconcile, whereafter we will conclude and summarise with responses to the question as to who reconciled life is is to be understood in Kelsey's project.

5.2   God relating to reconcile all that is not God to God

'The Son, sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit, reconciles' is the *taxis* employed to describe the divine perichoretic dynamic in the triune interrelationships in this third manner of God's relating. Kelsey emphasises that it is indeed "the triune God in its threefold *circumcessio* that reconciles estranged creatures to itself" (2009:128) or, even more, "by self-donation, God giving Godself, the Son, to human creatures" (2009:129) that they may be reconciled to God through their multiple estrangements. Firstly, the Son is given to all that is not God to reconcile living beings to the life-giving God. Secondly, the Father sends the Son and reminds that those who are reconciled are created prior to any other relation that God has with them, but also that the manner of reconciling should cohere with God's relating to create them by not violating their creaturely integrity. Thirdly, the Spirit's givenness stresses both that "the divine self-giving that reconciles is also powerful to enliven" and that "it also empowers a deep and enlivening transformation of human creatures in community" (2009:129). The wisdom inherent in God's threefold relating is present here also, so that "God reconciles in the power of

God's wisdom" (2009:129). Kelsey ascribes the preposition 'among' to this manner of relating, which points to God's being "at once other than human creatures and utterly near them", in "the otherness and nearness of interpersonal relations that are at once physical and social" (2009:130).

God relating to reconcile all that is not God in life's multiple estrangements (including self-estrangement, or the self-destruction that all such estrangement brings about) from God is the third and final aspect of the proximate and ultimate contexts of all living beings. The medium of God's structural reconciliatory work is that of incarnation, if the basic personal identities of living bodies are defined by way of being 'in Christ'. Indeed, as Woman Wisdom offers herself in love, in her regard for the dignity of human and nonhuman creatures alike (Kelsey, 2009:230), so too Jesus Christ offers himself in love, in the incarnation, for the reconciliation of living beings to God. God relating to reconcile is distinct by way of the unique story it tells of the self-destructive estrangements of living beings (including their quotidian and proximate contexts) from God, and in particular the contingency of such distortion, since neither God's relating to create nor God's relating to consummate necessarily entails that such self-willed estrangement should take place. God's relating to reconcile is distinct, firstly, in its telling of the story of God relating to all that is not God by way of being marked by the resistance of living beings to being related to by God. Secondly, God's relating to reconcile is distinct in its account of God's own relating taking place on terms set by these beings in their resisting. Just as the first and second modes of God's active relating is distinct but interrelated to the other modes of relating, so too this third mode of God's relating is concretely distinct but inherently interrelated to the first and second modes of relating. Kelsey employs 'incarnation' for describing the "complex interrelation of God's action and a personal body's action" (2009:608) as "the concrete way in which the triune God actively relates to human personal bodies on terms defined by their creatureliness both to consummate eschatologically and to reconcile" (2009:609).

Yet, these canonical stories (God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation and to reconcile) are often conflated into a single narrative, either through collapsing eschatological consummation into reconciliation (through depicting eschatological consummation as the culmination of God's story to reconcile all that is not

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God) or through collapsing reconciliation into eschatological consummation (through inserting reconciliation as an episode within the story of God drawing all that is not God into eschatological blessing). Kelsey emphasises, however, that even though these stories cannot be told in isolation from one another, they should be kept distinct – if only because their narrative logics do not allow them to be assimilated to one another, in whichever way. If God relating to draw all into eschatological consummation is equiprimordial with God relating to create (by giving account of "God relating in blessing" (2009:611)), then God relating to reconcile[105] must be distinct not merely from the first proposal, but also from the second. Kelsey describes these two modes of relating as "irreducibly different types of stories, asymmetrically related" (2009:611): 'irreducibly different' because of the different narrative logics of each type of stories, and 'assymmetrically related' because either type of story could only make sense if told in conjunction with the other (cf. Kelsey, 2009:612).

It is important for Kelsey that the various theological descriptions of the proximate and ultimate contexts of all that is not God be held as closely together as possible, without confusing or conflating or collapsing or surrendering stories with different narrative logics (in)to one another. It is possible for these stories to function in such proximity, if Jesus Christ is interpreted as both proximate and ultimate context in this regard. In the Gospel narratives God's relating to reconcile all that is not God to God has "Jesus and self-destructively estranged humankind exchange places *coram deo* – that is, in the presence of and in relation to the Triune God" (2009:616; original italics).

Thus, being-reconciled provides a third angle on thinking through God's relating to all that is not God with the aim of constructing a basis for ecological theology from Kelsey's own theological anthropological project, and so depicts an ultimate context wherein God's own life of love characterises the relations and being of living beings. Living beings are structurally reconciled and forgiven within their multiple estrangements through this mode of God's relating, which calls for certain appropriate responses to God's relating to reconcile. When these become distorted they make for sin, sins and evil in the quotidian and reconciled life. All of these dynamics, however, are integral to

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[105] Which, in contradistinction to eschatological consummation, gives account of "God relating to deliver" (2009:611).

Kelsey's argument on who living beings are as eccentrically grounded living beings, and will form the basis of what is argued to be the constitution of reconciled life as eccentrically grounded living beings related to by God in exchange.

5.3 The ultimate context of God relating to reconcile

In the third part of his book, Kelsey interprets the ultimate context of God relating in this way as 'living by another's death', which revolves around the life and personal identity of Jesus Christ, as the incarnate God and decisive revelation of God's own 'personal'[106] identity. Consequently, Kelsey reads New Testament narratives about Jesus as stories that provide insight into the identity of God. He interprets these narratives by way of a triadic structure, namely by way of Jesus' intimate relations with those he calls 'Father' and 'Spirit', even if these texts do not "explicitly express any Trinitarian view of God" (2009:617). Thus Kelsey's taxes formulate theological accounts of God in such a way as to keep distinct the three persons of the Trinity who nonetheless relate perichoretically (and in a threefold manner) to all that is not God, such as reconciling estranged living beings to God. 'The Son sent by the Father in the power of the Spirit' expresses this relation in particular, by providing "the distinctive pattern in which the three-person God perichoretically reconciles estranged humankind in particular" (2009:618).

The Son in the power of the Spirit stresses the eschatological blessing that all that God relates to receives in spite of their repeated and persistent estrangement from God. Since the triune God is the agent of such reconciliation, God blesses all that is not God through the free and unhindered, uncontrollable and unmanipulable working of the eschatological Spirit – so much so that "[n]ot even personal bodies' turning away from God limits or constrains the triune God's freedom to turn to them" (2009:618). Indeed, it is in this very turning to those estranged living beings in order to reconcile them amidst their multiple estrangements that the triune God's powerful judgment "exposes their self-

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[106] Strictly speaking, Kelsey does not regard God as having personal identity, since 'person' becomes confusing when used to refer to both human unsubstitutable identities and the hypostases of God. Thus, for Kelsey only living human bodies can have personal identities, and since God is not a living human body, it is not proper to describe God's identity as personal identity. However, "Jesus, on the other hand, uncontroversially is a living human personal body, so one may speak properly of his personal identity" (2009:617), and so it is the life and death of Jesus Christ that Kelsey employs to gain understanding into God's identity.

estrangement in their proximate contexts here and now for what it is: bondage to a demonic dynamic, a self-contradictory self-destructiveness" (2009:618), in divine, nonviolent resistance of creaturely resistance.

The Son sent by the Father tells the story of one who is sent and goes; one who is faithful and obedient in inaugurating the prophetic promises of his coming eschatological blessing (a relation between Father and Son that Kelsey terms 'in faith'). The perichoretic faithfulness of the Son sent by the Father, as well as the steadfast solidarity of the triune God with living beings amidst their multiple estrangements points to "the triune God's self-consistency in righteousness", to the enactment of "the triune God's trustworthiness" and to the "trustworthily righteous" character of the ultimate context of all that God relates to in this manner (2009:621). The triune God's faithfulness in resistently and persistently turning toward and in sharing God's own perichoretic relations with living beings through the incarnation in Jesus the Son are instances of God's love for all that God relates to.

Thus, the Son is sent to all that is not God because God chooses to relate to all that is not God through any type and number of estrangements that living beings may embrace. The triune God's sharing of the Son's relationship with the Father goes beyond God's creative or eschatological blessings of all of life. The sharing that Kelsey describes is one of a "radically unconstrained, uncontrollable, unpredictably ad hoc turning by the triune God to estranged human personal bodies", "a persistent generosity to those who resist and reject what God shares with them" (2009:621). Kelsey employs the notion of 'incarnation' to describe God's concrete and particular relating to all that is not God in order to reconcile living beings within the creaturely limits of time and space. Jesus' unsubstituable personal identity is *agape*, which then is also the content of the ultimate context of all that God relates to reconcile in time and space. A particular pattern of power that is transformed into powerlessness in Jesus' life and work governs this *agape*, so that it is God among living, estranged beings that defines the reconciliation that is spoken of. In this sense God relating to reconcile is 'gracelike', although, strictly speaking, 'grace' could only be used in reference to Jesus in the context of the triune God. And so it is that "our ultimate context is defined by the Son's concrete presence sent

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by the Father in the power of the Spirit as one among us on terms set by us, set both by our creatureliness and by our self-destructive self-estrangement from God" (2009:623).

Humankind's ultimate context, and probably that of all living beings, is characterised by love and grace, if it is held that "the concrete enactment in the singular person of Jesus of the triune God's love for estranged humankind in which God turns to identify with human personal bodies in their estrangement, relentlessly resisting their resistance of God in a way that at once judges that resistance and yet shares with them the relationship the Son has with the Father in the power of the Spirit" (2009:624) describes God's relating to reconcile all that is not God to God.

The triune God's love for all estranged living beings defines the ultimate context of God relating in this manner, but equally defines the quotidian and proximate context of God relating to reconcile all that is not God to God – especially where life and living beings may be bound and caught up in the deeply complex ambiguities and multiple estrangements of their proximate contexts. For these purposes, and within this understanding, Kelsey interprets the triune God's relating to the concrete realities of everyday life as being by way of the incarnation, which infuses the life and being of living beings with theological meaning appropriate to his project.

5.4   Quotidian and proximate context of God's incarnation

For Kelsey, the incarnation of the triune God in the person of Jesus defines the quotidian and proximate contexts of estranged, reconciled living beings. If the person of Jesus, the unsubstitutable identity of God the Son defines and gives content to the ultimate context of God reconciling all that is not God to God, then the person of Jesus defines and gives content also to the quotidian and proximate contexts of those related to by God in this manner. Kelsey's inquiry into the personal identity and narrative of Jesus does not ask metaphysical questions or engage with the 'historical Jesus' (or, in Kelsey's words, "historians' Jesus") research or research type questions. It is not inquiring into the private interiority or subjectivity of the person Jesus or even in critical historical research that Kelsey is interested in. Instead, he seeks to define proximate contexts by way of Jesus' "unsubstitutable living human personal body… sharing in community the creaturely quotidian" – in short, "estranging contexts reconciled" (2009:626).

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Jesus is fully human and so fully finite, fully functioning within a certain context, a certain time and place, and concretely particular in terms of both location (historical, social, cultural) and community[107]. From the Gospel narratives it would appear as if Jesus was as much defined as human being in terms of ethnicity (being Jewish), gender (being male), class (probably being poor and unemployed; marginalised, in any case, within the society he found himself in), and socio-public role (being a healer, preacher, teacher and so forth) as any other. However one might depict Jesus' own reactions or responses to these various contextual markers, what Kelsey seeks to emphasise is that Jesus is 'one of us' and thus 'one among us' (and so within 'our' proximate contexts), since "only as one among us can he be the locus of God's relating to us to reconcile us to God" (2009:627).

Kelsey reads the Synoptic Gospel narratives as an account of Jesus' personal identity, and it is in this reading that the stories told of Jesus' life and interactions with his context and the people around him is of "Jesus being not only one among others but being with and for them… in Jesus' own distinctive way" (2009:631). Admittedly, each Gospel account or portrayal of Jesus may favour a particular model or type or figure of the Christ[108], but it would seem as if two intersecting plotlines could be traced throughout the narratives, and it might even be that these structure and pace the narratives to some extent. The first plotline is an account of Jesus' ministry, and the second plotline is an account of Jesus' last days. For Kelsey, both plotlines are driven by conflict (particularly the mentioned characteristic movement from power to powerlessness): the first containing a variety of public and private conflicts, and the latter pertaining to a cosmic conflict between powers of good and evil. The logic of the two plotlines converges, however, in Jesus' resurrection, where it becomes impossible to distinguish God the agent from Jesus the agent from Spirit the agent. What the interweaving of these plotlines, and thus the Gospel narratives, do establish is the unique and concretely particular unsubstitutable personal identity of Jesus. Essential to this identity of Jesus is that "he is uniquely God-related" and thus "unsubstitutable in his God-relatedness" (2009:634). God relating to Jesus is a key moment in Kelsey's work, and it is upon the

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[107] "He shares in the full range of biochemical psychological, cognitive, social, political, economic, and cultural energy systems that characterize all living human bodies" (2009:627).

[108] Kelsey ascribes this to what would have been familiar to a particular Gospel's audience.

three ways that God relates to Jesus that Kelsey also bases his three proposals of God relating to all that is not God: God relates to Jesus creatively ("as God relates to every living body" (2009:635)), God relates to Jesus "as God relates to no other living human body as the one in whom God's long-promised eschatological victory over evil is concretely inaugurated" (2009:635) and God relates to Jesus "as God relates to no other human body as the one in whom God reconciles estranged creatures to God" (2009:635). In conclusion, Jesus is one who, in his powerlessness to save himself, saves others. In the third proposal of God relating to reconcile all that is not God to God, proximate contexts are given content and defined by the concretely particular and unsubstitutable personal identity of this Jesus being present in them.

Since Kelsey regards narratives as the most adequate descriptions of personal identity, he wants to take both the Synoptic Gospels' account of Jesus as well as that of the Gospel of John seriously in constructing a personal identity of Jesus the Christ. In John, he notes, Jesus is not only portrayed and described by others, but also regularly describes himself – so that he is indeed portrayed as "the source of true life" (2009:637), "the presence of God who is the source of true life" (2009:637), the one who "comes from God" (2009:638) and, finally, "he who lives powerfully now as the source of new life in the midst of the quotidian, but who does so only as one powerless to save himself from evil's power" (2009:639). It is the presence of this 'source of true life' within quotidian, proximate contexts that defines them. The presence of Jesus the Son within the ontologically and morally ambiguous quotidian reconciles them to God, and God to them, by the very way he lives and exists in them. Kelsey points out that Jesus' personal identity is not only defined by way of his faithful and unique relationship with God, but also by his faithful and reconciling relationship with humankind. Even though these two aspects of who Jesus essentially is seem to contrast, Kelsey insists that Jesus' identity as 'one among us' involves being 'one in solidarity with us', the faithful one of God as one among sinful living beings amidst the full extent and consequences of their persistent sin and self-destructive estrangement from God. In short, "[h]e identifies with them in order to share with them his own quality of relationship with the Father" (2009:641) and by carrying the consequences of their multiple estrangements upon himself, that of "the full destructive consequence of such disobedience – namely, utter God-forsakenness (Matt.

27:46)" (2009:642). The way in which the triune God is involved in all of this is by the incarnation.

It is by exchange that living beings are reconciled to God and God to them. Since Jesus lives a truly human life, "who in being with us is for us" (2009:642), and since this life is one of true love and grace for all that God relates to, the creaturely integrity (or otherness) of the other is maintained in God's relating to all reconcile all that is not God to God. Jesus is described as respecting others as equals, acting toward the well-being of others (even to the point of self-giving and self-sacrificing powerlessness) in *agape*. In this, the deep ambiguities of quotidian, proximate contexts are exposed on a second level, so that in the life and death of Jesus Christ these are both reconciled to God ánd shown for what they really are ever clearer – profoundly distorted and estranged from God.

Recalling descriptions of the interrelatedness and interdependence of all of life, where living beings are understood as "complex centers of energy inherently interactive with other creatures, also understood as energy centers" (2009:643) (cf. chapter 3), the inherent relationality of living beings is important for Kelsey here. He distinguishes, however, between the endless cycle of nurturing giving and receiving that constitutes the life of created living beings, and the eternal cycle of loving giving and receiving that constitutes the life of the triune God. Since God is not dependent upon creatures or even networks of creatures for God's reality or life (as created beings are dependent upon the triune God for their reality or life), not extrinsically limited by interactions with living beings or inherently limited by finitude in the way of created beings[109], and not subject to the vicious cycles of power imbalances or inherent inequalities either within God's own triune life or in created life, the life of the triune God cannot be confused with or adequately described by the eternal cycle of giving and receiving that created living beings are subject to. Even more, these creaturely cycles can be distorted into vicious cycles of violence, violation, exploitation, exclusion and oppression where created living beings were to live not in vulnerable dependence and openness to the giving and receiving of other created beings, but as though they were their "own ground of reality and worth rather than living in appropriate response to God relating… creatively"

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[109] "[A]lthough they may be freely self-limited in their perichoretic relating to reality other than the triune God" (2009:644).

(2009:645). Vicious cycles become cycles of "reciprocal violence", self-perpetuating" and "interminable" – in Kelsey's words, these cycles "make for proximate contexts that are a living death" (2009:645). Jesus, incarnated within these vicious cycles firstly takes upon himself this living death, and secondly draws living beings into his own true, quality life, so that living beings, those that God relates to, may flourish. Indeed, this is what Kelsey means by 'exchange' – that God-become-human are drawn into the vicious cycles of death and destruction and estrangements of living beings' proximate contexts, in exchange for living beings' being drawn into the very life of the triune God's perichoretic interrelations. Indeed, this exchange is living death for true life, so that living beings may "live truly by another's dying life" (2009:646).

Consequently, it can be said that proximate contexts are ambiguously both estranged and reconciled, relations which Kelsey is careful to maintain as 'structural' rather than 'subjective'. The vicious cycles that quotidian, proximate contexts are structurally caught up in involve multiple estrangements (which infuses every kind of relationship between beings, and not just the relationship between God and created living beings). These vicious cycles that move created beings and entire networks of living beings toward their extinction, and the disintegration of their proximate contexts. The incarnation of the triune God in Jesus structurally reconciles living beings to one another and God by breaking into the vicious cycles of violence, extinction and disintegration, taking the deadly and destructive consequences of these cycles upon Godself, and, in exchange, drawing living beings into God's own, triune, giving and receiving life of reconciliation. This does not mean that structural reconciliation replaces structural estrangement within proximate contexts, but rather points to the containment of estrangement within the "structure of relations among Jesus, Father and Spirit into which they have been set" (2009:647). However, this second level of ambiguity need not be understood as an absolute condition, since "[t]he structure of reconciliation is… the condition of the possibility of humankind overcoming estrangement" (2009:648). Giving and receiving forgiveness, repenting and confessing embodies this possibility of overcoming estrangement, through the acknowledgment of own participation in these vicious cycles.

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The Synoptic Gospels' narrative logics betray two patterns or plots that shape the way that Jesus' personal identity is constructed. Firstly, as the story progresses, Jesus is moved from power to increased powerlessness. It would appear as if, whereas he exercises a large measure of power in situations initially, he is increasingly lost to his circumstances, vulnerable and victim to the growing conflicts with religious and political leaders, neighbours, family, and cosmic powers. However, Kelsey points out that amidst these circumstances of utmost powerlessness (which culminates in Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion) an unanticipated emergence of power is ascribed to Jesus, so that he does in some sense shape his circumstances. Indeed, "Jesus is one who is powerful to save others but powerless to save himself; indeed brought down by his success in powerfully saving others" (2009:651).

Secondly, God's work and Jesus' work can only narrowly and arbitrarily be distinguished from one another, so that the narratives tell of both Jesus' work and experiences and God's work and engagements in the circumstances that shape Jesus' story. However, it is in the resurrection where "the trajectory of what Jesus does, and the trajectory of what God does converge" (2009:650), where the agent(s) of the plot become indistinguishable. Furthermore, the one who saves others but cannot save himself is the one who lives, not despite his unwillingness to save himself but through it. This second narrative trajectory (in addition to the first trajectory of Jesus' unwillingness to save himself) describes Jesus as the risen one. Indeed, "[e]ssential to his identity is this: he is he who lives" (2009:660). In each rendition of the events surrounding Jesus' life, death and resurrection it becomes clear that Jesus is, in Kelsey's own words, "unmistakably a living human personal body" (2009:657). Jesus becomes the very message that he proclaims, so that "Jesus himself in his unsubstitutable personal identity is the key to understanding the mystery of the kingdom that he is proclaiming" (2009:669). Jesus' personal identity is portrayed as inherently mysterious, as defying human comprehension and thus any final remarks that may be made regarding the identity of Jesus.

The Gospel of John does not describe the personal identity of Jesus in the way that the Synoptic Gospels do. The dominant movement in John is that of the glorification of Jesus, which culminates in his being raised on the cross when he is crucified. The mission of Jesus is not merely a mission of the personal body Jesus amongst the personal

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bodies of his quotidian (as is the portrayal in the Synoptic Gospels), but involves his mission into creation from outside of creation. In particular, Jesus is not portrayed as one who is delivered over to the powers that be in powerlessness and vulnerability (as the Synoptics portrays it), but one that is in control of every moment of the narrative as it proceeds. Indeed, even when dying, it is not so much something that is done to him as it is "something he actively does, and does in his own way" (2009:677). Finally, whereas it is often the outside powers and beings that identify Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, in John Jesus is the one who identifies himself. In this way the Gospel of John repeatedly portrays Jesus in its unique way, mainly by virtue of the way that the question regarding Jesus' personal identity is structured. The portrayals of Jesus differ from the Synoptic Gospels to the Gospel of John, because the questions regarding Jesus' personal identity differ – "Who are you?" (Synoptic Gospels) and "Where do you come from?" (Gospel of John) elicit very different responses in the text.

In his discussion on Christology, Kelsey argues that the point of Christology is existential, in that the New Testament aims to make assertions about who Jesus is, who God is and who we as human personal identities are. Other than historical (such as the quest for the historical Jesus aims to investigate) or revisionist (which focuses on Jesus' personal identity as roles or functions) Christologies or apologetics[110], Kelsey's understanding and employment of Christology in his project has to do with "an exploration of the logic of Christian beliefs about the unsubstitutable personal identity of Jesus in which a description of his personal identity is logically prior to, is formulated independently of, and provides the terms on which it also offers a description of his presence" since "[i]t is *he* who is present" (2009:689; original italics). Realistic narrative, rather than sets or bodies of theories, guides the description of unsubstitutable personal identities, and so Scriptural narratives about the identity of Jesus are vital in gaining greater understanding of who Jesus is in his personal unsubstitutability. Thus it is imperative that Christological claims be informed by the realistic narrative of Scripture, if "the task of Christology in secondary theology is to explore the logic of Christian beliefs about who Jesus is… and… offer a description of Jesus in his unsubstitutable personal identity" (2009:692).

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[110] As the logic of coming to believe, echoing Frei (1975).

The incarnation of the triune God in the personal identity of Jesus makes for structural reconciliation between estranged living beings and the incarnate, immanent and transcendent, God that breaks into the vicious cycles of violent estrangement and distortion and constitutes an exchange of narrative plots[111], whereby living beings are drawn into God's own, triune life of reconciliation. Therefore, for Kelsey living is not truly living without flourishing, and so God's promises are taken to point above and beyond – to the flourishing of all of life, by another's death.

5.5 Flourishing by another's death

The ultimate context of all that is not God, related to in reconciling, is *agape*, for which the appropriate response is eccentric love.

These two types of love may seem to be identical, but Kelsey distinguishes quite clearly between them – *agape* is God's love for all that is not God, whereas the appropriate response of humanity to God is 'human love'. For Kelsey, it is within relationships characterised by love that beings flourish when related to by God in reconciliation. In particular, reconciled beings flourish by another's death, in that the entire narrative of Jesus' life and death tells of God's solidarity with the suffering of all that is not God. Jesus' solidarity with all that suffers and all that spirals into increasing disintegration and nonbeing extends to God's exchange of places with all that is not God within this dynamic, so that the unsubstitutable personal identities of all that is not God flourish insofar as they respond appropriately to God's reconciliation of them in love.

Kelsey correlates the identity of that which is not God (and in particular human beings) and being 'in Christ', so that his response to the core question of his third proposal, namely 'Who are we?', he answers: "As those who are 'in Christ', we have our identities in Christ's identity" (2009:695). In particular, it is the patterned relation of God the Father and Jesus the Son that defines the structural relation between the triune God and all that is not God, so that the Pauline expression 'in Christ' need not only describe conduct, status or distinction, but is probably used by Paul to indicate a number of possible meanings. Kelsey picks up on one particular interpretation of the phrase 'in

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[111] Namely the pattern of the story of proximate, quotidian contexts for the pattern of the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

Christ', namely by understanding this as the 'in' of condition (rather than those of location or situation), which would make the description 'in Christ' "intrinsic to their personal identities and normative for how they ought to be set into their proximate contexts" (2009:697). He identifies three aspects of the condition of reconciled beings 'in Christ' describes

A first aspect of the formula 'in Christ' could be to give expression to the relationship of human persons and the crucified, living Jesus Christ, so that being 'in Christ' becomes "a condition or status into which they have been brought by the grace of God… a given that embraces and environs their lives" (2009:697). In this understanding the formula 'in Christ' expresses a relationship, and defines beings in terms of a private and personal condition.

The second aspect has to do with the public and observable condition (constituted by practices in public) of those who claim to be in relationship to Christ, which involves practices that define and designate the identities and common life of entire Christian faith communities. These practices are determined by the pattern or plotline of narratives telling of God's relating to reconcile (which Kelsey describes by way of 'incarnation'). In short, "[t]o be 'in Christ' is to have their stories included in Jesus' story" (2009:698).

A third and last aspect involves specifically the communal focus of public and observable practices that constitute the common life of the church ('in Christ' being likened to 'in church'), so that being 'in Christ' give expression to "a relationship lived in community" (2009:696).

Thus, the use of the construct 'in Christ' points to the condition of humankind by virtue of the incarnation. Since God becomes human not only to relate to human beings in a uniquely human way, but does so in solidarity with their suffering and with an eye to their reconciliation to God through their multiple estrangements, the identities of human beings are intrinsically defined by this status or condition, or what Kelsey describes as a structural relation. The reconciliation that is spoken of includes reconciliation of personal bodies' quotidian identities and basic structural identities. However, not only are human beings 'objectively' reconciled to God by way of their reconciliation and eschatological consummation, but 'subjective' human responses (such as acknowledgment or acceptance of that which is given 'objectively' by God) form an integral part of the

definition of human quotidian personal identities. Kelsey describes the personal, bodily identities of human beings in three ways – namely as related to by God creatively, in God's drawing of all that is not God into eschatological consummation, and in reconciliation to God. In all three ways the personal identities of living beings are defined structurally by virtue of the threefold theological claim of God's relating to all that is not God. Thus, God's threefold relating to all living beings "structurally defines who they are", in that "it defines their identities" and "is intrinsic to who they most basically are" (2009:702). With this in mind, Kelsey responds to his own question of who we are by emphasising, firstly, that personal identities are defined by the living, crucified and risen, Christ, and that, secondly, this condition of being 'in Christ' is intrinsic rather than extrinsic to human personal bodies. It follows, on the one hand, that it would be expected of living beings "to live in ways whose patterns are consistent with the identity we have been given in Christ" (2009:702) and, on the other hand, that living beings would flourish "when the patterns of their lives are consistent with their most basic identities, structurally defined by their being in Christ" (2009:702). It is with this in mind that Kelsey refers to the incarnation, so that 'incarnation' comes to define who human beings most basically and personally are.

If living beings are to flourish, and if flourishing is most intricately linked to their appropriate responses to God's threefold relating, then responding in love (which Kelsey deems the appropriate response to God's relating to reconcile) to God and fellow living beings would describe flourishing personal identities of living beings. However, Kelsey is careful to describe 'love' as the appropriate response to God's reconcilation by way of a very specific profile. For him it is to be governed by three theological considerations: (1) a trinitarian understanding of God; (2) the incarnation as the story of the concrete relation of God to all that is not God; and (3) love being the appropriate response of living beings to God and fellow beings (though "human love to God has conceptual and logical priority to neighbor love" (209:713)). This understanding bears upon the various relationships involved in God's relating to all that is not God in order to reconcile them through their multiple estrangements.

In the first instance this type of love is characterised by the perichoretic love of God that is displayed in God's sending of his Son, which has to do with love reflecting

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God's own *agape* for humankind. Indeed, it is rooted "in the triune God's own self-relating in love, a communion of mutual and reciprocal self-giving and receiving that constitutes the triune God's own life" (2009:704). God's *agape* is God's desire, God's passion for communion and relationship with living (human) beings, but Kelsey is careful to maintain that God remains unchanged and unchanging in such love, so that "God's desire for communion with realities other than God is not a desire born out of lack or need, nor a desire for that without which God would not otherwise be fully actualized as God" (2009:705). Rather, it is love that desires communion with estranged living beings in spite of their multiple estrangements[112] from God. God's love for created living beings adheres to the concrete particularities of all that is not God in God's relating to them, and so "God's radically free loving of unlovely creatures" (2009:707) engages living beings on their own terms, even terms that estrange them from their God. Kelsey consequently distinguishes between two directions that the love of (human) living beings take – namely 'love to God' and 'neighbour love'. Love is understood as passionate desire for communion with the other, even if this take on different forms with regards to the different loved ones involved. For Kelsey, 'passion' denotes that which is "relatively settled, steady-state aspects of human creatures' identities rather than being episodic" (2009:714), having 'intentional objects' but not necessarily being self-conscious or even conscious. However, the love with which human beings in particular respond to God cannot exactly mirror this love of God for all that is not God, for even if human living beings could love God in spite of anything about God (and so not necessarily love God in response to God's lovely goodness), living beings cannot reconcile God to them in any way.

Thus Kelsey describes the humanly appropriate love for God as "desire for union with Christ, union with God-with-us here and now" (2009:707). Humanly appropriate love for neighbouring living beings desires communion – Kelsey adds "without moral, cultural or aesthetic preconditions" (2009:709) – with them. He defines 'neighbour' not merely as a generic reference to the physically or socially nearby other, but as describing a certain type of relationship with fellow created living beings. 'Neighbour love', then,

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[112] What Kelsey calls their "faithless, hopeless and loveless responses to God's relating, responses that estrange them" (2009:706).

involves meeting fellow living beings 'where they are', amidst their unjust and multiple estrangements, as well as acknowledgment and rectification of injustices, if the appropriate response of love entails justice-seeking and desire for reconciliation in communion. Fellow living beings are 'lovely' as a result of God's reconciliation of them (not by virtue of who are they apart from this), and so neighbour love is appropriate in that it responds to who they are in Christ – love as neighbour is deemed "the appropriate response to God's *agape* that forgives human personal bodies' sin against God, fellow human creatures, and themselves" (2009:724). Indeed, "what makes human love appropriate human response to the triune God's *agape* is that it is humble acknowledgment of a condition shared with fellow human personal bodies" (2009:712; original italics). Kelsey is careful to formulate the relation between human love to God and human love to fellow living beings. Human love to God has logical preference to love of neighbor – yet love of neighbour is the proper context for love to God. What is more, love to God cannot be understood as the underlying motive or driving force for neigbour love – rather, neighbour love is understood as flowing or following naturally and spontaneously from love to God. Thus, "human love to God an love as neighbor can neither be separated, conflated, or substituted for one another" and "human love to God is logically priori to neighbor love and is its conceptual context" (2009:721)

In the second instance this type of love is characterised by the perichoretic love of God that is displayed in the love to the Son that is sent in the power of the Spirit. Three points require mentioning. Firstly, the inseparability of biblical narratives telling of God relating to reconcile and God relating to consummate eschatologically (through revolving around the same figure, Jesus of Nazareth) indicates (1) that human love to God is appropriate both in being related to in reconciliation and in eschatological blessing, and (2) that human love to God "is love in the power of the eschatological Spirit whose circumambience draws them in Christ into his unique relation to the One he calls 'Father'" (2009:717). Secondly, human love to God and neighbour is a gift of God that engages all of living personal beings' capacities and powers, if loving occurs in the power of the Spirit. Love as gift given by the triune God "deeply shapes a personal body's orientation in its proximate and ultimate contexts, but it does not bind it" (2009:718) – living beings are fully, genuinely and integrally free. For Kelsey it is

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exactly in being related to by God in radically eccentric ways that the identities of living beings flourish, and in being reconciled to God that living beings are given the gift of freedom in order to love God and fellow created beings in ways appropriate to beings-related-to-by-God-in-reconciliation. Thirdly, "human responding love is always communal", so that "[g]iven their estrangement, it is by the power of the Spirit that human creatures are adopted into the condition and status of being in Christ" (2009:718). The reconciliation of living beings is understood as being universal in scope, and so it follows that the reconciliation of living beings are communal, as the creation and the eschatological consummation of living beings are communal. Furthermore, it is as church that human living beings "seek communion in solidarity" (2009:719) with all fellow human beings. Kelsey makes provision for the "give-and-take of communal discernment" (2009:720), whereby he allows for the relevant discriminations among human beings in the interests of relating in concrete particularity to fellow living beings. He offers one broad guideline in particular, whereby he argues that since the figure of Jesus responded appropriately to God's entering into solidarity with human created beings by identifying with the marginalised persons and groups of his quotidian, "it is proper to privilege becoming neighbor to the marginalized before becoming neighbor to relatively more powerful fellow human creatures", "to those who, having been marginalized in the arrangements of power that make up their proximate contexts, are most disadvantaged" (2009:720). He does allow for exceptions and qualifications, however, in his description of the historical accident of the concrete particularity of living beings, and, even more, allows for the possibility of difficult discriminations to be made in love and communal discernment, through the power of the Spirit. Thus (2009:721),

> neighbor love is inherently differentiated by the concrete particularities of the personal identities of both those who love as neighbors and those with whom they desire solidarity in communion…
> the human love to fellow creatures which is an appropriate response to the triune God relating to reconcile does not systematically lead to the depersonalization of those to whom it would be neighbor.

Personal identities flourish in the passion of love's desire for communion with God and fellow living beings – in this sense the identities of living beings blossom and thrive "when their basic, structural identities are defined by another's (Jesus') death" (2009:722). In particular, "[h]uman personal identities flourish in types of concrete

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enactments of practices expressive of a love as neighbor for fellow creatures understood as a passionate desire to be in communion with fellow human creatures, in solidarity with them in the midst of the consequences of our common estrangement from God and each other" (2009:606). Furthermore, Kelsey underlines the importance of enactments of love for fellow living beings being differentiated, even if all enactments are born of the one desire "for communion in solidarity", "in the condition of being in Christ" (2009:723), and are thus united in personal identities that are grounded 'in Christ'. Indeed, he qualifies this by arguing that levels of differentiation in love enactments do not have to, even if it may appear to, threaten the unity of human love that seeks to respond to God's *agape*. Since the love of living beings is parallel to the responses of faith and hope[113] and since the personal body that hosts this attitude is itself grounded in the unity of being 'in Christ', even the "apparently wildly diverse ways in which that attitude is concretely enacted in particular circumstances" (2009:723) can be grounded in the unity of being 'in Christ'. Ultimately, however, the narratives of Jesus' own life trace a pattern wherein life is celebrated through the celebration of the personal identity of the living Jesus – indeed, "[t]he way of the cross ends in life" (2009:726).

Kelsey makes use of two theological formulas to describe love as appropriate response to being in Christ. The first is being 'in Christ', which, in the New Testament, is primarily associated with the apostle Paul. Kelsey follows Deissmann (1892) in interpreting being in Christ as being in the Spirit, since "Paul nearly conflates the presence of the exalted Christ with the presence of the Spirit" (2009:728). Indeed, the relationship described is "immediate and intimate" (2009:728), "a mystical relation" of human persons and Christ (2009:729), and, following Reid (1963), "express[es] a set of patterns of public conduct, public ways of relating to others, especially in the community of the church but not necessarily limited to that community" (2009:731). Being 'in Christ' is a relation that is expressed through the incarnation – God relating to all that is not God 'in the Spirit' in order to reconcile them through their multiple estrangements to God. For Kelsey, it is this intrinsic relation that constitutes the personal unsubstitutable identities of living beings.

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[113] And is thus also regarded as "an attitude of a whole human personal body" (2009:723).

The second formula that Kelsey employs is that of 'love', and he links being in Christ with love by arguing that "[i]t is by God's love for them that human creatures are located in Christ" and "the appropriate human response to being in Christ is human love for God and for creaturely neighbours" (2009:733). The love that is spoken of takes a specific form, and, rather than make a choice for a quasi-technical approach by choosing a specific New Testament term for what is meant by love[114], Kelsey describes three relations of the love. The first, God's *agape* for living beings, is "a love between unequals (unlike *philia*), without desire for its object (unlike *eros*), and, far from responding to anything in the object of its love that is perceived to be lovable, it constitutes its object *as* lovable by the sheer act of loving" (2009:736). Secondly, living beings' love to God is also *agape*, in that "their love for God is appropriate precisely to the extent that it is shaped as a response to the attractiveness of God's love to them" (2009:735). Thirdly, neighbour love between living beings (like living beings' love to God) cannot itself be 'saving love', even if it too is described as *agape*. It is described as love that is responsive to the attractiveness that is "a gift constituted by God's love to them", since loving fellow living beings is considered "inseparable from love to God as an appropriate response to God's reconciling love to us" (2009:735).

Flourishing by another's death points to the identity that living beings have 'in Christ' and 'in love', by being formed by the incarnation's public patterns of conduct and by Jesus' death that brings the gift of life within proximate contexts that are distorted and bound in vicious cycles of reciprocal violence. Living beings are transformed through the life and death, the incarnation, of the triune God in Jesus, into loving, living beings.

5.6   Loving, living beings

Thus far in this chapter, the question of who reconciled life is has formed the main focus of the discussions. In line with Kelsey's own method of discussion of all three core questions in each part of his work, what constitutes created life and how eschatologically consummated life ought to be will also need to receive attention in this part of my discussion on his proposals, albeit to a lesser extent than the core question.

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[114] Be it *eros, philia* or *agape* – although Kelsey does appear to have a special affinity for *agape*, even when he himself admits that no "rigorous and consistent qualification or nuance" of this term can be found in the New Testament (2009:737).

Kelsey describes the attitude that characterises the appropriate response to God relating to reconcile as "passionate desire for communion with the triune God and with fellow estranged human creatures in their estrangement" (2009:738 – 739). As in the cases of the appropriate responses of 'doxological gratitude' (chapter 3) and 'joyous hopefulness' (chapter 4), the attitude of 'passionate desire' is not to be understood as either an episodic feeling (erupting or interrupting the flow of everyday life) or an abiding feeling (such as a mood). Kelsey prefers to describe this attitude, like the attitudes of 'doxological gratitude' and 'joyous hopefulness', as "a long-lasting preoccupation" which "engages the psychosomatic whole of a human personal body in community, and defines the shape of that human life by orienting it and its energies to the single object of the passion" (2009:739). In this way, 'passion' is understood as sustained energy that orders and gives shape to the life of living beings.

The passionate desire that Kelsey speaks of are enactments of appropriate responses, both diverse and complex. Not only are these diverse, however, but existential hows are a 'unified complexity', since they are expressive of a passionate desire for communion with God and fellow living beings. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1 – 7:29) in particular is a body of texts that provides creative input as to the appropriate responses to God relating to reconcile all that is not God. 'True righteousness' (which is constituted by love that is eschatologically interpreted) is expressed through "concrete examples of the shape of human life that responds appropriately to the inbreaking of the eschatological kingdom in the person of Jesus" (2009:742). As such, "the person of Jesus *is* God's *agape*" (2009:743; original italics), which structures how passionate desire is to be understood and provides space for more interpretations and examples of existential hows expressive of the attitude of passionate desire to be given. Kelsey's own proposal is that the Sermon on the Mount is to be understood as normative in an double way: as moral assessment of actions and characters of human beings, and as formative for existential hows expressing the attitude of passionate desire for God and neighbour. Similarly, the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1 – 17) is interpreted as having normative force in shaping morally right action and appropriate existential hows, albeit serving as "the early part of a larger, more complex narrative whose plot turns on the events of Jesus' ministry, trial, execution, and resurrection appearance" (2009:744). In particular, the reconciliation

that God brings about for all that is not God governs the 'situation' shared by lover and beloved in a relationship of 'love-as-neighbour', since "both are estranged creatures who are nonetheless already structurally reconciled to God by God's having identified Godself with them precisely in their estrangement" (2009:746). Those who have been structurally reconciled to God are located 'in Christ'. Kelsey does distinguish between theory of moral principles and responsibilities and existential hows, and seeks to focus on the latter in his reflection on righteousness and love. Upon this reading both the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount are interpreted as giving 'exemplary demands' (echoing Luz, 1989), although these are by no means seen as being exhaustive or complete. Two foci or dimensions of the love described deserve attention.

The first dimension is that of the first love commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5, loving the Lord God with all of one's heart, soul and mind. For Kelsey this means 'love to God': "a passionate desire for communion with the triune God because that desire expresses human personal bodies' basic personal identities" as those who are structurally reconciled to God through their multiple estrangements (2009:748). Love to God, in this sense, constitutes worship of God, which includes prayer and practices of corporate worship. Contemplation, as practices of prayer, is not understood as merely an aesthetic experience, however, but are practices that have to do with "awed, celebratory and active adoration of the triune God's life" (2009:749) – indeed, "practices of love for God (that) are focused on the sheer reality of the communion of giving and receiving in love, the love that constitutes the life of the triune God" (2009:749). As such, expressions of the passionate, loving desire of God take shape in practices of prayer, and since these involve both an "active giving of oneself to" and a "passive taking in of the God's triune life in love", enactments of practices of prayer are understood to be "existentially self-involving" (2009:749), communal and public. They have purpose, engage "the entire range of personal bodies' creaturely powers" (2009:750) and, ultimately, engage "the entirety of human personal bodies' lives" (2009:749). Practices of prayer may themselves be enacted in a variety of ways, or take various forms: "contemplative adoration" (2009:752), "astonished praise" (2009:753), "grateful praise" (2009:754), "confession" (2009:754), "acknowledgment" (2009:754) and "petition" (2009:754).

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Prayer is an appropriate response to God reconciling all that is not God to God in three ways. In the first sense prayer is an appropriate response to Jesus the reconciling Son, who at once (1) defines the context of practices of prayer, (2) is the one being prayed to, and (3) defines those who pray. Firstly, the unity of the context of prayer, namely the unity of the ultimate context of God reconciling all that is not God to Himself through the Son and the proximate context of the ones praying in Christ, is grounded in the person and life of Jesus. Specifically, the incarnation is both the ultimate and proximate context in which all prayer is enacted. Secondly, the one being prayed to is the triune God, "whose life consists of particular pattern of giving and receiving a quite specific love" (2009:752), both transcendent and immanent for reconciling relating. Within such a context of prayer God's transcendence has to do with "the otherness of the radical freedom of God's prevenient reconciling love to creatures who are estranged from God" (2009:752). Within such a context of prayer God's immanence has to do with "the nearness of the radical intimacy of the triune God with estranged creatures in God's concrete solidarity with them in the person of Jesus" (2009:752). The free transcendence and intimate immanence of God are thus interdependent, so that God is at once radically free from those who pray and radically intimate with those who pray. Thirdly, the basic personal identity of those who pray is of being 'in Christ; prayers may be shaped by the acknowledgment of own estrangement and structural reconciliation to God by God. Prayer as love to God, the passionate desire for communion with God, is both an individual and communal endeavour. The unity and complex diversity of enactments of prayer lie in the liturgical, narrative structure (that Kelsey describes as "eucharistic practice" (2009:754)) that all prayers are said to follow, since the narrative logic of God relating to reconcile is self-involving and thus defines those who pray as estranged living beings structurally reconciled.

In a second sense, prayer is an appropriate response to the triune God relating to reconcile, through the Son being sent by the Father, and defines the One being prayed to. In Jesus' life, whose own appropriate responses and existential hows "were expressions of his human response to God's sending him in mission to proclaim the imminence of God's eschatological liberating reign" (2009:755), prayer featured prominently as part of the exemplary and normative responses of Jesus to the Father. The one who is being

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prayed to is known through five prayers that Kelsey identifies as exemplary and normative, namely (1) the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9 – 13, Luke 11:2 – 4), (2) Jesus' prayer in Getshemane (Mark 14:35, Matthew 26:39 – 42, Luke 22:42, John 12:27 – 28) and the three of Jesus' prayers from the cross, namely (3) the prayer of forgiveness for those who do not know what they are doing (Luke 23:34), (4) the prayer to God in Jesus' moment of abandonment on the cross (Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46), and (5) the prayer before Jesus dies on the cross (Luke 23:46).

In the Lord's Prayer the one who is being prayed to is to be focused on exclusively and single-mindedly, in the contemplative adoration of God's *agape* and the petitionary practice of prayer within and for the eschatological context of God's liberating reign in the already and the not yet. In Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane all things are referred to God, in that "[i]t acknowledges what one most deeply yearns for, and then surrenders just that to God" (2009:759). In Jesus' prayer for forgiveness from the cross, prayer as petition is "set in an embracing ultimate context marked by eschatological divine forgiveness" (2009:758). In Jesus' prayer to God in his moment of abandonment on the cross the practice of prayer as "heated argument with God", "part of a lovers' quarrel" (2009:760), is one enactment of love to God. In Jesus' prayer before he dies on the cross the deepest yearnings and fears of the one praying is publicly acknowledged and surrendered to God's reconciling *agape.*

Kelsey identifies four features of how these five prayers are normative and exemplary as appropriate responses to God's *agape*. Firstly, enactments of these prayers focus exclusively and single-mindedly on the triune God. Secondly, within such prayers human beings acknowledge and ask for whatever it is that they most deeply desire and yearn for (Kelsey adds "proper to their creaturely proximate contexts" (2009:760)). Thirdly, prayer is described as "expressions of passionate desire for communion with God" (2009:760), and thus involves referring to God all that is desired and yearned for most deeply. Fourthly, appropriate enactments of specifically petitionary prayer entail learning concepts appropriate to contemplative adoration of God.

In a third sense, prayer is an appropriate response to the Son 'sent in the power of the Spirit', and defines those who pray. The narrative logic of God relating to reconcile defines the appropriate responses of prayers by living beings to God in a twofold manner.

Firstly, since "[l]ove to God is eccentric" (in that response to God's own *agape* takes place "in the power of the Spirit" (2009:761)), then the triune God is both "the One being responded to" and "the One in whose power the response is made" (2009:761). Indeed, Kelsey argues that "Jesus' own human response to God is itself eccentric" (2009:762) since enactments of practices of prayer are eccentrically grounded, centered in the power of the Spirit – although Kelsey is careful to maintain that creaturely integrity remains intact in prayer, even if God is to be found on both 'sides' of the relation. Secondly, "many expressions of love to God are inarticulate" (2009:761). Kelsey argues that in some circumstances, such as those of "horrendous evil" and "inexpressible suffering" (2009:762), appropriate practices of prayer may involve enactments that are beyond words. One such an enactment is that of sighing, which is not an articulated enactment of prayer, but may nonetheless be public and communal. Appropriate response to God's reconciling, incarnate *agape* involve eccentrically grounded existential hows, enacted in the power of the Spirit, which may sometimes be inarticulate.

It is especially in the content and structure of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount that Kelsey finds support for what he describes as the profile of the appropriate response to God's reconciling, incarnate *agape*. Following Luz (1989, 1995), Kelsey sees a number of theological themes embedded in this gospel. Regarding the present context of (human) life, the inbreaking of God's eschatological reign is defined by the dynamic of forgiveness and reconciliation, which is expressed in righteousness[115], practices of prayer, and "active and innovative enactments of the double love commandment" (2009:766). The Lord's Prayer is placed at the centre of the concentric literary structure of the Sermon on the Mount, since the Matthean texts themselves are arranged according to an *inclusio* pattern. Thus, both theologically and literarily, the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer. This prayer "assumes the prevenient inbreaking of God's eschatological reign, and is prayer that is inseparable from public enactments of practices of forgiveness to fellow estranged human creatures" (2009:774). However, also in Luke's account of the Lord's Prayer does Kelsey identify aspects of the love that is to be passionate desire for communion with God and fellow living beings. Like the account in Matthew, Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is open and open-ended in its formulation

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[115] Which, upon Kelsey's reading of the Sermon on the Mount, "lies in forgiveness" (2009:767).

of what the kingdom of God is. Most remarkably, "within the structure of the Lord's Prayer itself, petitions expressing love to God for God's sake ('you petitions') and petitions expressing love-as-neighbor ('we petitions') are clearly held together as inseparable and are just as clearly distinguished" (2009:780). The intersection of divine and human action is, however, inseparable within the Lord's Prayer and the broader Sermon on the Mount: not only is the inbreaking of God's eschatological reign understood to be the "context'" and "condition" for human action, but, mutually, human action is the "occasion" and "condition" of human engagement by God's action (2009:780). Thus, appropriate responses to God's *agape* and loving existential hows involve love to God (taking the form of the Lord's prayer) and love to fellow living beings (adhering to the Sermon on the Mount's demands), which are not only inherently interrelated, but also wholly irreducible to one another. Regarding the Sermon on the Mount, the contents thereof "are demands for the enactment of certain types of practices… Like every other demand in the sermon, 'love' is interpreted in light of the eschatological anticipation of a total reversal of circumstances" (2009:781).

However, the demands themselves can neither be exhaustive descriptions of appropriate enactments of love, nor unambiguous definitions of Christian love. Rather, Kelsey understands these as examples (or what Kelsey calls "exemplarist demands" (2009:782)) of appropriate existential hows for human, living beings to respond to a context that is irreversibly defined by the inbreaking of God's eschatological reign. In particular, the nature of righteous action within such a context is addressed in the Sermon on the Mount, in practices that express love to God and love to fellow, neighbouring living beings. In this second sense, Kelsey distinguishes between practices that distinctly involve being *with* fellow estranged beings[116], and practices that distinctly involves being *for* fellow estranged beings[117]. As such, the Beatitudes are direct addresses to the public actions of who encounter them, whether by hearing or by reading. Even more, within the Beatitudes themselves "the kingdom is clearly the content of salvation" (2009:785), and righteousness "is a task rather than a gift" (2009:787). In terms of structure, each of the

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[116] "[B]y identifying with them in active solidarity in the consequences of human estrangement from God" (2009:786).

[117] "[I]n the midst of the distorting consequences of their estrangements, by fulfilling the demands of the law wholeheartedly as an integral, undivided agent" (2009:788).

nine Beatitudes is a deliberation on a certain type of person, declared blessed in the present "because God promises something distinctive to just that kind of person" (2009:797). The relationship between the Sermon on the Mount's exemplary demands and the law that it seeks to fulfill (Decalogue) is core to forming and formulating an understanding of both kingdom and righteousness that is appropriate to what the texts want to communicate. However, Kelsey suggests that "the demands of the Decalogue [as "the heart of the law"] is to be read through the hermeneutical lens of the Sermon on the Mount [as "the heart of the gospel"]" (2009:790) if it is to be existentially normative[118].

The second dimension of love as passionate desire for communion with God and neighbouring living beings is love as neighbour. Appropriate responses to 'love-as-neighbour' entail existential hows that are concretely enacted in "socially cooperative practices" (2009:793). The proposal that Kelsey makes in this second dimension of love as appropriate response to God's reconciling too is guided by the Old Testament's Decalogue and the New Testament's Sermon on the Mount. Again, in this regard, he emphasises that the demands that these accounts make are exemplarist rather than moralist or legal in force, although having normative force. The Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount form the context for "[g]enuine human-love-as-neighbor [which] is normed by the situation of both the lover and the beloved: both are estranged creatures who are nonetheless already structurally reconciled to God by God's having identified Godself with them precisely in their estrangement" (2009:795). As such, Kelsey expands upon the two types of existential hows that he proposes, namely being *with* fellow living beings in the midst of their multiple estrangements from God, and being *for* fellow living beings in the midst of their structural reconciliation to God.

A first general type of existential how, being *with* fellow living beings, is "a reconciling participation" (2009:798) which ranges from humility's kindness to shared mourning to avoiding estrangement with other beings as far as possible, and indeed contains "enactments of reconciliation and avoidance of enactments of practices that estrange" (2009:802). Even more, "[t]hey invite us to imagine other and new versions called for by other and different situations" (2009:802).

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[118] Even though he prefers the normative existential force of the readings, he can see how these texts can also be morally normative.

A second general type of existential how, being *for* fellow living beings, has to do with "peaceful living together, not only within the limits of the community but beyond them" (2009:804), ranging from non-violence to love of enemies to "trustworthy truthtelling" (2009:806). Thus it becomes clear that particularly the Sermon on the Mount provides "certain characteristics of the common goal of such existential hows" (2009:807), so much so that enactments of the passionate desire for communion with and love for fellow living beings are enacted for the sake of themselves, and not with an eye to particular goals or results or consequences or products (2009:807). Indeed, "[t]hey are enacted for their own sake as expressions of love responsive to the triune God's incarnate love" (2009:808).

Again, God's threefold relating has to do with life and living: "The demand is general: choose the way that leads to life" (2009:808), contra counterfeited enactments of love-as-neighbour, enactments that are not done communally or with communal discernment, and foolish enactments[119]. The eschatological character of the enactments of existential hows "can keep enactments of love-as-neighbour from being condescending, manipulative, oppressive and binding of fellow human beings" (2009:810), since the goal of these enactments is "being witness in action" (2009:812). Kelsey sees exemplary force for both overall and particular demands, and describes these (2009:812) as invitations

> to personal bodies in community to follow along the trajectories provided by the examples [of the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount] to figure out what the overall character of concrete enactments of practices of love-as-neighbor ought to be in novel, particular proximate circumstances structurally reconciled to God by the triune God relating to them in incarnate *agape.*

Love-as-neighbour[120] and love-to-God[121] are related to one another in some remarkable ways, in Kelsey's thought. Especially in the light of the controversy surrounding love-as-neighbour supposedly being in competition with love-to-God it is assumed not only that love is predominantly a psychological phenomenon (and thus presents this controversy as a psychological problem) but assumes also that love as resources must in some sense be

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[119] Namely by those who do not know or act with the knowledge of already being under judgment, in addition to final judgment by God.

[120] Which Kelsey describes as "passionate desire for communion with fellow, structurally reconciled, estranged human creatures" (2009:793).

[121] Which Kelsey describes as "contemplative adoration of God in prayer" (2009:813).

limited and thus it must be possible to be used up in one or the other relationship. Although, Kelsey admits, such a distraction of the one type of enactment of passionate desire from another may be possible it is the challenge to "any adequate theological account of the relationship of the two loves to show why such competition need not happen" (2009:813).

Kelsey relates three proposals in response to the question of competition between these two loves. The first proposal suggests causal relation, in which love-as-neighbor is dependent upon love-to-God: "love to God be thought of as the inner emotional state, perhaps a certain type of inner religious tension, that motivates or impels or drives the outer behavior of overt concrete acts of love-as-neighbor that relieve the tension" (2009:813). The second proposal suggests "a means-ends relation" (2009:815), in which love-as-neighbour and love-to-God is interdependent: "love to God be thought of as the intention that is enacted in actions of love-as-neighbor" (2009:814). The third proposal suggests an alternative relationship, in which love-as-neighbour and love-to-God is interchangeable: "an act of love to God, and every genuine act of love to God is an act of love-as-neighbor, either as an interior act of intercessory or petitionary prayer for fellow human creatures or as an overt act of charity for fellow human creatures" (2009:815).

Various objections are brought against any one of these proposals in response to a proposed relationship of competition, and Kelsey summarises these into two formal features of the relation between love-as-neighbour and love-to-God that require underscoring. Firstly, Kelsey warns against reducing or conflating the two loves to one another[122], since the different intents of the two loves embrace "entities with very different ontological status" (2009:817) and thus require "significantly different types of actions" of human love in response (2009:817). So too these loves cannot truly be in competition with one another, if they are different types of love by virtue of being geared towards different intentional objects. Even more, it may be that these loves are enacted concurrently, as well as sequentially. Secondly, Kelsey warns against separating the two

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[122] "Love to God and love-as-neighbor are irreducible to each other because they have different intentional objects: God and fellow creatures" (2009:816).

loves[123], since enactments of love-to-God are the fundamental conditions of enactments of love-as-neighbour[124] and vice versa[125].

Thus, love-as-neighbour and love-to-God are inseparable and dynamically interdependent in their being fundamental (or necessary) conditions of one another. Beyond such a mutually enriching relationship, Kelsey sees two functions of practices of prayer in enactments of love-as-neighbour: in (1) undercutting the distortion in the understanding of human living beings being ends-in-themselves and being the saviours of fellow living beings, and in (2) undercutting the distortion of supposing that the significance and reality and goodness of living beings (both human and nonhuman) can be understood anthropocentrically. This is possible in that "[e]nactments of such practices of prayer are self-involvingly performative" – indeed, "in the very act of prayer, the ones who pray help constitute and conceptually shape their own identities as communal creatures radically contingent on God's active relating to create" (2009:823 – 824). Even more, prayer actively functions to subvert the tendency of the enactors of love-as-neighbour "to treat fellow human personal bodies as divine and to treat nonhuman aspects of their shared proximate contexts as anthropocentrically dependent on human creatures for their goodness and significance" (2009:824)[126]. Moreover, even though Kelsey understands the two loves to be dialectically related, he does, upon the reading of the Sermon on the Mount, assume a particular order within this dialectic – namely, "a certain priority of love to God over love-as-neighbour" (2009:824), which is shown in the symmetrical priority that the literary structure of these passages give to the Lord's Prayer, "the center and the theological heart of the sermon" (2009:824 – 825). For Kelsey, "[t]his order-in-dialectical-interdependence between love to God and love-as-neighbor mirrors most immediately the relation between the ultimate and proximate contexts within which love to God and love-as-neighbor are enacted" (2009:825). Two arguments are provided for this understanding of a dialectical order of the two loves. The first argument interprets

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[123] "[T]he pair of types of practices forms an interdependent unity because each type of practice is what it is only in its relation to the other" (2009:819).

[124] "[B]ecause they are appropriate to the One to whom they respond" (2009:820).

[125] Because they are given definition by "the concrete particularity of… fellow creatures" (2009:821).

[126] One might be justified in asking whether destruction of the earth and her ecology is then not, in this sense, idolatrous.

love-to-God (expressed through prayer) as the ultimate context of humankind and love-as-neighbour (expressed through acts of love toward other living beings) as the shared proximate context of humankind with fellow creatures. The second argument builds on the first in holding that both of these types of enactments are aspects of appropriate responses to God relating to reconcile, and as such "presupposes and takes place within the larger context of God relating to draw to eschatological consummation" (2009:826). At the same time, it is the enactments of practices of prayer that assume and prioritise God relating to eschatologically consummate while responding to God's relating to reconcile – indeed (2009:827),

> [t]he priority of love to God to love-as-neighbor, although the two are dialectically interdependent, mirrors the priority of God relating to draw to eschatological consummation to God relating to reconcile, even though the two are dialectially interrelated.

In concluding the question of how living beings ought to be, the profile of the appropriate response to God's reconciling, incarnate *agape* is defined by the interrelationship of passionate desire for communion with God and passionate desire for communion with fellow, neighbouring beings. Living beings flourish "when their existential hows are constituted by concrete enactments of practices expressive of appropriate responses to the triune God relating to them" (2009:827), but when those responses are distorted "their existential hows are distorted as sins (in the plural) and their personal identities are in bondage to the living death of sin (in the singular" (2009:827)). Living beings' conditions of flourishing or distortion imply their freedom to orientate or disorientate themselves and therefore, within this mode of relating particularly, have to do with the freedom to foster passionate desire for fellow living beings and God.

5.7   The freedom of living beings being-related-to by God

Regarding the question of what living beings are, Kelsey stresses that basic personal identities that are shaped by the two types of love entail various senses of freedom. For Kelsey, "[e]nactment of love to God in prayer is inseparable from bodily action in the public world" (2009:830), and so it is within these actions that human righteousness is enacted and the reconciling grace of God occurs. In responding to God's relating in

loving God and loving fellow living beings, bodily agency[127] is fundamental in living beings' responses. Kelsey addresses a particular set of features of what living beings are when he gives his responses to the questions of whether living beings have free will and whether living beings are free. If one follows the assumptions of his account of existential hows formed by appropriate responses to God's reconciling *agape*, then it must be acknowledged that (1) "living human personal bodies have certain capacities to take charge of themselves in setting themselves into and orienting themselves toward their proximate contexts" (2009:834), but equally that (2) "they are capable of actually living in ways that are at cross-grain to the basic personal identity they have as reconciled estranged living human bodies in Christ" (2009:834). Kelsey himself, however, approaches the question of freedom from theological anthropology, and gives both the answers 'yes' and 'no' to the question of whether human living beings are free and have free will.

In responding 'yes', he holds that living beings are totally free either to be (or "own", in Kelsey's words) who they are in their basic personal identities, living in appropriate response to that identity, or to deny and ignore that very identity and choose for the distortion of who they most basically are. For Kelsey, then, freedom is also the possibility of ánd the capacity for having responded otherwise (which implies both desiring to respond in a particular manner, and actually enacting the desired response) in assuming that living personal bodies have "capacities for self-regulation and self-direction in their actions" (2009:836 – 837). Even more, freedom has to do with the flourishing (understood theocentrically) of living, in response to God relating to all that is not God and so, in flourishing, being free "in their trusting in and loyalty to God, their hoping in God, and in their love to God and fellow creatures" (2009:836).

In responding 'no' to the question of freedom, Kelsey holds that freedom is constrained to some extent, most notably through the extrinsic factors that the finitude and bodily limits of beings being alive impose upon them. Freedom is limited for distorted personal identities in particular, since, being in bondage to distortion, "they are incapable of freeing themselves from such identities" (2009:838). Also, the assumption

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[127] And, related to this, consciousness and subjectivity, "as features of an array of various kinds of powers of bodily agents" (2009:832).

that God is in some ways more internal to living beings than they can be to themselves (in constituting them through his threefold relating) also poses a question as to their being autonomously free. Thus, living beings "are anything but free even when they are wholehearted and not self-divided" (2009:838).

In relating his 'yes' and his 'no' in responding to the question of the freedom of human beings, Kelsey is of the opinion that the question "is too vague to be answerable" (2009:838) in the first place. Furthermore, the question whether human beings have free will too easily distinguishes between the will and the being of a living being, and so fails to account adequately for understanding human beings as "integral psychosomatic wholes" or "whole actual living human personal bodies" (2009:839). Freedom then, can only be the finite freedom of finite, living personal bodies, and cannot be or mean 'absolute' freedom ("unconditioned, unconstrained freedom" (2009:840)). Finite freedom varies in several senses, and one such sense is that of contexts, so that "different proximate contexts offer different degrees of the richness of freedom" (2009:841), providing "more or fewer concrete alternative means for alternative courses of action" (2009:841) for agents to enact their intentions through their varying capacities and with regard to their set of choices and opportunities for 'doing otherwise'[128]. Thus, Kelsey urges two points, namely (1) that living beings may make decisions within their particular, concrete contexts that concur with or contradict who they are through God's relating creatively to them, and (2) that freedom's 'could have done otherwise' is not essential to what living beings are through God's relating creatively, but is a property that involves various degrees and scopes of richness. The freedom of living human beings may appear to be limited and conditioned by their contexts, their relationships to fellow living beings and God's relating to them in particular ways. However, since God's threefold relating to all that is not God "is said to be more interior to them in their agency than they are capable of being themselves" and since "God's reality is incomprehensible" (2009:843), God's relating cannot be construed as a necessary contradiction to the freedom of created living beings. For human living beings, freedom can only be within this threefold relating of God ("being-related-to-by-God is internal to what he is" (2009:844)), keeping in mind that the concept 'relation' in 'related-to-by-God' cannot be

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[128] Which might entail acts of non-doing as alternatives to all that can be done.

conflated to 'related-to-by-fellow-living-beings'[129]. In light of Kelsey's theological anthropological proposals, tension arises between the points of human living beings having the capacity to respond to God's relating 'whole-heartedly' and 'non-self-dividedly' and the capacity for inappropriate responses to God's relating that distort personal identities and bound personal identities to their distortion. When distorted, the agency of living beings' personal identities is compromised, so that they become incapable of responding to fellow living beings "in wholehearted and non-self-divided love as neighbor" (2009:845). Moreover, even though bondage to distortion is not essential to what living beings are in their personal identities, they are unable to flourish, if "they flourish only in wholehearted and non-self-divided love to God and love as neighbor" (2009:845). Thus, for Kelsey it is important to affirm that Christian theological anthropology has interests in affirming living beings as free in several senses, but also holds that living beings are finitely free ("conditioned, dependent, and limited" (2009:846)).

Reconciled living beings are those reconciled and identified with by God, those called to be and become dying lives – and thereby called to respond to the God who relates to reconcile them to Godself and to fellow living beings within their multiple estrangements, by enacting practices of eccentric love that are expressive of passionate desire for God ('love to God') and neighbouring, living beings ('love as neighbour'), within their proximate, quotidian contexts. When these responses are distorted the existential hows of living beings are distorted (sins) but may also lead to the living death of distorted personal identities (sin) and structural oppression and violence (evil).

5.8   Living death: distortions of love

Distortions of love are because they comprise of inappropriate responses to God's relating to reconcile. For their great complexity and modes of manifestations, the sins of inappropriate response to God's relating to reconcile all that is not God through their multiple estrangements and distorted existential hows as enactments of these practices

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[129] "While fellow creatures are all on the same ontological level ('creatures') and related to one another within a common spatio-temporal framework, God and creatures are by definition not on a common ontological level and do not inherently share a common spatio-temporal framework within which they interrelate" (2009:844).

share one common and base feature – they are not enacted by another's death. Sin (in the singular), as "a violation of how human creatures are to be, as ones related to by God", and evil, as a "violation of living human personal bodies in community" (2009:847) distort the existential hows of personal identities and bind them to those distortions. Within this third proposal of how God relates to all that is not God, namely through reconciling, sins (in the plural) are distortions of love. For this third mode of God's relating to all that is not God, distortions of the appropriate response of love as passionate desire for communion with God and fellow living beings constitute sins in the plural.

Sins in the plural have to do with inappropriate responses to fellow living beings, and may be conscious or unconscious inappropriate responses, entailing the "formal and structural distortions of the enactments" of existential hows. Passionate desire, as appropriate response to God's incarnate *agape*, is distorted when love-to-God and love-as-neighbour are either separated or conflated. Kelsey identifies three broad types of structurally distorted versions of love's existential hows, or sins.

The first type of distortion manifests itself in "practices of prayer in the absence of love-as-neighbor" (2009:849), as responses shaped by God but not by the presence of God-with-us. Since Kelsey deems it impossible for a living being to respond appropriately to God and not to fellow living beings, either responding to God inappropriately (sin) or responding to fellow living beings (sins) are "radically self-isolating" (2009:850). This fails to take serious the claim that community has upon their living and being – indeed, their existential hows are structurally distorted because they contradict their inherent being-in-community. This type of distortion may take the form of "denial in praxis", which "does not adequately involve whole human personal bodies in enactments of practices of prayer" (2009:851), in that practices are prayer are separated and treated as independent from practices as love-as-neighbour. Such isolation distorts both the living personal bodies within their community and those of their neighbours (as their "companions in estrangement" (2009:851)) with an eye to their common status of 'being in Christ'. Practices of prayer in the absence of love-as-neighbour are sinful "because they are against the grain of one's actual situation before God", living by other living beings' lives and not by Another's life, namely, in Christ (2009:852). Indeed, estranged living beings in community live by both the life ánd the

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death of an Other, which, when distorted, "existentially set human personal bodies in contradiction to the actual structure of their ultimate and proximate and orient them to their fellow human creatures in distorted ways that cause them not to flourish" (2009:853).

The second type of distortion entails "enactments of practices of love-as-neighbor in the absence of enactments of practices of prayer" (2009:853), as responses shaped by the proximate contexts of living beings but not by prayer and God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. This distortion is dangerous, in that it divorces the estrangement of human living beings from God's incarnate *agape* in ways that distorts both those living beings that enact them and those living beings that are the intentional objects of these enactments. Practices of love-as-neighbour may be "impressively moral" (2009:854), but lack "a certain hermeneutics of suspicion" (2009:855) – indeed, "they lack adequate basis for critical distance from other human creatures and for self-critical distance from their own enactors" (2009:855). In this sense such practices take the estrangement of proximate contexts and the living beings within these contexts seriously (and may perhaps even include understanding these as undergoing reconciliation), but do not deal appropriately with the state of these as "having already been structurally reconciled before God" (2009:855). These inappropriate responses "lack adequate eccentricity" (2009:855), which provides critical distance for evaluating and understanding and responding to both the estrangement and reconciliation inherent in proximate context and the living beings that move and live in them. In sum, these distortions are dangerous in their arrogance and self-involvement – "they fail to be enacted with fellow human creatures" (2009:856) – and do not provide an adequate basis for self-criticism. Since they orient and set themselves within their proximate contexts as the possible saviours of both those contexts and the living beings that move and have their being within these contexts, these enactments are not only described as sins, but as "tragically self-destructive for finite creatures" (2009:857). Another form of the lack of critical distance inherent in such responses is "practices that assume that it is their fundamental goal… to stand in solidarity with others as they seek on their own to make those proximate contexts fundamentally right again" (2009:859). This is dangerous because it leaves living beings "vulnerable to the sentimentality of well-known practices that assume the overall aim of

loving one's neighbor as oneself is simply to be with neighbors who know best what they in their particular circumstances most deeply need to correct, repair or reform in their proximate contexts and how best to accomplish it" (2009:857 – 858). Such enactments have to do with their surrendering of their own agency in responding to God's reconciling *agape.* All in all, these enactments are sinful "because they are against the grain of one's actual situation before God" (2009:859). The personal identities of living beings involved in such distortions are distorted "because they live by others' lives" and not by "Another's life" (2009:860). For ecological theology in particular, then, it is important to affirm with Kelsey that living beings "only live in the first place by virtue of the inescapable interdependence with fellow creatures, especially interdependence with living creatures" which constitutes "the web of creaturely finitude in quotidian proximate contexts" (2009:860). Kelsey's theological anthropology enriches ecological theological thinking, however, by affirming that the existence of created living beings is eccentric not merely in this first sense, but also in the second sense of living by Another's, Jesus Christ's, *life*. Even more, for living beings that are structurally reconciled to God through their multiple estrangements and distortions, they live especially by the *death* of Another, and it is this third sense of eccentric existence that provides an adequate basis for critical distance and examination. Existential hows that do not account for the latter (namely, living by an Other's death) run the risk of existentially setting living beings' personal bodies "in contradiction to the actual structure of their ultimate and proximate" (2009:860) and fellow living beings, which prevents them from flourishing.

The third type of distortion is the conflating of prayer and love-as-neighbour, which is the assumption that the two loves, love-to-God and love-as-neighbour, "are two names for the same set of practices and their enactments" (2009:860). Such conflation is dangerous in that "both the determinate reality of practices of prayer and the determinate reality of God are dissolved" (2009:861)[130]. The overlap or convergence of enactments of prayer and love-as-neighbour lies in their address of and engagement with the concrete particularity of living beings, the intentional objects of practices of love-as-neighbour and the contexts of practices of prayer, which is expressions of love-to-God. In particular,

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[130] 'Determinate reality' is to be understood as defined by the concrete particularity of created living beings.

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Kelsey warns against vague understandings of prayer, which give "an honorific name for any human action for the well-being of other human creatures" (2009:861) and which fail to address the determinate enactments of responses to estrangement and reconciliation in God's incarnate *agape* adequately. Indeed, "[s]uch distorted ways of being oriented to their proximate contexts are dangerous to the well-being of their fellow human creatures because they tend to dissolve them into the background of acts of prayer" (2009:863).

Whereas sins (in the plural) are inappropriate responses to God's relating, expressive of distorted existential hows, sin (in the singular) is expressive of distorted personal identity. Sin in the singular has to do with inappropriate responses to God in prayer, which manifest in distorted existential hows and distorted personal identities. If "personal bodies have basic personal identities that are grounded eccentrically in that they are constituted by the triune God's peculiar and complex way of relating to them" (2009:864), then "distorted identities constitute bondage in some type of living death" (2000:864). Personal identities that live in self-contradiction, at cross-grain to who they are constituted to be in God's relating to reconcile them through their multiple estrangements, are both eccentrically, objectively grounded in God relating to them and in their own subjective involvement. Even more, God relating to all that is not God is "self-involving, fundamentally shaping who one is" (2009:865). Kelsey identifies at least three types of bondage that may manifest in distorted personal identities.

The first mode of distortion or bondage that Kelsey identifies is that of personal identities that are not formed and informed by either the structural reconciliation or the forgiveness that God's relating to reconcile brings about for all that is not God. Two claims are made, namely that "in the life, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection appearances of Jesus of Nazareth, God relates to estranged human creatures to reconcile them" as well as that "human creatures do indeed stand in great need of reconciliation to God" (2009:866). Indeed, asking the question of who living beings are (and, for Kelsey, in particular who human living beings are) begs the question of what makes estranged lives worth living. Two versions of this type of distortions would answer this question in the following manner.

The first version holds that political status, and thus power[131], makes a human life worth living[132]. These forms of distortion are problematic in that they perpetuate inherently endless cycles of violence[133], and because "deep defect in personal identities defined in this way is that they are structurally incapable of establishing a truce in the cycles of violent estrangement they generate" (2009:868). As such, such distorted, bounded personal identities are "not free to live in Christ by another's death rather than by their own powers to command or coerce respect" (2009:868).

The second version holds that moral status, and thus respect, makes a human life worth living[134]. These forms are also problematic, in that their understanding of a "universally valid, universally applicable, and exceptionless" (2009:869) moral social order that governs and regulates all of reality and all relationships again bounds personal identities to a past (by virtue of being unchangeable), perceived order. As such, such distorted, bounded personal identities are "not free to live in Christ as ones who live by another's death rather than by their own superior capacities to conform to the basic moral social order" (2009:871).

This first mode of distortion, expressed through these two versions, is expressed through especially three features. Firstly, since they sense that something is wrong in their identities and in the way that relationships and reality is constructed, personal identities question the worth of their lives. The understandings of sins and sin that govern such personal identities are "too vague, too simple or too superficial to grasp what is meant by the Christian concept of sin" (2009:872) since they do not adhere to the conceptual order that Kelsey proposes, namely that "distinctively Christian, theocentric concepts of sin are secondary to and dependent on distinctively Christian concepts of the triune God relating to reconcile" (2009:872). Secondly, since they conform or subject themselves to the perceived acknowledgment of their worth by others, "these identities

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[131] Kelsey includes here the possibilities of "economic, political, cultural, emotional or intellectual power" also (2009:868).

[132] "A personal identity is shown to be worth living by its display and exercise of the power to command or coerce respect from others" (2009:867).

[133] As processes of both violation and defection.

[134] "A life is shown to be worth living when its superior conformity to a moral social order that is basic to all reality commands respect from others" (2009:867).

subject themselves to bondage to the assessment of others" (2009:873). Indeed, personal identities defined in this way are deeply vulnerable to the contingent acknowledgment by others, and thus perpetually insecure as to their worth and value and role within their social order and context, so much so that "[t]he insecurity generates a living death of endless and vicious cycles in which they are bound" (2009:873). This is highly problematic, since these cycles "inherently cannot accomplish its goal of defining one's personal identity in a way that secures that it is worthy of respect and hence is an identity that is worth living despite its undeniable failures and distortions" (2009:874). Thirdly, since they are "driven by constant competitive comparison with other human creatures" (2009:874), personal identities play zero-sum games in which the worth of some identities are increased at the expense of the worth of others. The violent cycles of competition, envy and resentment diminish, denigrate and humiliate all parties involved (2009:874). These features highlight various constructions and understandings of personal identities that are highly problematic in that they do not refer to the worth that they've acquired through their structural reconciliation or forgiveness in Christ. In short, "[t]o live a personal identity bound in such vicious cycles is a living death" (2009:874).

The second mode of distortion or bondage that Kelsey identifies is that of personal identities "that are defined by acknowledgment of something like structural reconciliation, at least in the future, but without acknowledgment of any call to practice forgiveness now" (2009:875). Upon this understanding, future structural reconciliation and rectification of multiple estrangements are acknowledged, which makes lives worth living in the present through the active involvement in social, political and cultural movements that endeavour for the well-being of proximate contexts and the quotidian. Theories of history, whether formal or informal or conservative or liberal or revolutionary, are employed (or, in Kelsey's words, required) to assess which of these movements are for the well-being of the quotidian, in the belief that history is moving toward ultimate structural reconciliation. Kelsey is wary of such theories, especially when these theories claim to be wholly realistic about the employment and distribution of various types of power in the quotidian and proximate contexts. Since personal identities are inevitably involved in relationships where power is not equally distributed and, furthermore, define themselves by way of these unequal relationships, personal identities

"fall into bondage to vicious cycles of reciprocal diminishment accompanied by self-deluded denial of viciousness" (2009:877). These cycles are the function of (reciprocal but differentiated) dependency created by the unequal distribution of power in some[135] respects among those involved in relationships, and may distort personal identities both in terms of formal[136] and cognitive[137] structure. However, inequality in relationships and patterns of reciprocal but differentiated dependency are not regarded as vicious cycles in themselves, but become vicious when "they diminish some partners because other partners define their own personal identities in terms of their active engagements in the exercise of powers that are unequally distributed" (2009:877). Dominating partners' contempt for dependent partners and dependent partners' resentment for and retaliation against dominating partners sustain cycles of self-perpetuating, reciprocal diminishment. It is only through forgiveness[138] that unjust patterns of human action and relationships can truly be rectified. Forgiveness, in this sense, comes to mean "the act of interhuman reconciliation that is the necessary social context of acts seeking the rectification of unjust patterns of human action" (2009:878). Forgiveness is particularly difficult within this mode of distortion, since quotidian identities "that are lived at cross-grain to their basic personal identities" (2009:881) are self-deceived and thus self-contradictory, in hypocrisy[139] and blindness[140] to their own condition. Such identities are bound to the past (2009:882):

> These are distorted personal identities because they are defined as though they were not the identities of personal bodies whose ultimate context is their being in Christ and living by an Other's death, but rather the identities of personal bodies whose ultimate context is solely a history that moves toward a future structural reconciliation that does not obtain in the present.

The third mode of distortion or bondage that Kelsey identifies is that of personal identities that "are defined by reference to the value of what they do" (2009:882), in what

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[135] Kelsey is quick to add "but not in all" (2009:877).

[136] Which has to do with "vicious cycles of reciprocal diminishment and mutual exclusion" (2009:79).

[137] Which Kelsey describes as "self-deception that blinds them to the dynamic that drives that vicious cycle" (2009:879).

[138] But not approval nor acceptance nor even necessarily the forgetting of the injustice, oppression and violence of such diminishing relationships.

[139] Which Kelsey describes as "blinding self-deception" (2009:880).

[140] Which Kelsey describes as "the cognitive dimension of bondage to living death" (2009:881).

is regarded as fulfillment of 'moral duties'. Interestingly, Kelsey sees the drive for this distortion not in outward or public conformity or the avoidance of shame, but rather in an "intense inwardness": "a desire to avoid discovering themselves inwardly guilty of failure to do their duty" (2009:883). Again there are several variations on the distortion described. Firstly, where duties are understood as social conventions, acceptable patterns of action are determined by each person's own sense of responsibility "to express his or her personal identity by deciding, with imagination, insight and critical reflection, which unique, concrete action will best fulfill one's duty in the concrete particularities of each novel, historical situation" (2009:883). A second variant (described by Kelsey as "humanist" (2009:883)) has to do with finding worth in doing one's duty, "as defined by critical reflection on human nature broadly understood, and the dynamics of human social life" (2009:883). A third form is theocentric, in that it connects duty with the will of God, as revealed and expressed in God's law: "one's identity will be worth living, despite its manifest imperfections and distortions, if one does one's duty as defined by God" (2009:884). For Kelsey last-mentioned is particularly problematic, since, for the apostle Paul and the Torah, it is the fact that human living beings are the covenant partners of God (individually and communally) that determines their personal identities, and not the duty of fulfilling God's law. The problematic behind all of these versions of the distortion which connects the fulfillment of duty (of whatever kind) so intimately with the ground of personal identity is that it subscribes to a never-ending project, one which requires full realisation to be successful – but which, "[i]f never ended… cannot achieve its goal" (2009:886), and thus "is impossible to complete" (2009:888). Indeed (2009:886),

> [n]ot only do quotidian personal identities that are defined in this way have a formal structure that binds them in the living death of a project of self-justification that cannot be realised, they also have the cognitive structure of a self-deception that blinds them to the dynamic that binds them to that project.

Thus, not only are distorted personal identities blind to their own distortion, but they are also wholly unable and incapable to reverse or correct their distortion.

In conclusion, "the claim that human creatures stand in need of reconciliation is dependent on and derivative from the more basic claim that the triune God relates to human creatures to reconcile them in the person of Jesus of Nazareth" (200:882). Despite their manifold unworthiness and tendency to want to connect their worthiness with the

achievement of status or power, or the fulfillment of duty, or other versions of the distortion of personal identities, personal identities remain "the identities of personal bodies whose ultimate context is a God whose judgment that their identities are worth the time, space, and resources they consume in living" (2009:887 – 888) is core. Therefore, "any bondage in living death does obscure that reflection so that personal bodies become unable to respond to one another with the eccentric and passionate joy of love-as-neighbour" (2009:889).

Thus, for their great complexity and modes of manifestation, sins of inappropriate response to God's relating to reconcile and distorted existential hows as enactments of these practices share one common and base feature – they are not enacted by another's death. Perhaps it is enough to admit that the realities of distorted responses of practices of prayer in the absence of love-as-neighbour, of practices of love-as-neighbour in the absence of prayer, conflating of practices of prayer (or love to God) and love-as-neighbour, self-assessments by way of political power or moral status or various duties, and so forth, are opposites to the passionate desire that God's relating to reconcile all that is not God calls for. For Kelsey, love is the appropriate response to God, and therein basic personal identities that respond in faithful trust in God and faithful loyalty to God's creative project and blessing become the dying lives that this mode of relating calls for.

5.9   God's active relating to reconcile as basis for ecological theology?

In sum, how would ecological theological thinking appropriate Kelsey's substantial contributions made to the proposal that God relates to reconcile all that is not God through their multiple estrangements? It is my contention that this mode of relating is appropriated with the least ease of all three proposals made in Kelsey's project. Again, the concern for 'life' and 'living beings' in this study will be reflected here, as is particularly evident in the discussion of the triune life of true love that is present within the quotidian to effect life-giving exchange within cycles of violence and oppression. Regarding the question of who we are to be as reconciled life, God's threefold relating to all that is not God, and in this particular case relating to reconcile all that is not God through their multiple estrangements, forms the basis of the response that Kelsey gives.

Who is reconciled life? It is clear from Kelsey's detailed discussion on what it means that God relates to all that is not God to reconcile that the question that he attempts to answer in this section, namely "Who am I and who are we?", seeks to focus on the personal identities of living beings as those estranged but reconciled 'in Christ'. Reconciliation 'in Christ' is reconciliation through the incarnation of God within proximate contexts that are caught up in violent cycles of oppression, (self-)estrangement and (self-)destruction. Reconciliation defines the identities of all living beings and all of life that is drawn into the triune life of love by way of (1) the self-donation or self-giving (*kenosis*) of God within such death-dealing contexts and (2) process of exchange, wherein God incarnate enters into the cyclical, reciprocal violence of proximate, quotidian contexts and takes the effects of these upon Godself. All living beings and all of life are liberated and transformed within the eternal, processes of perichoretic giving and receiving relationships within the triune God's own life, within processes of exchange. Again, this section emphasises Kelsey's own use of 'life' within his project, and particularly points to God's own life of love that liberates and transforms all of life through the incarnation of God within violent and oppressive contexts. The question as to who reconciled life is does not say something of the constitution of life, as in chapter 3, or of the drawing of life into the life of God, as in chapter 4, but speaks to restitution and restoration of life within God's giving of Godself in love to take the effects of living beings' multiple estrangements upon Godself. God reconciles life. God reconciles life through its multiple estrangements and distortions, including those inflicted on itself by itself; moreover, God reconciles life through its estrangements by drawing it into the perichoretic giving and receiving of and in the triune life of love. For an ecological theological project, the self-donation of Godself to and within the violent estrangements and distortions of proximate, quotidian contexts and the resultant exchange through the incarnation of the triune God that brings all living beings and all of life into the life-giving giving and receiving relationships of perichoretic love within the Trinity is core to an understanding of reconciled life.

God's reconciling of living beings with their very lives, the core or source of what constitutes and maintains and fulfills them – which is the triune life of love – is marked and revealed in Jesus' offering of himself in love, of the self-giving of his life in love so

that living beings that are caught up in the violent cycles of distortion, death and destruction may be liberated and transformed into lives that reflect the loving receiving and giving relationships of the triune God within Godself. Reconcilation, like eschatological consummation, is therefore first and foremost about participating in the divine life of the triune God. The pattern of exchange, wherein God becomes living being within an ambiguous proximate context to take the consequences of the violent cycles of distortion and estrangement upon Godself, is freely enacted and therefore freely given – like the creative blessing of chapter 3 and the eschatological blessing of chapter 4. Indeed, the gift of love, in this mode of relating, is the gift of life through the cross, since Jesus' death on the cross brings or gives life to all estranged and distorted living beings and contexts. Indeed, living beings are freed from living death to be the dying lives that they were meant to be through God's threefold relating, and therefore have the meaning and value and worth and reality of all of life and all living beings that lie in God's own triune life of love, revealed in and through the life of Jesus, God incarnate. For Kelsey (2009:825),

> God's relating to reconcile simply is the person of Jesus as one among us" so that "the Incarnation is at once an aspect of humankind's ultimate context, the triune God relating to reconcile, and a defining aspect of humankind's proximate contexts.

The action of God's reconciliation is normed by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, who is fully finite and concretely particular. Therefore reconciliation is liberation and transformation of living beings within particular times and places, within their particular contexts. Jesus's story, as uniquely God-related, reveals the story of all living beings that are related to by God. In God's relating to reconcile, the presence of Jesus in proximate contexts pulls the ultimate context of all living beings related to in this manner – namely, as those who are reconciled through the love of God to God and fellow living beings – into the quotidian and restores the quotidian and the living beings therein to their true lives. Jesus is therefore the presence of true life, the triune God, within the quotidian, as 'One among us'. Indeed, Kelsey would go so far as to refer to the inbreaking of God's eschatological reign into the quotidian lives of living beings and their contexts as defined by the dynamic of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Jesus, incarnate God, transforms all that is not God in two ways: he takes upon himself the living death of the estrangements and distortions of living beings (wherein he

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exchanges the living death of estranged living beings for the dying life of reconciled living beings) and he draws living beings into his own, triune life. Living beings flourish when they are 'in Christ', which, for Kelsey, has to do with the condition of living beings, and is therefore a relationship that entails public, observable, communal practices. The presence of Christ *within* estranged and distorted proximate contexts is the solidarity of God with the suffering of living beings – it is within this that love lies. God's *agape* is the ultimate context of all living beings and all reconciled life, which points to God's desire for communion and community with all that is not God.

The appropriate response to God's love is love itself, specifically love to God (worship of God through practices of prayer) and love as neighbour (love to fellow living beings). Practices of love are, for Kelsey, genuinely free and fully communal and, like practices of faith (chapter 3) and practices of hope (chapter 4), engages living beings in their full possibilities, powers, abilities and capacities. Eccentric love is passionate desire for life-giving relationship with God and fellow living beings that seeks to witness to God's glory in all of life. Thus, whereas created life expresses the glory of God, and eschatologically consummated life participates in the glory of God, reconciled life witnesses to the glory of God. Again, God's own life forms the context for the appropriate response of living beings to God, and therefore the deep passion of desire has to do with love to God (enacted through practices of prayer) and love as neighbour.

The phenomenon of exchange in particular, as Kelsey's description of the ultimate context of God relating to reconcile all that is not God through their multiple estrangements, has much to offer an ecological theology by way of constructing a picture of the ultimate context of all that God relates to. Jesus not only reveals the triune God through his life, death and resurrection, but through the incarnation also reconciles all living beings, all of life, to God and to one another. The distortions of fixing the worth and value and reality of living beings to themselves or within their proximate, quotidian contexts through such means as political power or moral status leads to the estrangement and isolation of living beings. Jesus exchanges the living death of living beings for the dying life that they are meant for by way of liberating them from the cycles of violence and distortion that they are caught up in and takes upon himself the consequences – which is living death – of these reciprocal, self-replicating cycles. Firstly, all living

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beings are caught up in these violent cycles of dependency, created by the unequal distribution of power, which diminishes and devalues and ultimately distorts and destroys the worth and value of all living beings – including the earth and her ecology. This means that all living beings stand in need of reconciliation, which is effected through God's incarnation and forgiveness of living beings. As such, violent cycles of devaluation and dependency is broken and unjust patterns of distributions of power rewritten. Secondly, what makes life worth living for all living beings and all of life is therefore no longer tied to the fulfillment of certain functions or duties (or even vocations), but lies solely in the worth and value that living beings find in living by the life and death of Another, of God incarnate, of Jesus the Son. This provides living beings with the freedom to both orientate and disorientate (or distort) themselves within God's self-giving and perichoretic life of love. This entails the ultimate freedom of being eternally freed and liberated and transformed by the *agape* of God. Freedom of living beings, for Kelsey, entails both God's 'yes' (to have the choice to stay true to their basic personal identities as those reconciled, liberated and transformed) and God's 'no' (as those who are nonetheless constrained in their finititude and particularity for certain choices) – indeed, as the possibility of having to been able to do otherwise.

God's relating to reconcile has to do with love, which is the very life of the triune God, and therefore with the appropriate response of eccentric love. The perichoretic, mutually interpenetrating, giving and receiving relationships within the trinitarian God's life comes to define the love to God and love as neighbour that living beings are called to practice, whereby it becomes clear that each of these enactments of love are fundamental conditions of the other. Love constitutes living beings as fully finite and fully free in their very being, in that the possibility of the flourishing of living beings governs the freedom that they have to orientate or disorientate and distort themselves in the moment of God incarnate's exchange with them. Herein lies, too, the possibilities for witnessing to the glory of God in living beings and all of life, not only through reflecting (or having been given) the glory of God in being creatively blessed (chapter 3) or participating in the glory of God in being eschatologically blessed (chapter 4), but also in loving God and loving fellow living beings as God loves all that is not God.

5.10   Conclusion

In the process of inquiring whether Kelsey's theological anthropology could serve as basis for ecological theology, the core question that structured inquiry into this third proposal would be who the reconciled living beings are that God forms or effects through the pattern of exchange and self-donation within the incarnation makes living beings to be in their very identities, namely "Who is reconciled life?" It was established that *all* that is not God is reconciled to and within the loving life of the triune God, which structures the way in which reconciled life is understood, particularly with regards to their proximate (quotidian) and ultimate contexts, their flourishing by another's death, their being free and loving (and loved) living beings, and the living death of distortions of love.

In Kelsey's project, living by another's death defines living beings and their contexts as those estranged from and reconciled by the triune God through a pattern of exchange and kenotic self-giving of Godself. The lives of living beings and their proximate, quotidian contexts are marked by their resistance to being-related-to-by-God, which not only estranges them from the triune God and fellow living beings, but also deeply distorts and, ultimately, destroys them in their very beings. God turns toward estranged living beings within their ambiguous contexts (cf. chapter 4) and meets them where they are, within their estrangement and distortion, to reconcile them to Godself and to one another. God incarnate, in Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection, liberates and transforms all living beings and all of life by offering Godself in love. Being 'in Christ' defines living beings as those to whom Jesus offers himself up in love, through the giving up of his life so that they may truly live (self-donation or self-giving) as well as through drawing living beings into the source of their very lives, the triune God's own perichoretic life of love, of giving and receiving love.

The ultimate context of reconciliation through Jesus therefore has to do with the life and death of Jesus Christ, the incarnate God who is also the Son of God. The pattern of power that is transformed into a pattern of powerlessness in Jesus' life and death is reversed through the process of reconciliatory exchange: the pattern of powerlessness and unequal distributions of power within the lives (and deaths) of living beings is transformed into the pattern of power exactly through this very same process of

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reconciliatory exchange. Therefore the quotidian and proximate contexts of living beings and all of life related to in this mode of relating are characterised by God's *agape*, which is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. In scriptural narratives (particularly in the Gospel of John), through which the personal identity of Jesus[141] is portrayed, Jesus is depicted as fully finite and concretely particular. What makes the process of exchange possible and credible lies therein, moreover, that Jesus is uniquely God-related. Jesus' own life is characterised by plotlines that drive toward conflicts – private, public and cosmic – that ultimately come to describe the way in which Jesus, in his powerlessness, saves others in power. Jesus, the presence of the source of true life in the quotidian, initiates, sustains and fulfills the process of exchange, whereby the triune life of true love and grace enters into vicious cycles of power imbalances and inequalities[142] to redeem and restore all living beings and all of life. Indeed, the endless cycle of the triune God's perichoretic giving and receiving of life and love and grace breaks into the endless cycles of violence and violation of the quotidian and liberates, transforms living beings from living death to dying lives. The exchange that Jesus administers on behalf of all that is not God is that of the distortions and alienation of living death for the flourishing, the blossoming and the thriving, of dying life. Therefore Jesus takes living death, its full consequences and effects, upon himself and draws living beings into his own triune life in exchange.

The incarnation of God and consequent process of exchange entail the structural reconciliation and forgiveness and redemption and restoration of all of life to God and to itself (or one another), which is the mystery of dying life and the vocation of witnessing to the glory of the triune God. In the mystery of Jesus' personal identity the trajectories of Jesus' and God's engagement with living beings and all of life converges, which is nowhere more visible than in the flourishing of living beings 'in Christ'. The incarnation of God in Jesus points both to the solidarity of the triune God with the suffering of living beings ánd to God's perichoretic love and passionate desire for communion and community with living beings. Therefore love to God and love as neighbour are

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[141] And therefore God, if Jesus is God incarnate and reveals the triune God through his life and death and resurrection.

[142] Which Kelsey describes as 'violence', in the sense of the 'violation of the integrity of living beings'.

appropriate responses to God's relating in this manner. Love, being public and communal by virtue of being enacted in finite but full and genuine freedom, is a gift of God that engages living beings in their full possibilities, powers, abilities, capacities and particularities. Love, being an attitude of passionate desire for life-giving relationship with God and fellow, neighbouring living beings (and all of life) is therefore the opposite to desire for distortion and estrangement within death-dealing cycles of violence and oppression. The patterns of public conduct of such responses, as determined by God's incarnation in Jesus, are therefore characterised as being 'in Christ' and 'in love'.

Love as attitude is sustained energy that orders and shapes the lives of living beings around the object(s) of its passion, of which one expression is prayer. The incarnation, as both the ultimate ánd the proximate context of all prayer, reflects both God's immanence ánd transcendence in reconciliation. Prayer, as appropriate expression of love to God and love as neighbour, is both individual and communal, is performative, and is self-involving – it focuses single-mindedly on God in its worship of God, acknowledges passions and asks for desires of God, and entails learning language appropriate to the contemplation of God.[143] God's identification with estranged and distorted living beings within their estrangement makes for the reconciling participation in their estrangements, by being *with* and *for* living beings amidst their suffering. As God is *with* and *for* living beings in their estrangement and suffering, so too appropriate responses of love as neighbour would enact practices that identify *with* fellow living beings in their suffering, meeting them where they are, and that are actively and passionate *for* fellow living beings, for their well-being and their flourishing as dying lives within their contexts. Distorted existential hows, as expressions of inappropriate responses to God's relating to reconcile, are practices not enacted by another's death and are therefore distortions of 'eccentric love'. Such distortions involve being in bondage to self-assessment and assessment by others by way of political status or power or moral status or respect, wherein the very worth of lives lived may be called into question, and wherein living beings are delivered to distortions that is either forever attempting to

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[143] Although Kelsey is careful to maintain here that prayer may be beyond words, beyond language, in which case it may be enacted by practices of sighing – which is still regarded as public and communal, like all prayers.

prove own worth of life[144] or perpetually insecure. Such distortions are the function of dependency created by unequal distributions of power, and therefore it is only through forgiveness that unjust patterns of action can be rectified. Existential hows that entail only love to God or only love as neighbour – divorced from the other – or even views these as in competition with each other are distorted by virtue of their separation of appropriate response to God from appropriate response to fellow living beings. Indeed, worship of God or prayer is the appropriate context in which both love to God and love as neighbour is situated, as those practices that witness to the grace of God's reconciliation of living beings and all of life as well as the glory of God in creating, eschatological consummation and reconciliation.

For Kelsey, this is what is meant by positing 'eccentric existence' or 'eccentric life' as 'living by another's death'. The value, worth, meaning, reality of living beings, of the earth and her ecology, lies not in their own capacities or powers to constitute themselves, but in God's continuous and faithful liberation and transformation of all living beings and all of life through the incarnation of Godself in Jesus Christ – indeed, the gift of life is given by another's death on the cross. The value, worth and reality of the earth and her ecology lies not in herself, but outside of herself, in the threefold relating of the triune God to all that is not God. Placing the emphasis on the eccentricity of all living beings and all of reconciled life deals appropriately with the mystery of living beings that are related to by a mysterious God and that are caught up in the mystery of God's purposes of reconciliation. In this mode of relating God relates to restore and redeem the earth and her ecology in reconciliation, liberation and transformation, which is not only distinct and concretely particular in its own right, but also takes seriously the distinct and concretely particular, fully actual existence (and, especially, the particular contexts characterised by cycles of violence and estrangements) of living beings and all of life. Life and death, dying life and living death, characterise 'living by another's death' within God's relating to reconcile, and calls for appropriate responses of eccentric love from all that God relates to.

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[144] Through the fulfillment of perceived obligatory duties toward society, humanitarian causes, or even God.

<div align="center">**Chapter 6**</div>

The mystery and glory of God's relating

6.1   Introduction

David Kelsey has developed a theological framework for interpreting or understanding living beings – more specifically, human beings – theologically within God's relating to all that is not God, namely God relating to create living beings and all of life (chapter 3), God relating to draw all of life into eschatological consummation (chapter 4), and God relating to reconcile all living beings and all of life through their multiple estrangements to Godself (chapter 5). For Kelsey, the root question of his theological anthropological project is "What does the specifically Christian conviction that God actively relates to us imply about what and who we are and how we are to be?" (2009:605). Two concretely Christian beliefs intersect to structure the proposed answer to this question, namely the triune understanding of God and the three distinct ways in which God actively relates to all that is not God. In the Coda of Kelsey's project, the core question thus becomes: "How do the three parts work together as a whole to render their theocentric picture of human eccentric existence?" (2009:897). Similarly, chapter 6 of this thesis would need to be structured by the question: How do the three proposals of this thesis work together as a whole to render their theocentric picture of the eccentric existence of life and living beings?

Kelsey's three proposals all assume that being related to by God in being created, eschatologically consummated and reconciled is essential to what living beings, as all that are not God, are. Indeed, living beings are constituted in their very being by this threefold, life-giving dynamic. Living beings, living creatures, are constituted therefore ex-centrically, outside of themselves – indeed, "[b]eing related to by God does not threaten the integrity of creatures; it constitutes them as creatures" (2009:828). Since living beings are constituted eccentrically, and thus exist eccentrically, their responses to God relating to them in various ways must necessarily also be eccentric responses, if these responses, to be appropriate, are made "'in the power of the Spirit' that is other than they" (2009:829). For Kelsey, "God is on both sides of the relation: relating to human creatures as a reality radically other than they, and relating somehow interiorily present

within them" (2009:829). If, furthermore, one follows Kelsey in constituting the concrete particularity and integrity of living beings in the self-distinction of the Son from the Father, then the eccentric response of the Son to the Father itself becomes an indicator of how the response of living beings to God is to be appropriately eccentric, if Jesus' own response "has its center outside Jesus himself, in the power of the eschatological Spirit" (2009:829).

This chapter follows on the proposals of chapters 3, 4 and 5 and serves as a form of conclusion to the detailed discussion of Kelsey's project in this thesis, much like chapter 2 serves as a form of introduction to the detailed discussion of Kelsey's project in this thesis. However, a critical discussion of David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* preludes a final summary, as well as discussions of Kelsey's "triple helix" metaphor, use of the *imago Dei*, and the mysteries of life and living. A deliberation on the notions of 'eccentric earth' and 'eccentric ecology' follows on the final summary, whereafter this chapter is concluded.

6.2   God relating as "triple helix"

In previous chapters Kelsey's three proposals have been analysed and appropriated within an ecological theology that seeks to construct life and living beings as caught up in eccentric existence. This first challenge to a thesis such as this has been encountered in chapters 3, 4 and 5, but a second challenge remains to be addressed if it is to be shown that Kelsey's threefold, theological anthropological project can indeed serve as basis for ecological theology. This challenge has to do with the relationship of the various parts of his project to one another. The three parts of Kelsey's project are "theologically necessary, logically different from each other, irreducible to one another, and yet inseparable from each other" (2009:893). Nonetheless, Kelsey himself finds it difficult to understand or 'take' them together (in their "wholeness-in-complexity" (2009:893)), and would argue for understanding them through the metaphor of a triple helix. This section deals with Kelsey's 'triple helix' metaphor and how it is helpful not only in understanding the relation of the various proposals to one another, but also in understanding the proposals with greater coherency in order to gain a greater picture of living beings, the earth and her ecology within Kelsey's theological framework. To do

this it will be necessary to trace Kelsey's argument for understanding 'human being' as *imago Dei* through the triple helix metaphor.

Kelsey argues that traditional understandings of human living beings have (conceptually) centered around human beings as *imago Dei*. In his project he deliberately chooses not to initiate understandings of human beings with this, and thereby avoids all manner of intricate difficulties from the beginning of his project[145]. However, what the doctrine of the *imago Dei* dóés provide is an anchoring point for all thinking on human beings, in that "[t]he array of different types of claims about human being that are traditionally made in Christian theological anthropology have been held together by showing how they all tie into a central claim derived from Genesis 1:26a[146]… the *imago Dei* – was traditionally understood to be some essential structural feature of human beings that constitutes them as distinctively human and distinguishes them from animals who do not exhibit God's image" (Kelsey, 2009:895). Kelsey shows how this thinking has dominated well into the twentieth century, by which *imago Dei* "serves as principle of continuity that underlies the series of theologically significant changes that, according to traditional Christian anthropology, human being undergoes" (2009:896). He also shows how "contrasting exegeses of Genesis 1:26 – 28… largely cancel out one another" (2009:922 – 936), and thus deliberately chooses not to make the doctrine of the *imago Dei* the centre and anchor of his project. In choosing not to make the doctrine of the *imago Dei* the conceptual centre of his project[147], Kelsey thus also opens his project up to

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[145] One main problematic would especially be the interweaving of two narrative logics if Genesis 1:26 – 28 is employed, wherein God's relating to create and God's relating to reconcile is woven into a single narrative of God's relating to human and other living beings. See chapter 2 for more on the problematic and importance for Kelsey on keeping narrative logics coherently separate, especially with the aims of projects in secondary theology in view. Indeed, Kelsey sees in Genesis (especially Genesis 1 – 11) a "mixed genre narrative", so much so that "[t]he narrative logic of canonical redemption narratives bends he narrative logic of creation narratives so that, for example, they no longer address questions about the goal of God's creative relating, its implications for what creatures are, much less how God creates them" (2009:934). Again, it is mainly with this reason in mind that Kelsey turns to wisdom literature's creation narratives, which he regards as 'unbent' in this way, to find an own narrative logic to God's relating to create all that is not God (2009:934 – 935).

[146] Interestingly, Kelsey sees in Genesis 1:26 – 28 humankind's creation to be *like* God, "but *as* creatures, hence male and female… and… *unlike* God" (2009:930; original italics). For Kelsey, then, humankind is both like and unlike God – and, by implication, also then both unlike and like fellow created living beings.

[147] Indeed, "as the notable absence of the phrase *imago Dei* thus far in this theological anthropology testifies, that way of using the *imago* to integrate theological anthropological claims into a systematic whole is not available to his project" (2009:896). Instead, then, Kelsey attempts to "outline an alternative

difficulties and challenges that could be avoided when understanding human living beings as images of God. Furthermore, Kelsey himself admits to arguing "against the tradition" (2009:897) – in particular, he is skeptical of the assumption that "anthropological claims[148] made in Christian practices of secondary theology are warranted by a single canonical narrative that has a single plot or narrative logic" (2009:897). Kelsey does however opt for a christological understanding of the *imago Dei* to hold the three parts of the project together – the difference between understandings of human beings as image of God versus human beings as images of the image of God lies in the contrast between understanding 'image of God' as "general property as human beings as God's creatures" and the understanding of 'image of God' as "the concrete person of Jesus Christ in his own unsubstitutable personal identity" (2009:896 – 897).

By choosing not to allow the notion of the image of God to determine the agenda or even the core to his project, Kelsey's methodology in itself already opens itself up to being even more accessible to ecological theology, in that it does not posit a false dichotomy or distinction between human (as image of God) and nonhuman (as non-image-of-God)[149] or, even more, propose uncritical (albeit traditional) usage of 'image of God' in constructing a theological anthropological. Indeed, Kelsey admits to it that his project seeks to describe and define human being "without reference to the classical theological anthropological trope, 'Human beings bear the *imago Dei*'" (2009:1008). Indeed, the only way in which Kelsey is willing to engage with the *imago Dei* is, firstly, christologically, through understanding Jesus Christ (and not human beings in a direct way[150]) being the image of God; secondly, Kelsey is only willing to engage with the doctrine of the image of God *outside* of the textual scope of Genesis 1:26 – 28, for reasons stated above. These moves not only clarify Kelsey's own understanding of the

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way in which the theme of the *imago Dei* can serve to exhibit how the three parts of this anthropology work together as a whole to render a single theocentric picture of human eccentric existence" (2009:896).

[148] But here one could probably argue theological claims, in a broader sense, as well.

[149] There are moves in current scholarship to explore the earth and her ecology as image of God. Hwang (2010:185), for instance, argues that "[a]ccording to Calvin, not only human, but also nature, reflects the image of God out of which the glory of God is shining forth… human and nature are altogether the sacred locus where God's image is shining forth".

[150] To illustrate, see Kelsey's argument that "human beings, not bearing the image of God themselves, nonetheless image the image of God" (2009:1009).

imago Dei in his project, and therefore his decision to discuss it only in the Coda of his project, but may also hold important insights for constructing a basis for ecological theology from this project. Kelsey's own deliberate move away from centering understanding human being within his first proposal (or, more specifically, the doctrine of creation) is echoed in this thesis' concern to move away from centering or isolating understanding of living beings or life within his first proposal (again, more specifically, the doctrine of creation). This in itself already provides ample reasoning for the decision to inquire into the broader spread of Christian theology's possible contribution to constructing a basis for ecological theology, but what it would also seek to underline would be a particular understanding of God's relating to create – namely, to challenge the grounding and constitution of doctrines of creation merely and only within Kelsey's first proposal, God's relating to create all that is not God.

If human beings are the image of the image of God (or the image of Christ), then Kelsey's question of "What human beings are as eccentric existence" (2009:1009) ought to be responded to with regards to the three ways in which human living beings are constituted as the image of the image of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Firstly, "human beings image the image of God simply by living on borrowed breath – that is, simply by being human creatures in virtue of God relating to them creatively" (2009:1010). Indeed, by God's relating to him creatively "Jesus lives on borrowed breath" (2009:1012), in radical dependence on God and as concretely particular "body-in-community" (2009:1012). Kelsey sees God's relating to the human, bodily, living being Jesus as freely and as intimately as to any other living being ("to any other creature", in Kelsey's words (2009:1014)), "on the same ontological level as al other creatures" (2009:1014). Furthermore, "Jesus as an actual living human personal body is mysterious both epistemologically and ontologically" (2009:1015), by which Kelsey means to point to the impossibility of knowing Jesus in his humanity exhaustively and to the inexplicability of Jesus' particular concrete actuality. Thus it is that "in and as his creaturely human body that Jesus Christ is, in one way, the *imago Dei*" (2009:1010), so that, furthermore, the figure of Jesus becomes paradigmatic in understanding what it means to be human living being "related-to by God and capable of relating back to God" (2009:1011).

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Also, "human beings image the image of God imply… living on borrowed time" (2009:1016), a claim which relies on the narrative logic of stories telling of God's relating to eschatologically consummate, "to inaugurate, through the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, the fulfillment of God's long-standing promise to draw all that is not God to eschatological consummation in God's eschatological reign" (2009:1016). Living on borrowed time, in the time of the *eschaton* of God's reign and final judgment, has to do with being elected for eschatological consummation– indeed, for living beings "election is their destiny" (2009:1047). In this way Jesus, again, is paradigmatic for all living beings related to by God in this way – however, in an additional sense than God relating to create. Since "[i]n his resurrected human body, Jesus simply is the concrete beginning of eschatological new creation's space and time" (2009:1016), Jesus, "[i]n his resurrected human body,… is the paradigmatic human being living on time borrowed from the eschatological reign of God that is concretely inaugurated, fully actualized for Jesus, but not yet fully actualized for others, by Jesus' resurrection by God" (2009:1016 – 1017). For Kelsey the relationship between creation and new creation, between fully actualised and fully inaugurated living bodies, is described as "discontinuity within continuity" (2009:1017). The double gift of creative blessing and eschatological blessing is grace of God, "gift upon gift" (2009:1017), which is grounded in the faithfulness and "trustworthy self-consistency of the one self-same God who relates in both ways" (2009:1017), even where the discontinuity of the two blessings lie in the different narrative logics that span each. Ultimately, Kelsey comes to describe this discontinuity in bodily terms, namely as "two different modes of bodiliness: quotidian and glorified" (2009:1017). Kelsey is careful to emphasise that in accounts of Jesus' own resurrected, eschatologically glorified body, the claim that these can also be described as 'perfect' or 'complete' is nowhere warranted (2009:1018 – 1019). To Kelsey it is important that the two descriptions not be used as synonyms – especially regarding the theological understanding or status of how 'imperfections' or 'disabilities' are to be understood. Kelsey illustrates (2009:1019):

> If… we entirely set aside the notion of an absolutely perfect (that is, complete) human body as what God relates to creatively, then there would seem to be no grounds for rejecting the proposal that eschatologically glorified bodies, spiritual bodies in Paul's sense, continue in their concrete particularity to exhibit im-perfections and dis-abilities that were properties constitutive of their concrete particularities before death.

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Thus, very importantly, "[t]he concept 'living body' employed in theological anthropology needs to cover both quotidian bodies and glorified bodies, and do so in regard both to Jesus' paradigmatic bodied humanity and to all other human beings' bodies humanity" (2009:1019).

In a third sense, "human beings image the image of God insofar as, reconciled to God, they are living by another's death" (2009:1023), which involve the various ways in which Jesus, "living and acting in the power of the Spirit" (2009:1024), is narrated to be free. These are described by Kelsey as 'capacities' – which involve "freedom of choice" (2009:1024), the capability of transcendence (2009:1024), the possibility of non-divided and wholehearted action for others (2009:1025), and the capability of responding inappropriately to God's threefold relating, thereby "shaping his quotidian personal identity in ways that are at cross-grain to his basic personal identity" (2009:1025) – essential to the particular pattern of exchange through which Jesus effects humankind's reconciliation to God (2009:1025). This is important because "human beings are free only as eccentric beings – that is, as related to in a threefold way by the triune God" (2009:1025). Living beings are not only constituted by God's threefold relating, but insofar as God's threefold relating also does not stand in competition with the freedom of living beings' "agentic exercise of their capacities and powers" (2009:1025). In keeping these three understandings of Jesus of the image of God in mind, it becomes clear that "[i]n his created, resurrected, and reconciling living body, Jesus is paradigmatic of what all actual living human personal bodies are" (2009:1026), namely "a finite living mystery that images the triune living mystery" (2009:1026).

It follows that the various ways in which God relates to living beings entails existential hows that are determined by appropriate or inappropriate responses to God's particular mode of relating, so that, in responding to Kelsey's question as to "'How' human beings are to be as eccentric existence" (2009:1026), three sets of appropriate responses to God's three ways of relating ought to be kept in mind. Firstly, Jesus flourishes as image of God, living on borrowed breath, by responding appropriately to God's creative relating to him. Kelsey calls this response 'faith', which he understands as "a combination of trust in God's hospitable generosity in relating creatively to all that is not God, and loyalty to God's creative project, which is expressed in a basic attitude of

reverent and awed doxological gratitude for both his proximate and ultimate contexts" (2009:1027). As taken up in previous chapters, the concrete practices entailed by the particular attitudes that Kelsey identifies as appropriate may involve a great number and variety, which need not be exhaustively expressed either in Kelsey's project or in this thesis. Even the existential hows enacted by Jesus are, for Kelsey, "exemplary but not exhaustive" (2009:1028).

Secondly, then, Jesus flourishes as image of God, living on borrowed time, by responding appropriately to God's relating "to inaugurate, but not yet to fully actualize, God's promised eschatological consummation" (2009:1028) in his resurrected humanity. Kelsey calls this response 'hope', which he understands as "joyous hopefulness" (2009:1029), "acts of thanksgiving" (2009:1029), that describe practices that manifest in "an attitude of celebratory joy in response to God's actual inauguration… of the fulfillment of God's promise of eschatological consummation" (2009:1029) and in "being response to the future-oriented liberating triune *missio Dei* within… quotidian proximate contexts by participating in it" (2009:1030). "Signs of hope" (2009:1030) may point to those communities that actively live out their eschatological double identity of the already and the not yet, which Kelsey describes as "community-in-communion marked by justice and peace" (2009:1030).

Thirdly, Jesus flourishes as image of God in his passion and crucifixion, through fulfilling God's reconciling purpose for his life and the lives of fellow living beings through his ministry, death and resurrection – "Jesus in his humanity flourishes as imager of God in his responding to God in these enactments of love to God and love to fellow human creatures" (2009:1032). Kelsey calls this response 'love', as "both a passionate desire for communion with God and a passionate desire for communion with fellow human creatures in solidarity with them in the full consequences of their estrangement from God" (2009:1031). However, not only through the death of Jesus does Kelsey see God's relating to estranged living beings to reconcile them to God, but indeed "in and through everything that Jesus does and undergoes in the power of the Spirit from his birth onward" (2009:1031). By their being 'in Christ', human living beings respond appropriately in love in practices of prayer to God[151] and love-as-neighbour[152]. These

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[151] "[I]n which one is oriented to one's ultimate context in contemplative adoration of God" (2009:1032).

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two sets of practices are both inseparable from ánd irreducible to one another. Jesus, who is "finite living mystery who images the triune living mystery", flourishes in appropriate response to God's threefold relating.

Thus it is that Jesus, as paradigmatic human living being, exemplifies how living beings are to be as eccentric existence[153] by enacting "practices expressive of appropriate response in faith, hope and love to God's ways of relating" (2009:1033 – 1034). In this project, "[e]ach part explores what counts as appropriate response to one of the three ways God relates – namely, in faith, in hope, and in love" (2009:836), so that truly flourishing (human) life "is eccentrically shaped by faith, hope and love" (2009:856). Equally, each proposal of Kelsey explores what counts as inappropriate response to one of the three ways in which God relates to all that is not God. Inappropriate responses produce distorted existential hows, which entail suffering and estrangement rather than well-being and flourishing, being the polar opposites of faith, hope and love. Importantly, for Kelsey, "[h]uman creatures obscure their imaging the image of God when their quotidian personal identities are not in fact congruent with their basic personal identities" (2009:1049), resulting in distorted identities that are lived daily (2009:1050).

Finally, Kelsey brings the three lines of thought together in the metaphor of a triple helix, which highlights three angles or dimensions to the third and final (Kelsey adds "perennial" (2009:1034)) anthropological question, namely "Who are we?" and "Who am I?" (2009:1034). He responds to this question by emphasising in particular that "human beings flourish as finite living mysteries", which is to say "when their lived quotidian identities are consistent with their basic identity in Christ" (2009:1034), Jesus of Nazareth who himself is "the image of (the) triune living mystery" (2009:1045). Therefore, Kelsey considers the basic personal identities of living beings to be both 'gift' and 'vocation' (2009:1045). If "Jesus images the congruence between the communion-in-community of giving and receiving that constitutes the triune God's own inner life and the ways in which the triune God self-involvingly relates to all else" (2009:1046), then living beings related to by God in being created, drawn into eschatological

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[152] "[I]n which one is oriented to one's proximate contexts as one who is with and for fellow estranged human beings" (2009:1032).

[153] Which he understands as "truly finite mysteries" that image "the image of the triune infinite mystery" (2009:1034).

consummation, and reconciled consequently live on borrowed breath, borrowed time, and by another's death as images of the image of God.

6.3   *Imago Dei* **and living beings**

As illustrated above, Kelsey uses the image of a 'triple helix' as metaphor for how the three parts or proposals of his project work together. As a metaphor, this image cannot be a comprehensive description of how these parts are to relate (or do relate), but points to the attempt in understanding the already present relations of the proposals present in Kelsey's project. Kelsey himself understands 'helix' as "an object having a three-dimensional shape like that of a wire wound uniformly around a cone or a cylinder" (2009:897). However, for Kelsey "[a] helix defined as a line wound around a cone would not be a good analogy for the way the three parts of this work are related to one another because such a helix appears to come to closure – that is, to define a closed three-dimensional space" (2009:897 – 898). This is not acceptable as a metaphor seeking to address the underlying relationship between the three parts of Kelsey's project, since it does not express the open-endedness (even if the various parts do converge at a certain point) which is inherent in the project. Thus Kelsey opts for the description 'triple helix', whereby he means to point to "two or more helices… (spiraling) around one another" (2009:898). In particular, he sees two narrative logics (which cannot be collapsed into one another) wound around each other (expressed in three stories of God's relating), being "inseparable" and "being in a fixed order" (2009:898). According to Kelsey's logic, part 1 (God relating to create) forms a helix by its own, while part 2 (God relating to consummate eschatologically) and part 3 (God relating to reconcile) is wound into a double helix and in a fixed order around the narrative logic of "the same concrete historical subject" (2009:898), namely Jesus of Nazareth. Kelsey is careful to maintain, however, that these two proposals "each have their own distinctive internal logic" even if "[a]t the same time, they cannot be separated from each other" (2009:899). Their communal christological centre binds them together in a way that they spiral around each other, which signify a logical relation and fixed internal structure for Kelsey. Finally, helix (part 1) and double helix (parts 2 and 3) wind together to form a triple helix, precisely because "their narrative logics make them irreducibly two distinct types of

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story" (2009:899). Parts 2 and 3 are described as "two inseparable[154] but irreducibly distinct stories about Jesus that are ordered to each other in a definite pattern" (2009:912) of which the one narrates God's relating to eschatologically consummate all through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of which the other narrates God's relating to reconcile humankind to God through their multiple estrangements. Part 1 assumes that the God who relates creatively to all that is not God is also the God who relates creatively to Jesus Christ, even if "it is not self-evident that the logic of canonical Gospel stories entails that God relates creatively to all else through Christ in his humanity" (2009:913). As a whole, "[n]o two of these three can be conflated with or absorbed into the third" (2009:913)[155], and so "the double helix composed of part 2 and 3 as a whole is inseparable from the single helix defined by the line of theological anthropological remarks made in part 1" (2009:900). Thus, even though these three proposals, which are expressive of three narrative logics, cannot be derived from each other, one could be justified in proposing a narrative-driven logic for Kelsey's proposals which may themselves require a particular narrative (or logical) order in the interests of making sense as narratives. For Kelsey, then, parts 2 and 3 of his project logically presuppose part 1, even though part 1 does not presuppose parts 2 and 3 (2009:913) – and part 3 is in some way dependent upon part 2, even though part 2 need not presuppose part 3.

Consequently, Kelsey describes his project as "christocentric in a certain way at the meta level… guided and normed by a christocentric understanding of the *imago Dei* at the level of its construal and the task of formulating theological anthropological proposals and some of the criteria of what count as good arguments for or against such proposals" (2009:909). However, methodologically Kelsey's project is not christocentric either "in the sense that it is warranted by the claim that Christ is the name of a single ultimate Christological principle, a cosmic Christ principle in virtue of which the cosmos has both reality and unity or coherent wholeness" (2009:910), or "in the sense that it is warranted by christocentric claims about the nature of 'revelation'", whether that

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[154] "The two stories are inseparable because they are both about Jesus; they are interdependently necessary to the identity description they give of Jesus in his humanity… They are irreducibly distinct because they have different narrative logics" and so cannot be absorbed or conflated into one another (2009:912).

[155] Since, as Kelsey himself states, "such conflation has major and dangerous systematic consequences for the practice of Christian secondary theology", as he has also argued throughout his project (2009:956).

involves "the decisive revelation of God" or "the exclusive revelation of God" (2009:910). For a thesis in ecological theology, this is not only important in affirming Christ's centrality in theocentric, Christian theology, but serves as a particular warning in seeing a cosmic Christ principle inherent in Kelsey's work, and therefore finding it appropriate to establish cosmic christology as core to a basis for ecological theology that appropriates Kelsey's proposals. In sum, for Kelsey, "Jesus Christ in his concrete living human personal identity is the decisive, if ambiguous, *imago Dei*" (2009:911). Jesus's unsubstitutable personal identity is the content of the *imago Dei* (2009:915).

All in all, "Jesus Christ, interpreted in the larger context of Christian Holy Scripture construed as a canonical whole that is unified by three types of narrative that are irreducible to one another because they have distinctive narrative logics, yet cannot be separated from one another because they are ordered to one another in a fixed pattern" (2009:914). The three parts of Kelsey's project "hold together as a systematically unsystematic whole in which they are related to one another in a triple helix as facets of the way in which human beings are imagers of the image of God, Jesus Christ" (2009:11). Indeed, "[t]ogether the three parts of this theological anthropology offer a picture of human existence as eccentric, centered outside itself in the triune God in regard to its being, value, destiny, identity, and proper existential orientations to its ultimate and proximate contexts" (Kelsey, 2009:893). Human beings are not understood as images of God per se, but as imagers of the image of God (as "the definitive image of God" (2009:907)), which Kelsey understands as Jesus the Christ – moreover, "not the (religious?) name of a universal cosmological principle, one that somehow images incarnation of the divine", but as "the name of a concrete living human personal body in his distinctive relationship to God" (2009:906).

This does not, however, deny any kind of cosmological relation of Christ to God and all that is not God, as Kelsey shows in his exegesis of the Christ-hymn in Colossians 1:15 – 20 (for which he relies extensively on Lohse (1971)).[156] Here, Christ is located "in

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[156] In his "Coda to Introductions B: Image of God" (2009:922 – 1007) Kelsey relies upon three texts to substantiate or warrant the judgment that Jesus' unsubstitutable personal bodily identity is definitive of how God is imaged in relating to create and relating to reconcile. Apart from Colossians 1:15 – 20, Hebrews 1:1 – 4 and 2 Corinthians 3:7 – 4:6 are also employed, but I focus only on the first text because it serves to make clear that, even though Kelsey does not understand Christ as cosmological principle, he does

relation to God and to the rest of creation in two ways, cosmological and soteriological" (2009:961). Cosmologically, two things can be said. Firstly, "Christ's relation to God is that he is God's agent in creating and sustaining the universe" (2009:961); secondly, "Christ's relation to all reality other than God is that of absolute cosmological superiority and preexistence" (2009:962). Soteriologically, "Christ's relation to God is that he is God's agent of reconciliation" (2009:962 – 963). Here, Christ is "absolutely prior and superior to all that is not God" (2009:963), "lord of every kind of creature, including the elemental powers, the powers and dominians" (2009:963), the bringer of cosmological peace[157]. The reconciliation that Jesus the Christ brings about in creation is not regarded as being the product of a cosmological process or progression, but is, for Kelsey, brought about by Jesus' being human "in history through the events of his crucifixion and resurrection" (2009:965). Thus it would seem that Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection is regarded as reconciliation brought about only for human beings, but as for all that is not God, the entire creation. Kelsey, however, stands for a more modest interpretation of this passage, whereby he understands the text to describe the unsubstitutable personal identity of Christ – in this way (2009:966),

> he relates to al that is not God before – that is, prior to – their relating back to God; and he relates to them in a way that is superior to them both because is not estranged from God and because, in precisely that concrete way of relating, he is their Lord.

Thus, in Colossians 1:15 – 20 Christ is the image of God that make concrete (in Kelsey's words, 'define') how God relates creatively and in reconciliation to all that is not God, in a way that refuses to conflate ór separate the two aspects of the way that Christ is the image of God in the text here, namely cosmological and soteriological (2009:966 – 967).

Kelsey's understanding of *imago Dei* is important for a thesis on ecological theology because it relies on a particular characterisation of God that might prove valuable – in Kelsey's own words, "[t]he content of the *imago Dei...* guides the way in which to characterize God, not only as triune… but as the triune God self-relating *in se* in the triune life, and not merely relating *ad extra* to all that is not God" (2009:917). In

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envisage a cosmological relating of Christ to God and to created living beings. As per the methodological decision taken in chapter 2, all three texts will not be discussed here.

[157] Which Kelsey understands as "a peace within the created cosmos… a peace that comes with the reconciliation of the created cosmos to God" (2009:964).

affirming that Jesus Christ is the *imago Dei* Kelsey argues that "God is *in se* reliably the same as God is *ad extra* in and through whom Jesus of Nazareth is in what he does and undergoes" (2009:918). The correlation between the economic relating of God (outside, *ad extra*) and the immanent relating of God (inside, *in se*) is as important as the correlation between the freedom and intimacy inherent in each of God's modes of relating for Kelsey, since it is the selfsame triune God that is 'outside' as that God that is 'inside'. Indeed (2009:919),

> [t]he economic and immanent cannot be separated because, according to the canonical Christian stories, in free and loving self-determination, God, immanently triune, is actually self-committed to relating to reality other than God in ways that are necessarily economically triune because in them God's integrity is maintained, God remains faithful to God's character and self-commitments.

Kelsey's understanding of *imago Dei* is not without its challenges to ecological theology, though. With regards to the relationship between human and nonhuman living beings, Kelsey describes human beings created in the image of God as "God's concrete representatives on earth to whom God's royal rule over nonhuman creatures has been delegated" (2009:933) – indeed, human living beings are created "first among equals" (2009:281) – and therefore in a special way responsible for enacting appropriate responses and existential hows both to God and fellow living beings. In sum, Kelsey proposes that human beings be understood as "finite living mysteries that image the triune living mystery" (2009:1009), and therefore some discussion on the mysteries of life and living is core to a thesis on Kelsey's project.

6.4   Mysteries of life and living

In his book, Kelsey employs the concept of 'mystery' to describe a number of key concepts in his threefold proposal. One sees him refer to God (2009:75), Wisdom (2009:229) evil (2009:208), human persons (2009:1051), living bodies (2009:246) and even created life as mysterious – it would therefore be appropriate to explore not only what Kelsey understands as 'mystery', but also how Kelsey makes use of the term.

In the first instance, Kelsey is not satisfied with merely understanding 'mystery' as 'elusiveness' – moreover, the intrinsic, inherent elusiveness of a subject – and therefore explores the mysteriousness of subjects theologically from his project's

proposal of God relating to all that is not God. Kelsey is careful to maintain that the mystery of living beings (and in particular human beings) is not adequately explained as the systematic elusiveness of subjects or subjectivity. Indeed, "while elusiveness is doubtless an aspect of the mystery of being a human subject, I shall argue that, theologically understood, the basis of that mystery lies elsewhere" (2009:105). Kelsey describes human persons as being "inexhaustibly mysterious" in two senses. Firstly, human persons are mysterious by virtue of the lack of comprehensive and completely coherent, unifying systematic account that can be given of their living on both their own creaturely, present time and borrowed Godly, proleptically present time concurrently (2009:481). Secondly, human persons are mysterious in their proneness for inappropriate responses to God and distortion in sin (when eschatological blessing becomes a call of and for judgment on their lives) due to their "rationally inexplicable self-contradictoriness" (2009:481). These dynamics of complexity and self-contradictoriness is found in all of created life (Kelsey uses the New Testament concept of 'world'), which sees created life as opposed to God's eschatological blessing and as in bondage to the power and oppression of evil. Upon such a twofold description of what Kelsey understands as the 'inexhaustible mystery' of human living beings, one may be justified in applying Kelsey's designation 'mystery' to all living beings. Life and living beings are, therefore, mysterious by virtue of the lack of coherent, systematic accounts of their living in time and space, and are mysterious in their proneness to inappropriate responses to God's threefold relating. This last point is especially important, in that Kelsey's emphasis that such self-contradictoriness may be found with regards to all of life and all living beings indicates that questions regarding whether Kelsey's discussions on sin and sins[158] is non-applicable to nonhuman living beings need perhaps to be answered in the negative from Kelsey's own project. Life and living beings are inexhaustibly mysterious in Kelsey's project, an understanding that will be core to the arguments employed in chapter 7.

Importantly, however, one may need to inquire as to how Kelsey himself understands and describes 'mystery'. In his project, Kelsey employs 'mystery' (in the singular) "to refer to God's incomprehensibility to human cognitive capacities, to refer to

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[158] Evil is probably self-evident, if one follows Kelsey in understanding 'evil' as systemic violence.

revelation insofar as it is God's faithful communication of Godself precisely as incomprehensible, and in an analogical sense to characterize human beings as related-to-by-God" (2009:75). In particular, Kelsey posits an important dynamic in the relation of the 'self-revelation' and 'mystery' of God (2009:73):

> If God Godself is to be known, and not merely God's plan for eschatological consummation, God's self-revelation is necessary; if it is truly God who is revealed, and incomprehensibility is one of God's essential properties, then it is necessary that God remains incomprehensible even in self-revelation.

Thus Kelsey does not understand mystery and revelation to function at opposite ends of thinking on knowledge of God, but sees each inherent in the other. Moreover, since God communicates mystery in God's self-revelation[159], "being-in-relation-to-mystery is ontologically constitutive of human being" (2009:75) and "relatedness-to-God is constitutive of human being" (2009:75). Mystery, then, refers primarily to the self-revealed incomprehensibility of the triune God. Three intersecting, interdependent features of mystery shape Kelsey's understanding of the community-in-communion that is God's life. The first is "the *glory* of God's life" (2009:77; original italics), which is the rich, inexhaustible life of God self-giving out of fullness. The second is "the *incomprehensibility* of God's life" (2009:77; original italics), which admits to the limits to understanding God's reciprocal self-giving. The third is "the *holiness* of God's life" (2009:77; original italics), which has to do with God's radically free and uncaused, self-determining self-giving of Godself in love. Kelsey thus understands God as "a distinctively Trinitarian mystery" (2009:919), and very specifically refers to the apocalyptic context of the description of God as 'mystery'. Indeed, notions such as 'secret', 'intentional disclosure', and 'concrete spatio-temporal reality' shape what Kelsey understands as 'mystery' in his project.

For Kelsey it is in Jesus, as "finite living mystery that images the triune living mystery" (2009:1050), that the mystery of human living beings are enclosed and given content. Jesus Christ, who "in his humanity is the image of God *and* is disclosive of God's mystery" (2009:920), is both epistemologically mysterious[160] and ontologically

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[159] "In revelation God communicates *Godself* to human beings" (2009:74).

[160] "[I]n that it is not possible to know who he is exhaustively in his creaturely, glorified and reconciling humanity" (2009:1050).

mysterious[161]. Furthermore, since "[i]n his created, resurrected and reconciling living body Jesus is paradigmatic of who all actual living human personal bodies are, as he is paradigmatic of what they are and how they are to be" (2009:1050), human living beings too are finite living mysteries, "imaging the image of the triune infinite mystery" (2009:1050). The mystery of living beings is therefore the selfsame mystery of the humanly Jesus' life, death and resurrection, which Kelsey describes as epistemological and ontological mystery.

Living beings related to by God, the "triune mystery" (2009:920), are mysterious in their eccentricity – indeed, 'mystery' describes one aspect of what Kelsey understands as the 'eccentric existence' of all that is not God. The epistomological and ontological mystery and mysteriousness of life and living beings do not lie in themselves, much like their reality and worth and value and identity do not lie within themselves, but are situated within God's own mystery and mysteriousness. Therefore the holiness and incomprehensibility and glory of God's own life comes to describe life and living beings – imaging the image of God, Jesus the Son, within whom God reveals Godself – as holy, incomprehensible and glorious in their mysterious eccentricity. God's relating to all that is not God therefore renders the earth and her ecology, too, mysteriously eccentric: holy, incomprehensible and glorious.

6.5   Critical discussion of David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence*

Kelsey's theological anthropology is an enormously rich resource for study, also with regards to ecological theology. Exactly because it is written with sound methodology, coherent arguments and well-nuanced proposals in place, it is possible to give a more detailed critical discussion of some finer aspects of Kelsey's project – in particular the employment of his conceptual framework (and the underlying relationships between related concepts), various crucial arguments within his proposals, and the order and internal logic of the proposals themselves – keeping in mind his own concern for it being and remaining an "a project in systematically unsystematic secondary theology"

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[161] "[I]n that the ontologically contingent fact of his particular concrete actuality as created, glorified and reconciled is finally inexplicable" (2009:1050).

(2009:45). Three rounds of critical remarks and detailed critique of Kelsey's project follow.

The first round of critical remarks has to do with Kelsey's conceptual framework, especially with regards to the project's own deliberate inner consistency in describing and maintaining the various relationships between concepts. In terms of the entire project the author is very consistent in clarifying conceptual uses and their various interrelations and frameworks, as well as justifying and substantiating uses where necessary, in light of the rigorous thinking undergirding other concepts such as 'person' and 'personal', and most especially with regards to their underlying relationship. Therefore, one may need to ask, firstly, what Kelsey understands as 'public' – and, even more so, who is in view when spoken of 'the public' (cf. 2009:17 – 20). If, for instance, "[t]he public realm does not need, not even in principle, to include all human agents whatsoever as possible enactors of practices in order for those practices to count as public" (2009:18), one may wonder what Kelsey would understand as public practices – in particular, practices with an eye to whom, to which or what kind of public?[162]

Secondly, the relationship between Kelsey's 'appropriate responses' and 'existential hows' probably needs greater clarification, especially the conceptual difference of each to the other, since there seems to be considerable overlap between them (cf. 2009:340 – 345, 354). Indeed, at times it would appear as if they are almost employed synonymously, in that both of these seek to point to appropriate ways of responding to God, ways that make up how we express our existence as those related to by God. If, furthermore, Kelsey maintains that "[m]y use of "how" in a theocentric account of human flourishing is designed to acknowledge that… human creatures are indeed accountable for so taking themselves in hand that their way of being set into any

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[162] Two similar remarks can be made in the spirit of this point of critique. Firstly, further qualifications around the understanding of the relationship of 'faith' to 'faithfulness' in Kelsey's project may require attention – indeed, what exactly is meant by faithfulness? Is faith expressed vis-à-vis faithfulness? Are the terms used interchangeably, and if so, on what grounds? Thus, it is almost strange that 'faith' and 'faithfulness' are not clarified in their relation here, nor (specifically) is 'faithfulness' clarified as concept (cf. 2009:328 – 332). Secondly, it would seem as if the relationship between *eschaton* and *apokalypsis* is more problematic than its use by Kelsey in his second proposal, and so one could ask what the relationship between the two are to be in Kelsey's project. Might a statement such as "[t]he eschatological future depicted by apocalyptic rhetoric" not conceptually confuse the two, and at least make the interrelation more unproblematic than it is or ought to be? Primarily, however, one might inquire as to the underlying relationship between Kelsey's understanding and use of 'eschatological promise and apocalyptic judgment' (cf. 2009:452).

proximate context is an appropriate response to the way in which the triune God has already related to them creatively" (2009:341), then one may be justified in asking how the underlying relationship between 'appropriate response' and 'existential how' may be understood.

In third place, the relationship between eschatological consummation and eschatological blessing is unclear, and almost appears to be used synonymously within Kelsey's second proposal.[163] Does consummation include blessing, and therefore imply that consummation is the greater encompassing term? Since the relationship between creative blessing and eschatological blessing is clarified in Kelsey's project, one would think it important to define the relationship between eschatological consummation and eschatological blessing in greater detail and with greater clarity in Kelsey's second proposal. Two concepts that occur throughout Kelsey's three proposals, namely those of 'flourishing' and 'well-being', may need more attention, especially with regard to the relationship of these to one another (cf. 2009:578 – 579).

Thus, as a fourth critical remark, if actively hopeful practices "[confuse] human flourishing with human well-being" (2009:569) so that "human flourishing generally is identified with the highest degree of human well-being" (2009:570), one would need to ask whether personal bodies could flourish without being well, even if they could be well without flourishing. Perhaps the question regarding the relationship of 'flourishing' to 'well-being' speaks to the dynamics of each (the first being in process or active, the latter denoting a state or being passive), or maybe even speaks to the order of Kelsey's proposals, in that God's relating creatively is logically prior to God relating to draw into eschatological consummation, and therefore 'well-being' being assumed in God's relating to create and 'flourishing' being assumed in God's relating to consummate eschatologically (although this surely cannot be the case, since Kelsey's speaks of 'flourishing' in all of his three proposals). Furthermore, if well-being is defined solely by

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[163] Also, the proposed relationship between 'promise' and 'expectation' would require attention (2009:454 – 455). If 'promise' has content but is open-ended, and 'expectation' (or even standards of excellence in expectation) is dynamic and themselves shape at least the perception of the new context that promise creates, or at most the very context that promise itself creates – how is the relationship of 'promise' and 'expectation' in Kelsey to be constructed? If 'promise' is implicit and not explicit, but if it is nonetheless described as performative, self-involving and causal, the question remains how 'expectation' would be brought to bear on 'promise'.

means of human dignity and value, then surely it could be the understanding of well-being itself that could stand in need reformulation or redefining?

A last point of critique in this first round of critical discussion on Kelsey's project has to do with the notions of 'fellow creatures' and 'fellow human creatures' (cf., for instance, 2009:823), which do not appear to be used in both consistent and clear ways, so that a reader may wonder as to how deliberate the different usages are employed in the book. For a thesis topic on ecological theology this becomes a crucial question, and clear distinction and consistent usage of these different concepts/terms crucial to especially how Kelsey relates human living beings to nonhuman living beings within his three proposals. Thus, one may be justified in asking whether these terms are to be understood as alternatives, or as interchangeable concepts designating the same objects, or as complementary/interdependent concepts, or as clearly delineated, separately defined objects?

The second round of critical remarks has to do with some arguments that Kelsey employs at important moments in his three proposals. Firstly, with regards to Kelsey's argument that fully actualised human personal bodies are both finite and imperishable (cf. 2009:552, 550, 554, 560 – 561), the relationship between the finitude and imperishability of the bodies probably require more attention. If it is argued that eschatologically glorified bodies are both finite and imperishable, how does one attempt to hold together such apparently contradicting claims even in loose coherency? Might the issue be explained through the intersection of "imperishability" and "finitude" with "morality" – although these would not solve or necessarily satisfactorily explain the tension in the proposals that eschatologically glorified bodies can possibly be at once finite (and thus vulnerable to disintegration) and imperishable (and thus not bound to the physical, quotidian confines of time, space and matter). Perhaps these tensions ought to be understood from Kelsey's argument that all that is not God is finite by definition of its being related to by God (both before *and* after eschatological glorification, blessing and consummation), and that the imperishability of glorified bodies have more to do with fully actualised glorified bodies (that are still dependent upon God's relating for their constitution and existence and actualisation) than the matter of physical and spiritual realities, or mortality and immortality. However, if this is an appropriate response to this

tension, how would one respond to these questions without employing apologetics, or succumbing to 'conflating the questions'?

Secondly, an interesting description of the dynamic of history in Kelsey is that of 'historical accident' (cf. 2009:719 – 721). If "[p]art of the concrete particularity of human creatures is the historical accident that as parents, children, spouses, grandchildren, grandparents, and close friends, with profound shared experiences, moral debts, and the like, they have histories of commitment and responsibility to certain persons that they do not have to others" (2009:720), one may need to pay more attention to how the dynamic of history and the involvement of God therein is viewed in the book – especially with regard to God's relating to reconcile, where Kelsey's arguments on history pertains to how living beings ought to respond appropriately as good neighbours to all that is not God.

Thirdly, Kelsey's use of 'natural' and 'unnatural' love would need greater explication (cf. 2009:805). If, as Kelsey argues, "love of friends is natural" and "the demand to love enemies is an unnatural demand", how should 'natural' and 'unnatural' be understood – especially when dealing with questions of nature, the environment and ecology, as this thesis is seeking to do? Two qualifications do assist Kelsey's use of these, namely Luz's comment that "[l]ove-with-the-goal-of is not love" (Kelsey, 2009:805; quoting Luz, 1989:350) and the insistence that "the demand to love enemies cannot be understood as the perfection of natural human love". Still, if 'love for enemies' is "not a demand for enactment of goal-oriented practices, nor psychological practices that might make a friend out of an enemy nor political practices using love as a strategy" (2009:804 – 805), one may need to seriously ask of Kelsey's project what constitutes 'natural love'.[164]

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[164] Furthermore, Kelsey argues that love-as-neighbour and love-to-God is not interdependent – one may need to ask whether, from Kelsey's own discussion of the relation of the two loves, this is not contradicted and love-as-neighbour and love-to-God portrayed as interdependent after all (cf. 2009: 814 – 815, 820). If love-to-God is not to be thought of as the intention of the action of loving-as-neighbour (as is proposed through the second proposal regarding the relation of the two loves, and answered in the negative by Kelsey), does the second feature of the appropriate relationship between the two loves[164] then not consent to this way of thinking after all to some extent? Are the differences between the erroneous second proposed relationship of the two loves and the proposed appropriate relationship between them delineated clearly, or do they conflate (and confuse the reader) to some extent? What are the major differences between them, being both focused on some sort of dependence? Granted, whereas Kelsey's third proposal has to do with

Lastly, one may need to ask of Kelsey who human beings are as eccentric existence? (cf. 2009:1008 – 1051). No description or detailed response is given to this question, as it is given to the questions of "What human beings are as eccentric existence" (2009:1009 – 1026) or "How human beings are to be as eccentric existence" (2009:1026 – 1034).[165]

The third and last round of critical remarks has to do with the order and logic of Kelsey's three proposals within the project as a whole. At first reading Kelsey's order of proposals (especially the order of the second and third proposals) is rather surprising, in that it moves away from the conventional creation-reconciliation-consummation order of discussion by switching around the proposals on eschatological consummation (second proposal) and reconciliation (third proposal) in his project (this is discussed in detail in chapter 5). The main reason Kelsey gives for his order is 'formal' (2009:122):

> God's reconciling of creatures does seem to be partly dependent on God's drawing them to eschatological consummation" even as "stories of God relating to consummate creatures eschatologically are logically independent of stories of God relating to reconcile estranged creatures.

Thus, the rationale for the order of the proposals themselves is well formulated and substantiated in Kelsey's project, and is one of the greatest strengths to his framework. For Kelsey, the three proposals of his project are tied to the three questions that he asks,

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one-way dependence only this second feature has to do with two-way dependence, but it would still seem as if some sort of dependent relationship between love-as-neighbour and love-to-God is proposed.

[165] Two further points of critique can be added to this round's discussion. Firstly, the relation between unconscious or unintentional action or choices to violence and systemic evil is unclear (cf. 2009:404). If lying or untruthful speech need not be employed deliberately or with the conscious intent to deceive, what are the implications then for distinguishing between conscious and unconscious or non-conscious decisions and actions? Indeed, if the latter is (seemingly, as here) replaced with the designation 'systemic', there might be great implications for developing an understanding of 'person' (as, for instance, centers of consciousness, or, in the spirit of this project, 'living personal human beings') from Kelsey's project that might not be in line with what he himself has to say about 'unsubstitutable personal identity' earlier (cf. 2009:368 – 385). Secondly, Kelsey is of the opinion that "[s]ome reports of Jesus' prayers could only be prayed by Jesus himself and cannot be considered exemplary for other human persons' responses to God's *agape*" since some of these prayers reflect Jesus' "unique role as Son of God, a role no other can claim" or "his role as mediator, which no other may presume to fill" (cf. 2009:756). Greater clarity may be needed in distinguishing Jesus' role as Son of God and Jesus' identity as Son of God, if Kelsey himself insists that the unsubstitutable identity of human persons (following Jesus' own unsubstitutable personal identity) lies exactly not in roles or functions, but in being related to in particular ways and responding to these ways of relating in differing ways. Whereas it is both understandable and reasonable that the role and identity of Jesus cannot be divided, Kelsey does seem to be wary of collapsing identity into social role. Therefore, is Kelsey not succumbing to the very temptation that he seeks to avoid in an earlier treatise on 'human personal unsubstitutable identity'?

in such a way that "[t]he three parts of the project are… differentiated by the way each of them tends especially to address a different one of three logically different types of perennial anthropological questions" (2009:893). These questions are: (1) What are we?; (2) How ought we be?; (3) Who am I and who are we? In a similar way this thesis is aimed to address a set of three questions, namely: (2) What constitutes created life?; (2) How ought eschatologically consummated life be?; (3) Who is reconciled life? One point of critique of Kelsey's proposals has to do with the various interrelationships of the three proposals that are expounded in the introduction of each of the chapters on Kelsey's respective proposals (chapters 3, 4 and 5) of this thesis. Kelsey insists that the proposals be understood within a logical (but not chronological) pattern (cf. 2009:476 – 477). In some way, Kelsey's insistence that the order of the three proposals in the project may perhaps not be intended for understanding the interrelations of proposals chronologically, but the project would appear to rely upon an accumulative argument to support the inherent structure of proposals. If God's relating to create is the basic presupposition of the second and third proposals, and if God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation and God's relating to reconcile are logically independent from but still interrelated to one another in the sense of the latter following logically upon the former to some extent, then there probably is some accumulative movement inherent in the proposals. This would indeed make sense, if they are logically ordered to the point of each presupposing some other proposal in its own logical coherency. One would be justified in asking whether, if this is the case, the interrelations of these proposals do not then succumb to the critique of both philosophical ánd logical schemes after all, which Kelsey tries to avoid in his project – even though the overall canon-unifying narrative seeks to respect each story for and in its own integrity, and even though the stories are deeply interrelated. How, then, would Kelsey have the reader distinguish between the logical order and necessity, and logical dependence (and perhaps therefore even chronological order?) in understanding the order of proposals?

These three rounds of critical remarks on Kelsey's theological anthropological project primarily speak to Kelsey's own concern for adhering to secondary theology's logic of beliefs, which is important also for a thesis that would inquire into how God's threefold relating to the earth and her ecology may serve as basis for ecological theology.

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Kelsey describes the relationships of the three proposals to one another with the metaphor of the "triple helix", which may have important implications for a thesis on ecological theology that employs the notion of 'living beings' to describe those that God relates to.

6.6   God relating to all that is not God

After all that was said about God relating to all that is not God in chapters 2 through 5, this section (and the following section) seeks to deal specifically with God's relating to the earth and her ecology. For Kelsey, "[b]eing-related-to-by-God" is intrinsic to what living beings are, as finite and (internally, externally) limited beings (2009:539). With regards to God's relating to the earth and her ecology, as part of 'all that is not God', Kelsey is careful to emphasise that God's transcendence and God's immanence (similar to the freedom and intimacy of loving relationships) be understood not as contrastive or mutually exclusive terms, but as correlative[166]. Indeed, the God who relates in threefold manner to all that is not God is the selfsame God (2009:817) – and even though intentional objects may differ, the God who creates *ex nihilo* is the God who consummates eschatologically is the God who reconciles. If God is the same in all acts, then the difference and diversity of intentional objects are not grounds for God's relating on non-relating to them, since they are constituted not by their own responses to God but always and only by God's initial and uncaused relating. All living beings and all of life – the earth and her ecology, too – are related to by God in these ways, since God relates threefold to all that is not God. Thus, even though responses may differ (for just because God relates to all that is not God in His own sameness and in the same way, this does not mean that all is constituted the same or expected to respond in the same ways), intentional objects are irreducible to one another and concretely whole (being living beings created with integrity) in their own beings.

For an ecological theological thesis, a first major point of inquiry of this thesis will have to do with the ability to respond back to the triune God, if response is part of the integrity of living beings related to by God. I would think that it must be argued from Kelsey's project that all that is not God to be able to relate back to God – not only for

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[166] By which Kelsey means to say that "the 'more' God is one, the 'more' God is the other as well" (2009:916).

human beings who respond in a certain way (communication as core part of this), but for all living beings – for if living beings are truly to other to God, then they must be able to relate back to God. If they are able to relate to God, then they must be able to respond to God. This might or might not involve communication, or different forms of communication (different from human beings), but arguably it must be possible, if living beings are truly beings with integrity and if God does not violate that integrity. If living beings are able to respond to God, then they must be able to respond appropriately and inappropriately. If living beings are capable of such responses, they must be capable of both fellowship and sin. Keeping in mind that Kelsey admits that use of 'relation' is an abstract concept that needs to balance its analogies off one another[167] all that God relates to is therefore in some measure 'responsible', through having the ability to respond back to God, for their relating back to God and to their contexts (ecology) and fellow living beings (including the earth).

A second important point of inquiry for a thesis on ecological theology will be whether all living beings are capable of fellowship with God, as human beings are said to be. Kelsey argues that God incarnate enters into fellowship with human beings, through being drawn "on their own terms into a community bound together by the kind of love that constitutes God's own life" (2009:465). The condition for God's communion with human creatures is that they exist as bodied beings, which implies particular social and physical contexts that sustain them in life. I would argue that, although such fellowship might not be the specific focus of Kelsey's project, Kelsey himself interprets human beings' fellowship with God within the broader scheme of God relating to all that is not God. This implies, firstly, that it is not in their humanness, but in God's Godness, that the capacity for fellowship between God and any being that is not God lie. Secondly, God's purposes in drawing particular creatures into loving community make possible and sustain such community, and so if created living beings, human or nonhuman, are destined for such community, they can only be constituted in communities through God's active relating to them. One would be able to make a strong case from Kelsey for God's purpose in drawing all that is not God into such loving community, through again seating

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[167] Indeed, with an eye to his project in particular, "[t]he challenge to theocentric thought about *anthropos* is to keep all such analogies off-balance so that no one of them comes to govern the grammar and to dominate the discourse in anthropology" (2009:830; original italics).

this movement not in the particularity of any creature, but in God's Godness. Kelsey, of course, places the central focus of the condition for fellowship on the moment of incarnation, whereby "stories of a maturational and pedagogical process focused on the promise of an eschatological outcome that consists in sharing the communion that the incarnate one has with God" (2009:466) forms the core of this condition. Importantly, however, Kelsey maintains that nonhuman living beings cannot be thought of as reconciled or as brought into fellowship with God through God's fellowship with human living bodies (2009:709):

> Human personal bodies dare not suppose that by seeking solidarity with other human creatures in their estrangement, in a way that distantly imitates God's solidarity with humankind in Jesus, human love will somehow reconcile others to God or save them from the consequences of their estrangements form God, fellow human creatures and themselves.

Lastly, from Kelsey's work one might not be able to articulate how nonhuman living beings may be able to respond or stand in fellowship with the triune God relating to them. However, just as practices expressive of appropriate responses to God vary within humankind, so too practices expressive of appropriate responses to God may vary within nonhumankind. Again, one reaches the limit of what could be said of the response of nonhuman living beings to God or God's fellowship with nonhuman living beings – again, however, the point made here primarily is not responses to God's relating in certain ways, but God's initial and sustained relating to all that is not God that makes the existence, integrity and various responses of greatly diverse living beings possible.

God relating to all that is not God – including the earth and her ecology – is ultimately defined by their ultimate contexts, and both these points of inquiry speak to the ultimate context of all that is not God. The earth and her ecology is, like all that is not God, living on borrowed breath (through God's relating to create), living on borrowed time (through God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation), and living by another's death (through God's relating to reconcile). For Kelsey, the appropriate attitude of living on borrowed breath is eccentric faith, so that "in *faith* human creatures flourish in appropriate response to the triune God relating to them creatively, a response best characterized generally as an attitude of doxological gratitude" (2009:738; original italics). The appropriate attitude to living on borrowed time is eccentric hope, so that "in *hope* human creatures flourish in appropriate response to the triune God relating to draw

them to eschatological consummation, a response best characterized generally as an attitude of joyous hopefulness" (2009:738; original italics). The appropriate attitude to living by another's death is eccentric love, so that "in *love* human creatures flourish in appropriate response to the triune God relating to reconcile them through their multiple estrangements by their being 'in Christ', a response "best characterized generally as an attitude of passionate desire" (2009:738; original italics).

Each appropriate attitude may, however, entail a number of different and differing responses or existential hows, in that "the attitude involves commitment to a set of practices whose concrete enactments in innumerable diverse concrete situations constitute the 'existential hows' of the personal bodies in community who enact them" (2009:738). Through these types of appropriate attitudes and responses living beings are what they were meant to be, namely 'dying lives'. Appropriate attitudes or responses however imply the possibility of inappropriate attitudes or responses, which Kelsey describes as 'distortion'. Distortions of these types of living – living on borrowed breath, living on borrowed time, living by another's death – are sinful and distort the 'dying lives' of living beings into 'living death'. 'Living', in Kelsey's project, is closely tied to 'flourishing', which speaks to the response of living beings to God's threefold relating (in the sense of both 'blossoming' and 'thriving') as 'dying lives'. A closely related notion in Kelsey to 'flourishing' is that of 'blessedness', which Kelsey employs to describe "[t]he subjectivity of a fully actualized subject" (2009:93). In particular, 'blessedness' is understood as the pleasure of being immediate self-conscious of or "experiencing the world… in relation to God – that is, 'in God'" (2009:95). Christian theological consciousness is particularly shaped by stories of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, and so 'blessedness' is theologically understood more specifically as "the *telos* of the process of maturation through which subjects go" that is shaped by Jesus of Nazareth, who, in his person, is "the actualization of the *eschaton*, the end and goal of the project of human subjectivity's full self-actualization" (2009:95). Thus, it becomes clear that, for Kelsey, 'living' is not simply 'existing' or 'being', but would call living beings and all of life – so too the earth and her ecology – to a blessed life, in which living beings experience the world 'in God'.

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God's own triune, divine life is one of love, and therefore inseparable from God's threefold relating and the eccentricity of the earth and her ecology. Indeed, God's relating to create is "a loving giving of reality" (2009:123), which expresses the "divine triune love's vitalizing, enlivening, and empowering life-giving power" (2009:124). God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation is "grounded in the eternal giving and receiving of love, which comprises the divine life" (2009:126). God relating to reconcile is "grounded in the eternal divine self-bestowal in love which is the divine life" (2009:128). 'Living', for Kelsey, is 'flourishing' by being defined and constituted, transformed and grounded in the triune God's divine life of love. God relates in love to all that is not God. Therefore, God relates in love to the earth and her ecology to create (through the medium of address), to draw all into eschatological consummation (through the medium of promise), and to reconcile (through the medium of exchange or "pattern of exchange" (2009:1024)) the earth and her ecology to flourish eccentrically, 'in God'.

6.7   Eccentric earth, eccentric ecology

Together, the three parts of Kelsey's theological anthropology "offer a picture of human existence as eccentric, centered outside itself in the triune God in regard to its being, value, destiny identity, and proper existential orientations to its ultimate and proximate contexts" (2009:893). Kelsey establishes in his project that a theological understanding of what constitutes human beings is rooted in claims about God relating to all that is not God and is shaped by Christian theological appropriate understandings of a trinitarian God. Even as he engages in this project, Kelsey warns of the irreducible differences among the three proposals that seek to describe the way that God relates to all that is not God, since "[n]o single monolithic story can be told about God's relating to us" (2009:130). If there is, as Kelsey argues, neither a single, simple Christian meta-narrative nor any Christian anthropological meta-theory, then so too can there be no Christian ecological meta-theory. Human beings, arguably like all living beings constituted by God, "are in their own way *too richly glorious, too inexhaustibly incomprehensible, too capable of profound distortions and bondage in living deaths, too capable of holiness*, in short, *too mysterious*, to be captured in that fashion" (2009:131, my emphasis – NM).

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For Kelsey the inherent dignity and worth of living beings, human and nonhuman, in all their mystery and complexity and (bio)diversity, is to be understood as being *eccentric*, situated and constituted in God's relating to all that is not God. Even though Kelsey himself speaks deliberately of 'ecology' in a mere four pages in his entire book (2009:248, 1020 – 1022), he assigns great value to the earth's ecology, which he sometimes describes as synonymous with 'proximate context' (2009:249) by virtue of it being the basis of any kind of actual or potential or possible life. Following Kelsey, this thesis functions with the core hypothesis that all living beings are constituted by God's threefold relating. This is theologically significant in two ways.

The significance of rooting the identity, reality, worth and value of living beings – and, indeed, all of life – in God's active relating to all that is not God lies, firstly, in the eccentricity that such a basis much necessarily have, if it is to be understood in this way. Consequently, the earth and her ecology is eccentric, if eccentric existence as existence constituted outside of ourselves is core to all of life. Through God's relating to all of life, or to all that is not God, both human and nonhuman beings are eccentrically constituted. For Kelsey, it goes without saying that the value, worth and reality of the earth and her ecology does not lie in human beings or human beings use or understanding or evaluation of, or even care and concern and protection of, the earth and her ecology. Furthermore, against even ecological theologies that would want to establish the dignity and worth of the earth or ecology as inherent, intrinsic and inestrangeable, an ecological theology that employs Kelsey's framework would only be able to affirm the inherent dignity, worth and value of the earth's ecology in a secondary sense. This is important, for Kelsey makes the same shift in his discussion of human beings (it is particularly prevalent in his long, initial silence on the *imago Dei*) in that he affirms that human beings have dignity or worth or reality as intrinsic to themselves, but only in a secondary sense – since it is extrinsically, in God's relating to all that is not God, that living beings, human and nonhuman alike, find their worth and value and reality and identity.

Secondly, God's relating to all of life assumes community, in that it is the triune (communal) God relating in every instance that establishes the importance of community for existence – as systems and sources of energy, as the concretely particular (proximate, quotidian) context of all actual living beings, those that are related-to-by-God. Human

existence is constituted in standing in communion (community-in-communion, as Kelsey would say) with both human and nonhuman community – indeed, all of life is relational. The eccentric existence and worth and value and reality of all of life and living beings therefore posits not only a deeply dependent relationship upon God and God's threefold relating, but also negotiable interdependent relationships with living beings on the earth and of living beings with the earth and with the earth's ecology. For Kelsey the notion of 'community' is probably particularly important in that he refuses to speak in the abstract about living beings, human beings, or any created reality, and in his repeated, consistent emphasis on the importance of the concrete particularity of created living beings, structures, systems, worlds, and so on.

An important caution follows. God's activity in relating to all living beings and all of life cannot imply that the relating to human beings take precedence and is then generalised in applying this mode of relating to all of creation, since "[t]o do so would assume that what we say theologically about the rest of creation must be extrapolated from what we say about ourselves as creatures" (Kelsey, 2009:162). It could seem, from a quick reading, that this thesis succumbs to such an interpretation in its efforts to construct a basis for ecological theology from Kelsey's theological anthropology and, consequently, that the proposed hypothesis can be strongly discouraged in light of Kelsey's own reservations. However, I would argue that, on a second reading, one understands this statement not as discouraging the use of Kelsey's theological anthropology in how God relates to all that is not God as disproving or discrediting a construction of a basis for ecological theology from this work. Rather, in light of the broader context of the section and passage wherein this statement is situated, Kelsey seeks to emphasise that God's relating to all that is not God must be the primary indicator to determine relations to and between human and nonhuman creatures. Thus, in line with this chapter's argument, Kelsey underlines that the constitution of all living beings and all of life, through God's relating to all that is not God, is not a result or consequence of God's relating to human beings, but rather a reality that is constituted in God's broader act of relating. Created, eschatologically consummated, reconciled life is, in the very first instance, constituted in God's threefold relating to it, and not contingent or dependent upon God's relating to humanity for any reason. This is a core proposal not over and

against theological anthropology, but something that stands at the very heart of what theology understands as 'human'.

Kelsey's view on the tension between ecological theology and theological anthropology receives attention in a telling argument close to the beginning of his book, where he responds to the possible objection that his project may succumb to problematic anthropocentrism. He describes the objection as follows (2009:199 – 200):

> Construing creation, and with it human creatures, as the quotidian, and then construing the quotidian, and with it human creatures, in terms of human practices, privileges a particular model of the human person and a particular conceptual scheme with which to describe it… Privileging such concepts, the objection goes, will inevitably lead to a radically anthropocentric view of creation, and therewith of human creatures. To do so puts into play a pattern of thinking that systematically elevates human creatures over the rest of the creation, for only human creatures are capable in the full sense of intentions and intentional actions and enacting practices, and so only they are really creatures. So far as their reality and value are concerned, all other creatures are reduced to the status of extensions or appendages of human creatures.

Kelsey responds to this objection by distinguishing between epistemic and ontological anthropocentrism. He understands epistemic anthropocentrism as the only way to think theologically about humanity's place in God's creation: "Indeed, we might wonder how it could be otherwise when it is human persons who are trying to understand the context into which they have been born as God's creation" (2009:200). Ontological anthropocentrism, on the other hand, is neither necessary nor theologically well-founded for Kelsey, and in any case not a pitfall that his project succumbs to – in his words, "this perspective [in reference to the necessity of epistemic anthropocentrism] is not necessarily anthropocentric with regard to judgments of the reality and value of nonhuman creatures… created to actualize purposes or ends entirely relative to human well-being" (2009:200). Kelsey's view of nonhuman living beings entail both that "[t]hey are not created by God simply for us" (2009:200) ánd that they, "along with us, make up the quotidian, as genuinely other than we in being and value" (2009:200 – 201). He wraps up his response to the objection to possible anthropocentrism of/in his project by affirming that there is "no systemic move that can by made by theology that will conceptually *guarantee* that such distortion will not happen" and that is therefore the responsibility of theologians to be "vigilantly self-critical in testing whether we have fallen prey to this danger" (2009:201; original italics). Therefore, this thesis could in one

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sense be described as anthropocentric – more specifically, epistemologically anthropocentric – even as it engages with Kelsey's project with the aim of constructing an ecological theology and being full aware of the challenges and difficulties ever present in a study that would bridge the divide of anthropology and ecology. However, its main concern is with understanding life and living beings (and is therefore equally biocentric?), including the earth and her ecology, by way of the theological idea of God's relating to all that is not God, and therefore theocentrically.

Engaging David Kelsey's theological anthropology to construct a basis for ecological theology is an engagement in which any kind of construction need necessarily be incomplete and therefore inviting more and greater input and response, both from Kelsey's own framework and from other sources that could possibly be employed in such a study on ecological theology. In the focus, scope and address of his book, Kelsey constructs his theological anthropology as a lived, public theological engagement. In this thesis, ecological theology is therefore described as an exercise in public theology – and, indeed, it is at the heart of what ecological theology stands for, namely that it should be public, engaged and concerned with policy and public thinking on ecological and environmental issues, challenges and opportunities.

6.8   Conclusion

David Kelsey has developed a theological framework for interpreting or understanding living beings – more specifically, human beings – theologically within God's relating to all that is not God. The central claim of Kelsey in his book, *Eccentric Existence*, is that all that is not God is to be understood ex-centrically, outside of itself, within God's ways of relating to all that is not God. The value and worth and being and reality of all that is not God is constituted in God's relating to it, rather than in itself or in its responses to God or (for an ecological theology) even in the assessment and understanding of one species, such as human beings. Kelsey argues that, since the ways in which God relates to all that is not God are irreducibly threefold" (2009:131), so too theological, theocentric accounts of human beings within this framework will be "irreducibly threefold" (2009:131) – and, arguably, theological, theocentric accounts of the earth and her ecology

interpreted within the framework of God's relating will be 'irreducibly threefold'. Indeed, for Kelsey (2009:120)

> the final anthropologically significant moment in the process of coming to a properly Trinitarian understanding of God turns on shifting focus back to the original topic: God's active relating to all-that-is-not-God, the One who has to do with us.

The core around which Kelsey's entire theological anthropology turns is therefore the theological idea of 'God relating'. This idea is theologically significant in two ways, expressive of the two important moves Kelsey makes in his project, namely (1) in understanding God relating to all that is not God in distinct, interrelated ways – thereby providing a good theological framework that could be proved for wider application than only within theological anthropology – and (2) in postponing his discussion and employment of human being as *imago Dei* – thereby opening his project up for broader engagement with its theological framework – to the Coda of his project. But Kelsey makes a third move in his project that may be theologically significant for a thesis on ecological theology by way of Kelsey, namely (3) the insistence that the triunity of God be maintained throughout his proposals. However, the theocentricity of Kelsey's project is synonymous with a certain christocentricity – for "if description of Jesus' identity as the 'image of God' decisively norms how God is best characterized, then the most apt characterizations of God are Trinitarian in form" (2009:915). Human life is understood as "a life that images the life of the risen Christ" (2009:951), which again ties into this thesis' concern for the centrality of life and arguably speaks to the life of all living beings. Indeed, "[t]he existential hows of such a life are grounded in the fundamental personal identity of such a life which… is an identity defined by its being in Christ, sharing the plotline of the narrative that describes Jesus' personal identity" (2009:952). The theological idea of 'God relating' itself turns upon a particular characterisation of God, and it is such a particular (admittedly limited) understanding of the triune God's being and life that Kelsey's project also contributes to a thesis on ecological theology.

Therefore, it may be said that Kelsey's theocentric understanding of the reality and worth and being and value of all living beings is, at its core, christocentric. Living beings related to by God (theocentrically) revealed in Christ (christocentrically) find their value outside of themselves, within God's threefold relating to them (eccentrically). The earth and her ecology finds its existence eccentrically within God's threefold relating,

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which itself is an expression of God's triune life of love. God's threefold relating is, however, not only an expression of life, but also the giving of true and mysterious life itself, the proper context of which is the glory of God. Therefore the earth and her ecology stands amidst this multiple giving of life, between the *mystery* and the *glory* of the life that God gives – eccentrically called, eccentrically constituted, eccentrically drawn, eccentrically liberated and eccentrically transformed into God's own triune life of love. The earth and her ecology flourishes – both thriving and blossoming – within this dynamic, between the mystery and glory of the life that God gives and within the bold eccentricity of the existence that such life posits.

Chapter 7
The eccentric earth and her eccentric ecology

7.1   Introduction

David Kelsey's fascinating work on the eccentric existence of human beings has moved theological anthropological thinking away from the centrality of the *imago Dei* and into the bold hypothesis of 'God relating to all that is not God'. Scholars regard Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* as "the most important work in Christian theological anthropology to emerge in decades, a model of theological reflection at its best and a work of astonishing theological virtuosity" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009). Kelsey himself thinks that "this book is "pushing a line", in that it is "not traditional". Indeed, as he points out (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009),

> [T]raditionally, Christians have read the Bible; they tend to see it as, in some way, one long story. Beginning: God creates. Middle: human beings mess up, get estranged from God, God intervenes to reconcile them to God. Ending: God transforms everything in the *eschaton.* One narrative. I'm wanting to argue that, in fact, it may be one narrative, but it's got three strands that simply can't be conflated with one another – so that the three you've distinguished I try to treat as distinct narratives, and I try to justify doing that with some care. But they can't be separated from one another either.

Interestingly, Kelsey identifies two types of people that his project addresses, namely "those who identify themselves with Christian communities and their traditions of thought and practice", and "those people who are for any reason interested in what Christians propose as answers to anthropological questions, and why they say such things" (2009:3). Moreover, Kelsey admits that his project was even initially intended to function as a intertraditional "bridge-building project" (2009:7) for thinking on what it means to be a human being – an endeavour he abandoned in favour of giving a concrete formulation of "the theological end of the bridge" (2009:7). Indeed, David Kelsey says, "I am concerned that a theological anthropology be so constructed that it is hospitable to those truths that come from the sciences about what it is to be human" (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009). For a thesis that would see in Kelsey's project the opportunity and challenge of appropriating his three proposals in

another way, this is important, since, I would argue, the project was probably constructed in such a way as to make creative engagement with it possible from the very beginning.

When asked which thinkers in the Christian traditions he found himself returning to again and again, Kelsey answered in an interview that he finds himself in regular theological conversation with John Calvin and Karl Barth. Furthermore, when asked in this same interview, "What kind of scholarship would you say you are reacting against, in putting forward this thesis?", Kelsey responded (Westminster John Knox Press Radio interview with David Kelsey, 2009):

> Well, I think that one of the things I worry about and was trying to think through is the increasing evidence – especially the so-called higher kinds of human capacities, not just rational but emotional, the ones that are a lot more complicated than other creatures seem to have, are just inseparable from the physiology and physical functioning of the nervous system. So a classic philosophical issue called the 'mind-body problem' has become a very fascinating and increasingly complicated topic among philosophers, and also among neuroscientists. And that has all kinds of implications for pictures of human being that traditionally divided us into bodies and souls.

Kelsey's project argues convincingly not only that human beings' reality and worth and value and identity lie eccentrically in the triune God's active relating to them, but does this within a broader framework that may, from his project, lend itself to be appropriated more broadly. Indeed, God's three ways of relating to humans can form the basis not only of God's relating to human beings, but also earth and her ecology (cf. Kelsey, 2009:563). Therefore, in chapters 1 to 6 of this thesis, the following has been established. Eccentric existence as existence constituted outside of the personal selves of all living beings is core to all of life. Kelsey's project displays an affinity for 'life' – this is particularly evident through the way that the three parts are described consistently as certain ways of living (God's relating to create as living on borrowed breath, God's relating to draw into eschatological consummation as living on borrowed time, God's relating to reconcile as living by another's death). Through God's relating to all of life, or to all that is not God (in Kelsey's terms), both human and nonhuman existence are eccentrically constituted. This constitution is not only personal, but also public. God's relating to all of life assumes community, in that it is the triune God relating in every instance that establishes the importance of community for existence. Human existence is constituted in

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communion ("community-in-communion", as Kelsey would say (2009:539)) with living, both human and nonhuman, community. However, not merely through God's relating creatively, but also through God's drawing into eschatological consummation and reconciling through creation's multiple estrangements does God relate to all that is not God. The structure and implications of the threefold proposal of God relating guide the reader to understanding living as eccentric existence. Specifically, Kelsey argues that the patterns and dynamics involved in the particularities of the incarnation and Jesus' life specifically could guide the structuring of his theological anthropology, and therefore so too the structuring of a basis for an ecological theology in this thesis.

This chapter has the specific goal to apply what has been said in chapter 1 to 6 in broad strokes to the earth and her ecology. It will commence with a discussion on anthropological ecological theology, which will be followed by deliberations on the theological idea of 'God relating' as basis for ecological theology and the images and understanding of the triune God that relates in Kelsey's work. Thereafter attention will be paid to eccentric living, which is situated between mystery and glory, and this chapter concluded.

7.2 Anthropological ecological theology

Ecological theology may be regarded as a next wave of contextual theology. It joins liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, womanist theology and various indigenous theologies in the quest for a theology which can respond to the challenges of our time. While all theologies reflect the contexts within which they are situated, contextual theologies are, for better or for worse, attempts to articulate and address their social contexts self-consciously and explicitly.

Conradie's (2005a:1) helpful description of ecological theology as contextual theology points to the double nature of ecological theology, as response to the challenges of a worldwide ecological crisis, through embodying both "a Christian critique of the cultural habits underlying ecological destruction" (Conradie, 2005a:1) ánd "a Christian critique of Christianity" itself (Conradie, 2005a:1). Both Conradie (2005a:2) and Cone (2001:30) see the core of the environmental crisis as having to do with exploiting and consumerist culture and cultural values – and therefore argue that "[t]he quest for economic justice is a quest for environmental justice" (Conradie et al, 2001:140) – as much as it has to do

with nature or the environment. Conradie et al (2001) argues for an emerging environmental awareness in South Africa, entailing both "a broad recognition that human well-being is dependent on the well-being of the land" (2001:138) and "a realization that the problems poor people experience on a daily basis are essentially environmental problems" (2001:138). Indeed, James Cone (2001:23) sees the fight for justice for the earth and justice for marginalised and oppressed people as "the fight for justice for life in all its forms" – one which, in his North American context (in our South African context as well?), has seen a separation in the fight for the dignity of all human beings and for the whole earth. In his words, "[r]acial and economic justice has been at best only a marginal concern in the mainstream environmental movement" (Cone, 2001:24), while environmental justice has often equally been marginalised in the concern for equality within humankind. Conradie and others (2001:140 – 141) have pointed out that eco-justice is only just beginning to emerge in South African civil society through such initiatives as the Environmental Justice Networking Forum.[168]

Ecological theological books and research are focused on the importance of the world and creation and nature and ecology and the environment, and deem these as core to its enterprise. However, as has been pointed out, often a contrast or polemic relationship with anthropology is introduced when the impetus of ecological damage, destruction and death is ascribed to the consequences of humanity's way of relating to the earth. Exploitation, wastage and consumer culture are some of the dimensions that characterise the proposed relationship, and so both the responsibility and the blame for ecological degradation is laid before humankind's ways of life and living. Ecological theologies' concern for anthropocentrism in theological anthropologies is widely recorded[169] and, one might add, probably well-founded. However, Christian doctrine is, in many ways, deeply anthropological. Anthropology, in a sense, stands at the heart of Christian theology, since through it theology is worked out and systematised with regards and in relation to humankind. Christian theology, after all, seeks to address humankind's relationship to God primarily, as a species that have deliberately sought to systematise

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[168] Which they describe as "a loose alliance of more than five hundred nonprofit, community-based, and non-governmental organizations" (Conradie et al, 2001:140).

[169] Projects in ecofeminism are particularly helpful in highlighting this – cf. works by such theologians as Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992) and Sallie McFague (1993).

and engage with the experience of the mystery that is God. Gordon Kaufman has pointed to the close relationship of anthropology to theology, and "takes it for granted that the biblical-classical theological tradition has been overwhelmingly anthropocentric in its approach to nature" (Santmire, 1985:5). Indeed, even "the great words of the Christian vocabulary – sin, salvation, forgiveness, repentance, hope, faith, love, righteousness – have to do primarily with humanity and with relationships between humans" (Santmire, 1985:5). Moreover (Santmire, 1985:5),

> Kaufman points to the fundamental affinity of God and humanity in Christian thought: humanity was created by God 'in the image of God. Ultimate reality then was appropriately thought of in anthropomorphic terms; and nature was seen appropriately for many centuries as having significance chiefly insofar as it mirrored aspects of the human predicament of the human relationship with God.

Upon this view, ecological theology as contextual theology, in a proposed polarised relationship to theological anthropology, becomes problematic in a second way, in that the relevance of ecological theology's own relationship to Christian theology runs into serious consideration. If ecological theology stands in polarised relationship to theological anthropology, and if humankind stands at the heart of Christian doctrine, then one would be justified in asking which deep theological resources are left to engage with in ecological theological study. The more radical question would be whether there could be something like a Christian ecological theology at all. And so, often the greatest focus in ecological theology consequently falls on the doctrine of creation, so that any and all texts and doctrines remotely friendly to the causes of ecological dignity and caretaking bears the burden for substantiating and legitimising most theological research in this area. I would argue that this limits ecological theology and ecotheological contributions not merely in its research, but also in the agency it has to stand at the heart of the Christian doctrine. Therefore, as Conradie (2005a:2) points out,

> Ecological theology certainly requires a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine. It cannot be narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology only, but also calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith, including the trinity, God as Father, creation, humanity, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments, and Christian hope.

Even more, a doctrine of creation may be core to theological anthropology. Conradie (2005a:10) quotes a chapter by Kelsey (1985:192) in the following way: "theological anthropology will be unable to do justice to the material dimensions of human life until it

has recovered a full-blown doctrine of creation as a mode of relation to God other than a relationship in consciousness". Indeed, as Conradie (2005a:53) warns, the opposite to anthropocentric understandings of the earth and her ecology may also be true: "It is an indictment of ecological theologies that the obvious theological strategy to guard against human alienation from the earth community is so often overlooked." Ecological theology that would claim to attempt a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine would therefore need to take great care in the way that it distinguishes between dualities in that which God relates to, if it would offer itself as nuanced and preliminary engagement with Christian tradition. David Kelsey's recently published project in theological anthropology, *Eccentric Existence* (2009), offers opportunities for just such a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine with an eye to ecological theology, especially if "[e]cological theology has to be more than environmental ethics or a revisited theology of creation" (Conradie, 2005a:2). By employing Kelsey's theological (anthropological) framework, it may be possible not to shy away from anthropological concerns and interests, in fear of marginalising ecological concerns or legitimising ecological destruction, while at the same time placing ecology and anthropology within a theological hypothesis of 'God relating' that speaks to both in a nuanced and well-balanced manner. Just as the ground and meaning of all living beings cannot be understood anthropocentrically, so too the ground and meaning of the identities of human living beings cannot be understood anthropocentrically, in Kelsey's project. If it is assumed, for instance, that "human intentional objects of practices of love-as-neighbor are themselves divine" then human personal bodies are distorted by "forcing them into roles and laying on them expectations that they cannot possibly fulfill" (2009:823). Thus human living beings themselves cannot be understood anthropocentrically, as being ends in themselves – and, therefore, so too, the ground and meaning of nonhuman living beings cannot be understood anthropocentrically, "as though they had no reality or significance apart from human purposes and projects" (2009:823).

Kelsey's theological framework is particularly helpful due to two movements that could prove constructive for an ecological theology. The first is, of course, the theological framework itself that provides a helpful description of the existence of living beings. On the one hand, Kelsey's core theological idea – 'God relating' – is available for

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a variety of interpretations, and particularly accessible to ecological theology, as argued in chapters 2 to 6. Secondly, Kelsey's own interpretation of human being with and within this particular theological framework provides some guidance on how to concretely interpret and situate understandings of living beings – in short, how to draw out the theological implications of the theological idea of 'God relating' with regards to human beings. Both these moves are crucial to engaging Kelsey's project with the aim of constructing a basis for ecological theology, not only for providing a solid theological framework with which to understand and interpret theological proposals – such as God relating to the earth and her ecology in threefold manner – but also give some insight into a helpful understanding of ecological theology to theological anthropology.

7.3　'God relating' as basis for ecological theology

David Kelsey's entire 1000-page project is built upon the thesis that God relates to all that is not God. Kelsey's proposal that human beings be understood as part of all that is not God, related to by God, may not, however, be an altogether new or novel theological idea. Wolfgang Pannenberg, in his *Systematic Theology* (1994) writes tellingly of the self-distinction of the Son from the Father that forms the basis for all that is not God to be distinct from their Creator. The self-distinction of Jesus from the Father, whereby Jesus lets God be the one God as Father and Creator over against himself, forms the origin for all that is different in creation – both from the Father and from each other. This self-distinction of Jesus forms the basis for the groundedness of creation and creatureliness in the Son, in that, as the human existence of the Son is grounded in the eternal Son, so he is "the basis of the distinction and independent existence of all creaturely reality" (Pannenberg, 1994:22 – 23). Indeed, the self-distinction of Christ, as principle of otherness, flows from the possibility as a result of his freedom to move out of the unity of the divine life, and as such not only forms the origin of the existence of creaturely reality (as totally independent from God), but also expresses the inherent unity of the Trinity (through the Spirit) (Pannenberg, 1994:29 – 30). Indeed, the description of the triune God that relates is not new either. Pannenberg, again, links the existence of the world to the reality of God in the doctrine of creation, by means of divine action, which leads him to define the divine origin of the world as creation. As such, "[t]he world is a product of an

act of God" (Pannenberg, 1994:1) This begs the question of God's trinitarian relation and activity in creation, and Pannenberg is of the opinion that "[t]he acts of the trinitarian persons in their mutual relations must be sharply differentiated from their common outward actions." This means that while the inward works of the Trinity is conceived of as distinguishable or separable, the outward works are regarded as inseparable (Pannenberg, 1994:2 – 4). The omnipotent freedom of divine creating, in that the divine love has freedom as its origin, forms the basis of the contingency of the world both as whole and in individualities. Not only love, however, but also goodness (which is not different from the love with which the Father loves the Son from all eternity), since "[t]he very existence of the world is an expression of the goodness of God", in that the love of the Father is directed at the Son as well as all creatures (Pannenberg, 1994:20 – 21). Therefore neither Kelsey's proposal that God relates to all that is not God, nor his description of the trinitarian activity of God in such relating, can be wholly original or novel.

Moreover, if Kelsey's argument for understanding all that is not God as related-to-by-God is in no way new or original, then so too his three proposals that God relates to create, God relating to draw into eschatological consummation and God relating to reconcile is probably not new either. In his book *God and World in the Old Testament* (2005), Terence Fretheim seeks to contribute to the conversation around the proper role for creation in reflections by and together with church and theology. Fretheim focuses on three overlapping dimensions of creation (or, what he calls, "three interrelated points of reference" (Fretheim, 2005:5)), namely originating, continuing and completing creation. By originating creation the author refers to God as source of creation, in that he brings heaven and earth into being; also, not only the origins of the physical universe is connected with this point, but also the origins of various orders of life, such as social, cultural and national order. By continuing creation the author has in mind not only God's establishment of the initial infrastructure of the world, but also God's own preservation or sustenance of creation (not including 'micromanaging', however). By completing creation the author means to point to elements of incompleteness that are inherent to created existence, in that the world was created "good" but not perfect. This creates the possibilities for further creativity and creation, and apparently invites partners to partake

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in God' own creation acts. These three dimensions of creation structure Fretheim's entire argument of a relational theology of creation, and by means of certain texts he steadily works through these dimensions of creation in his book. Kelsey's own threefold proposal, discussed in great detail in chapters 3 to 5, draws on a similar idea of the existence of living, created beings. Fretheim moves especially close to Kelsey's thought when he argues that "God's presence and activity in the life of the world must be conceived in relation to the history of the nonhuman as well as that of the human" (Fretheim, 2005:278). Finally, he argues for the interrelatedness, interconnected and interaction of God and human and nonhuman creation right through is book, which culminates in his discussion of vocation of human and nonhuman creation or creatures in the last chapter. This provides a fitting end to a great book, in that it points toward the future of creation: toward the possibilities and potentialities (in Jürgen Moltmann's words) for God opening up creation to partners and others and otherness. It is in this contingency and relationality of creation that human and nonhuman vocation finds its proper place, a place as part of the community of God's own creatures.

What *is* unique in Kelsey's contribution to theological dialogue on human being is particularly his drive towards arguing that theocentric and christocentric understandings of human beings ultimately lead to understanding them as eccentric living beings. It has been the aim of this thesis to engage the proposal that God relates to all that is not God in particular ways in order to investigate whether it could serve as basis for ecological theology, centered on the notion of 'eccentricity'. For Kelsey, subjects are not to be understood either subjectively (with what he describes as 'the Kantian turn to the subject') or objectively (by objectifying subjects), but eccentrically, and therefore, apart from his own reservations and concerns regarding anthropocentrism in his project, a case for anthropocentric understandings of human beings – and therefore, from his project, all living beings – would be difficult, if not impossible, to make. For Kelsey, the pivot around which his project turns is theocentricity, the triune God Godself. God reveals Godself in the person of Jesus Christ, and therefore his project is (also) christocentric. All that is not God, including the earth and her ecology, exists solely from and by God's relating to them – the God revealed in Jesus Christ – and in this way he understands all that is not God as existing eccentrically, from God's relating to all that is not God. The

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earth and her ecology finds her reality and worth and being and value in the triune God, revealed in his son, Jesus Christ.

To be busy with Christian doctrine and dogmatics is therefore, in one sense, to be busy with anthropology – epistemic anthropocentrism even, if one follows Kelsey in this regard. An ecological theology that would actively seek to estrange or distance itself from theological anthropology would not only create endless problems for itself with regards to the place and role of human ethical behaviour toward the environment (environmental ethics) or understanding the place of humanity within creation (apologetics), but also sabotage the logic of its own theological beliefs in the process. Engaging David Kelsey's theological anthropology for constructing a basis for ecological theology is one response to and within the ecological crisis that may provide ecclesial communities as well as those interested in Christian beliefs with the theological language to talk and think together in helpful ways that do not succumb to such dualisms and divisions. Language, Heidegger would remind us, is the house of being, and therefore clear and informed thinking on the conceptual frameworks employed – most especially within a thesis that needs to deal with the relationship of ecological theology to theological anthropology – is crucial. The conceptual choice for 'living beings' throughout this thesis (augmented, where necessary, with references to 'life' and 'all of life') has proved fruitful and helpful in moving towards applying Kelsey's proposal to 'the earth and her ecology'. Indeed, ecological theology's concern for 'life' resonates very strongly with Kelsey's concern for 'life', which provides an important bridge between his theological anthropology and an ecological theology that would be based on his theological framework. Again, then, it comes to the fore that a core concern in the relationship of ecological theology and theological anthropology is the language employed, as argued in chapters 1 and 2.

Unfortunately, his project itself does not engage much with other theological voices in theological anthropological research and thinking (though it makes extensive use of certain voices at certain points, particularly authoritative biblical exegetes), which ties it closely to similar critique that is often leveled at the Yale School of theological thinking in the USA.[170] In his influential article on two types of narrative theology[171],

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[170] Mark Wallace, in a chapter entitled 'The New Yale Theology' (1990:87 – 110), argues for "an emerging consensus among the theology faculty of Yale University and Divinity School" after the publication of

Gary Comstock describes the tension between two distinct theological groups or schools or camps of thinking. The first group he describes as 'pure narrative theologians' (1987:688), loosely identified with Yale:

> [T]hose tied to, or inspired by, what has gone on in New Haven: the antifoundational, cultural-linguistic, Wittgensteinian-inspired descriptivists. Frei, Lindbeck, Hauerwas and David Kelsey believe narrative is an autonomous literary form particularly suited to the work of theology. They oppose the excessive use of discursive prose and abstract reason, insisting that Christian faith is best understood by grasping the grammatical rules and concepts of its texts and practices.[172]

The second group he describes as 'impure narrative theologians' (1987:688), loosely identified with Chicago[173]:

> [T]hose with loyalties to, or sympathies with, what has gone on in the Second City: the revisionist, hermeneutical, Gadamerian-inspired correlationists. Ricoeur, Tracy, Hartt, and McFague agree with their purist cousins that stories are a critical and neglected genre in which important religious truths and practices are communicated. But they deny narrative unique theological status.

The three rifts in the family of narrative theologians, in Comstock's words, are with regards to (1) describing of Christianity (1987:694 – 698), (2) explaining Christianity (1987:698 – 703), and (3) justifying Christianity (1987:703 – 709).[174] Kelsey's *Eccentric*

George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (1984). Herholdt (1992:4) describes this consensus as a postliberal theology – he adds that the most well-known theologians that are associated with postliberal theology are either graduates of or colleagues at Yale Divinity School. Kelsey, interestingly, is both – he received his B.D., M.A. ánd Ph.D. from Yale, and shortly after he received lastmentioned (in 1964) was appointed as Assistant Professor in Theology (in 1965). He has been a Professor at Yale ever since.

[171] He describes narrative theology as "reflection on religious claims embedded in stories, ...one of the most significant currents of late twentieth century thought" (1987:687). The reason that it has remained in public academic dialogue, he says, "is because of the quality of the minds it has managed to attract: Paul Ricoeur, Hans Frei, David Tracy, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, Julian Hartt, Sallie McFague, Johann Baptist Metz" (1987:687) – and David Kelsey (1987:688).

[172] Indeed, "[i]n the last fifteen years or so, much of the ferment in American biblical hermeneutics has been caused by four theologians at Yale – Hans Frei, Paul Holmer, George Lindbeck, and David Kelsey – who have published a number of books and articles that have programmatically outlined a counterpoint to traditional academic and apologetic theologies. The Yale theologians cooperatively are attempting to forge a biblical alternative to mainstream theological liberalism that eschews both confessionalism and fundamentalism. Along with the hermeneutical programs of Barth and Ricoeur, I find the Yale postliberal alternative to be a welcome development as it seeks to redirect the Christian community's vision back to its scriptural sources and to the Bible's distinctive, even unique, vision of reality" (Wallace, 1990:87 – 88).

[173] As Herholdt (1992:5) points out, Yale is normally contrasted with Chicago, which, in popular opinion, is the symbol and heir to the liberal theological tradition.

[174] Comstock concludes his article as follows (1987:711): "Purists should be less resistant to talk about truth, and impurists should be more resistant to explanatory flight."

Existence reflects the position of the Yale school in all three of these topics.[175] Thus, although it is not the focus of Kelsey's study, and even though he himself admits to it that he did not aim to engage actively, persistently and consistently with other theological voices in the academic field – rather, he would say, he aimed to put what he thought on paper – an engagement with more authoritative contributions would have made critical engagement with him easier. However, the choice of minimal engagement with other theological (and especially non-Yale!) voices in the field of theological anthropology is a deliberate one for Kelsey.[176] Furthermore, one would probably be unfair to deny Kelsey any creative engagement with other theological voices in his book, and perhaps the sheer size of the study itself limits any such further engagements, but that the book itself needs to and has to be engaged creatively is certain.[177]

Kelsey describes his project as an exercise in secondary theology, concerned with the logic of Christian beliefs, with a focus thinking and understanding of the triunity of

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[175] Wallace (1990:87 – 88; footnote 3), however, does not think that Kelsey can be easily grouped with his Yale colleagues. In his words: "Kelsey's theological work has been more descriptive, and less constructive, than that of his Yale associates, making a comparison of his systematic thought with theirs more difficult. While Kelsey's own work on Barth's hermeneutic in the *Uses of Scripture* has undergirded his colleagues' narrative approach to theology, and while he too highlights the Bible's special 'logic' or 'patterns,' my sense is that Kelsey's theological vision is less intratextual and more pluralistic than that of his colleagues". However, I would argue, *Eccentric Existence* ultimately becomes the more constructive magnum opus of Kelsey.

[176] This issue has been touched upon in chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis as well. In an important interview on Westminster John Knox Press Radio, the interviewer commented on exactly this: "Yes, David, I did notice in this book how much of this book, so much of it, is your thought. I mean sure, sure, you've drawn from other sources… but this is very original, there is not a whole lot of dependence on other anthropologies and theologies. This is very much original." Kelsey's response to this assessment was as follows: "Thank you, because that was the goal. I've spent about the first half of my career doing studies of theology, writing books and articles about other theologians' treatment of this or that issue. And then I came to a point where I thought, 'Well, okay that's fine, but you want to try say something yourself – and so, instead of writing about theology, you just ought to write some theology. And quit talking about how to do it if you were ever to get around to doing it, and start doing it.'" He proceeds: "When I started to write this thing I was doing it in conversation with other theologians, but I realised that I was not going to get anywhere that way because so much space would be devoted to trying to give a fair explication of somebody else, and then try to explain why I think that needs to be modified. So, instead of going that route, I just set out, 'Well, here's what I think, and let me suggest this to you' – becomes the tone of voice I want to have all the way through." He concludes: "It is, in a way, a book, I hope, long on argument and short on information about other people".

[177] One such engagement is the proceedings of the mentioned symposium on *Eccentric Existence* in the January (2011) issue of the journal *Modern Theology*. Scholars such as David Ford and John Milbank engage with Kelsey's book in a variety of different articles, which contain foci ranging from 'Thomistic Kabbalah' to Anselm (cf. Thiel (2011), Buckley (2011), Pickstock (2011), Ford (2011), McDougall (2011), Schumacher (2011), Bucur (2011), McLaughlin (2011), Milbank (2011) – including a response to the symposium by Kelsey himself (2011)).

God and God's relating to all that is not God. Kelsey argues that Christian canonical Holy Scripture is a crucial part to practices of secondary theology, especially within ecclesial communities. In one sense, then, Kelsey's project can also be described as public theology, concerned with the public and the public practices of ecclesial communities. His concern for the unsubsitutable personal identities of human living beings indicates the intimate link between the public and the personal for him in his project – an ideal link for an ecological theology that would, itself, seek to be an expression of public, lived theology. Though engaging an anthropology to address ecological concerns by way of theological inquiry may not be an original research interest, what is original and in need of more research is Kelsey's proposal that all of life, all living beings, exists eccentrically, outside of themselves. For the earth and her ecology in crisis, especially with an eye to contexts where exploited human beings and exploited environments form a nexus, Kelsey's thinking on the theological eccentricity of all that exists may be enormously helpful. Ecological theology's focus on life and living beings resonates with Kelsey's idea of God relating, which describes the heart of what Kelsey understands as the eccentricity of living beings. Therefore, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically: God relates to all that is not God to create the earth and her ecology, to draw the earth and her ecology into eschatological consummation, and to reconcile the earth and her ecology to God.

God relates to create the earth and her ecology. God relates to the earth and her ecology creatively ('living on borrowed breath') which entails that God relates "to" the earth and her ecology through the medium of address. The ultimate context of the earth and her ecology is therefore that of being directly and indirectly addressed by the triune God, through which it responds to its being called into being. The call that Kelsey describes, and therefore God's creation of the earth and her ecology, is public and communal, involving both the radical freedom of otherness and the intimate nearness of sameness. God relates to bless the earth and her ecology creatively in God's life-giving address, by enabling it to be alive and to bring forth life. The earth and her ecology, as particular instances or forms of life, is dynamic, persistent and frail. Creaturely reality involves being and having living bodies, through being created as dying life. The earth and her ecology not only lives, but is enabled to flourish, on borrowed breath. In this

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way, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically, finding its reality and worth and being and value outside of itself, in God's relating to bless it creatively.

God relates to draw the earth and her ecology into eschatological consummation. God relates by drawing the earth and her ecology into eschatological consummation ('living on borrowed time') which stipulates that God relates "between" the earth and her ecology through the medium of promise. The ultimate context of the earth and her ecology is therefore that of being drawn into God's own triune life and being called to participate in the glory of God. The earth and her ecology is defined by the absolute promise of eschatological blessing and the implicit promise of transformation in the present and in the future, which is God's reaching out to all that is not God (also described as the *missio Dei*). The earth and her ecology, as particular instances or forms of life, stands under both God's election (or 'yes') and God's judgment (or 'no'). The earth and her ecology not only lives, but is enabled to flourish, on borrowed time. In this way, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically, finding its reality and worth and being and value outside of itself, in God's relating to bless it eschatologically.

God reconciles the earth and her ecology to Godself. God relates by reconciling the earth and her ecology through their multiple estrangements ('living by another's death') and entails that God relates "amongst" the earth and her ecology through the medium of exchange. The ultimate context of the earth and her ecology is therefore that of being reconciled to God through its multiple estrangements and being drawn into the divine life of God Godself. Incarnation and what Kelsey calls 'exchange' – God incarnated in Jesus exchanging Godself with the earth and her ecology amidst processes of violence and destruction to transform their living death into true life – defines the earth and her ecology in this mode of relating.[178] The earth and her ecology is reconciled with herself and with living beings and all of life through their reconciliation by and in God. God's reconciliation is liberation and transformation of the earth and her ecology within particular times and places, within its particular contexts. The life of the earth and her ecology is therefore no longer tied to the fulfillment of certain functions or duties (or even vocations) that it may be subjected to or expected of, but lies solely in the worth and

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[178] By way of Conradie's gripping description, "[t]hat Christ became flesh means that God became involved in a world infested by murder, rape and hatred" (2005a:66).

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value that it finds in living and existing by the life and death of another, of God incarnate, of Jesus the Son. The earth and her ecology not only lives, but is enabled to flourish, by another's death. In this way, the earth and her ecology exists eccentrically, finding its reality and worth and being and value outside of itself, in God's relating to reconcile it through its multiple estrangements.

Kelsey makes use of the metaphor of a 'triple helix' to sketch an image of the underlying relationships between the three proposals of his project. His postponing of discussion of the *imago Dei* is a significant move for a thesis inquiring into whether his project can serve as basis for ecological theology, since it avoids many of the pitfalls that traditional theological anthropologies may encounter and opens up theological anthropology in a significant way for engagement with the theological idea of 'God relating'. For Kelsey the inherent dignity and worth of living beings, human and nonhuman, in all their mystery – whether involving the mysteries of sin, sins and evil, or the mysteries of life and living – and complexity and (bio)diversity, is to be understood as being *eccentric*, situated and constituted in God's relating to all that is not God.

The very same earth and ecology that is in crisis today is the earth and ecology that is related to by the triune God, in freedom and out of love. The earth and her ecology, exploited and violated, is the earth that is endowed with God's eschatological and creative blessing. Life on earth and within the earth and her ecology is blessed, and can therefore flourish. The earth and her ecology, in all its mystery and mysteries, are not only given and called to be alive and bring forth life, not only transformed and liberated, not only freed and reconciled – the earth and her ecology are also glorified. For Kelsey, living is enacted on borrowed breath, borrowed time, and by another's death: in short, as dying lives, as living by way of things that do not belong to those beings that live and are not inherent to them. The earth and her ecology, in all its mystery and glory, are related to by the triune God, out of freedom and love.

7.4   The triune God that relates

Kelsey sees a particular characterisation of God as basis for his theological anthropology[179], and it is this basis that this thesis on ecological theology seeks to appropriate. To underscore this point, Kelsey argues that "in a theological anthropology organized in this fashion, it is clear that how God's ways of relating to humankind are understood, and how God Godself is understood, shape how the anthropological proposals are framed and organized" (2009:1008 – 1009). An ecological theology organised in this fashion, too, would arguably be shaped by how God Godself is understood, if it too has to do with the logic of beliefs – even if its focus is shifted from human being to the earth and her ecology. For Kelsey, "[t]he God who relates to all else is the triune God" (2009:915). In keeping with the concern for the lack of appropriate and proper trinitarian theologies in ecological theological thinking (Conradie, 2005a:51 – 78), Kelsey's project may yet prove valuable in providing exactly that for a 21st century's context and challenges – especially for theologies that would engage in the public life and public issues of the various contexts in which it is practiced. Kelsey himself takes his cue from the Nicene Creed in this regard. He advocates for a trinitarian understanding of God, by which he means "any understanding of God that is accountable to the Nicene Creed... God is one substance in three persons" (2009:46), and describes the aim of his project as thinking "through the agenda of theological anthropology in a way shaped from beginning to end by the triunity of the God with whom we have to do" (2009:46). Indeed, for Kelsey, "Christianly appropriate understandings of God are Trinitarian" (2009:78), which, themselves, are "rooted in Christian communities' practice, fundamental to their common life" (2009:78). Conradie (2005a:65) agrees that the Nicene Creed "develops a thoroughly Trinitarian view of God as Creator" that, especially with regards to its Christological core, may be important to ecological theology. This is perhaps no more visible and relevant than "[t]he recognition that God's being is to-be-in-relationship calls for a rethinking not only of the human person and of social

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[179] David Kelsey's recent Warfield Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary (which took place 28 to 31 March 2011, under the title "Glory, Kingdom and Power: Stammering about God") further explores the doctrine of God that is implicit and presupposed in his theological anthropology, but not explicitly developed. No publications or video recordings of the lectures are available as to date, unfortunately, but that the proposed focus of the lectures will develop an important part of Kelsey's thinking is fairly certain.

relationships, but of all of reality… [for a]t the heart of reality is relationship, personhood and communion" (Conradie, 2005a:51).

Many theologians have argued that doctrines of creation or ecological theologies have much to gain by emphasising the relational dimension of living and life: the South African Council of Churches' *Climate Change* document (2009:xi) speaks of "a common task to live together on a planet that we share with each other, with people from other faith traditions and numerous other forms of life", Fretheim (2005) argues for a relational theology of creation, Bouma-Prediger (2001:174) argues "that everything is connected to everything else", Vischer (2007:7) argues for wise interaction with the whole of creation, Brown (1999:405 – 410) argues for an ecology of community, and so forth. Moltmann (1993:3; original italics), for instance, argues:

> To be alive means existing in relationship with other people and things. Life is communication in communion. And, conversely, isolation and lack of relationship means death for all living things, and dissolution even for elementary particles. So if we want to understand what is real *as* real, and what is living *as* living, we have to know it in its own primal and individual community, in its relationships, interconnections and surroundings.

Kelsey would not only agree with such an emphasis[180] but would understand this relation eccentrically, as specifically God relating to all that is not God in the very first instance, after which every relation and act of relating is interpreted and regarded as a response to God's initial, totally original relating to all that is not God.

The image of the trinitarian God as "an inviting, hospitable, spacious, inhabitable ecological community" (Conradie, 2005a:52) is, in Kelsey's project, a core part to the development of the three proposals of God's active relating. The triune God, the source of true life[181] of all that is not God, relates faithfully, consistently and persistently to the earth and her ecology. The triune God, the source of true life of all that is not God, relates to the earth and her ecology in freedom and love. The triune God, the source of true life of all that is not God, constitutes the earth and her ecology's reality, worth, value and identity eccentrically, as that which is living on borrowed breath, on borrowed time, and by another's death. The triune God, the source of true life of all that is not God, brings

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[180] Kelsey's usage of "community-in-communion" (2009:121) is remarkably close to Moltmann's "communication in communion" above, although Kelsey refers to God in this particular instance, whereas Moltmann refers to the interrelationships of created living beings.

[181] For Kelsey, God is described as the source of life in Genesis 2:4b – 3:24 (2009:294 – 295).

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forth the earth and her ecology from the being of God, whereafter it remains distinct from God (Conradie, 2005a:55). For Larry Rasmussen (Hessel, 1996:268) this means that "[t]here is indeed an integrity about creation, for better or for worse". For Conradie (2005a:56) this implies that

> Creatures do not have dignity and integrity only because they are extensions of the divine being
> or because the divine being is present in them. Creation has a worth in and of itself.

Ecological theology that engages with Kelsey's theological framework would not agree if the dignity and integrity of creatures and the worth of creation would be absolute qualities inherent in created beings, but would move in a similar direction if this statement would mean that creation would have worth in and of itself only eccentrically, and therefore in a secondary sense. The earth and her ecology and human beings and all that God relates to exists only eccentrically, and without God's constant active relating to them would cease to exist. Distance between God and all that is not God is crucial in Kelsey's work but need not imply that eternal, absolute value is deposited in created living beings in the moment of their creation. As Kelsey points out, this may actually be quite dangerous, especially in dealing with issues surrounding human dignity (cf. 2009:275 – 280). Eccentricity, for Kelsey, *safekeeps* the dignity of that which God relates to by positing value and worth and dignity and reality not in the subjects themselves, but within God's relating to them. This does not mean that living beings and all of life ought to be understood as extensions of the triune God's being or because God is somehow present in them, but it does mean that dignity is understood theocentrically and therefore *ex-centrically*, grounded and centered outside living beings.

An important consequence of such a trinitarian characterisation of God for ecological theology has to do with theological language. Language, as has been argued in chapter 1, shapes perception of the world – the earth and her ecology – and how we think about it, respond to it, act towards it. Therefore the way in which relationship between the earth and her ecology and its value and worth and dignity is not unimportant, but may have unforeseen consequences and implications. Kelsey ascribes the value of the earth and her ecology to God's active relating to it, which is contra the way in which the global economy values the earth and her ecology. **S**outh African society in particular is torn between a sense of despair in the light of and hope in spite of the socio-economic

challenges faced in Sub-saharan Africa, such as a widening gap between rich and poor, centralisation of economic power and globalisation of consumer culture (Conradie, 2000:101 – 103). The context of living in a society and world dominated by the global market present unique opportunities and daunting challenges especially to tapping into fresh and sustainable sources of true hope, especially if "[t]he dominant mood at the end of this century is shaped by the conviction, actively encouraged by the powerful, that there is no alternative to the system of the global market'" (Conradie, 2000:104; quoting Raiser, 1997:80). The South African Globalisation Project (Boesak et al, 2010:23) describes the global economy as follows, in reference to the World Communion of Reformed Churches' Accra Declaration (2004):

> Accra paints a disturbing picture of the contemporary global economic system, arguing that it is grounded in a belief system that idolizes "unrestrained competition, consumerism, unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth… ownership of private property… capital speculation, liberalization, and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and natural resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes and the unrestricted movement of capital."

Indeed (2010:23),

> We live in a world of harsh inequality, across and within nations, of ecological destruction, resource-driven wars, poverty, disease, and global economic injustices. This unjust global system is defended and protected by political and military might.

The economic context that is sketched above is also one assumed by Loren Wilkinson in his book, *Earthkeeping in the 90's*, even though this book was published thirty years prior to the abovementioned publication. In a chapter on 'Valuing Creation', Wilkinson (1980:237 – 254) grounds the value of the earth and her ecology in "the Creator's norms" (1980:239). Interestingly, he argues that "[t]he very concept of value seems to point outside of ourselves", even when valuing is emotive: "Usually we try to support our feelings of value by referring to transcendent norms, or at least by appealing to common opinion" (1980:238). He also points to the close connection of value with 'usefulness'. However, "[r]ecently", amongst both Christian and non-Christian thinkers, "we have seen signs of a return to notions of intrinsic value – to the idea that things are good because of what they are, not merely because they please use or are 'good for' something" (Wilkinson, 1980:238 – 239). Bringing this in conversation with dominant ideas on economic value, Wilkinson points out that "[m]uch of the intellectual history of

economics is the search for a way to value things"; a way of valuing things that centers on the idea of scarcity, and therefore defined by way of the market forces of supply and demand. As he points out, talking about the value of earth and her ecology (and life on the earth and within the earth's ecology?) is complex, especially when brought into conversation with global economic understandings of value and the earth and her ecology.

It would not seem that one would fare much better when inquiring into the dignity of the earth and her ecology in the world today. Leonardo Boff argues that "affirming the dignity of Earth" and limiting "our desire to exploit its potentialities" will remain empty rhetoric if the dimension of the sacred is not reclaimed (1997:115). In his words (1997:115),

> 'Dehallowing' has reduced the universe to something lifeless, mechanical, and mathematical, and the Earth to a mere warehouse of resources made available to human beings.

Moreover (1997:139),

> Without a spiritual revolution it will be impossible to launch a new paradigm of connectedness… anchored in the sacred and in God, alpha and omega of the principle of self-organization of the universe. This is where all sense of connectedness is fostered and this is the permanent basis for the dignity of Earth.

Others would respond differently to what they perceive to be a common challenge or task in the context of a global economic crisis: disconnect between God, humanity and earth. Indeed, Santmire (1985:9) understands 'ecology' as deeply relational, "pertaining to a system of interrelationship between God, humanity, and nature". In response, John Cobb would see the need to develop an "economics for community" (1992:81), Joseph Sittler would look to 'A Theology for Earth' (in response to what he calls the uprootedness of life and its resultant desymbolisation of our culture (2000:22), and Dieter Hessel and others would see the vital importance of a field guide for sustainable communities (1996:1 – 20). Kelsey does not respond directly to this perceived challenge or problem, but his theological idea of God relating to all that is not God does express a particular characterisation of God as triune Creator, Consummator and Reconciler of the earth and her ecology that has significant implications for how the value and dignity, but also the reality and identity, of the earth and her ecology – and all living beings on it and in it – is to be understood. For this thesis, it must, finally, be affirmed that the earth and her

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ecology exists eccentrically, between the mystery and the glory of the mysterious and glorious triune God that relates to it in threefold manner.

7.5   Eccentric living: between mystery and glory

The earth and her ecology is deeply relational, conceived of and grounded in God's relating to it. As Boff (1995:7) points out, in a description of ecology as 'new paradigm',

> Ecology has to do with the relations, interaction, and dialogue of all living creatures (whether alive or not) among themselves and with all that exists. This includes not only nature (natural ecology) but culture and society (human ecology, social ecology, and so on). From an ecological viewpoint everything that exists, co-exists. Everything that co-exists, pre-exists. And everything that co-exists and pre-exists subsists by means of an infinite web of all-inclusive relations. Nothing exists outside relationships. Ecology reaffirms the interdependence of beings, interprets all hierarchies as a matter of function, and repudiates the so-called right of the strongest. All creatures manifest and possess their own relative autonomy; nothing is superfluous or marginal. All being constitutes a link in the vast cosmic chain. As Christians, we may say that it comes from God and returns to God.

The life and existence of the earth and her ecology is eccentric, situated in the living, triune God's relating to all that is not God. Living on borrowed breath, borrowed time and by another's death is eccentric living. The connection of the earth and her ecology to the image of a womb that brings forth life expresses something of eccentric living in a striking way:

> Earth's is a slow womb. Life came late, with trauma. It continues by jerks and starts, dyings and beginnings.

This profound start to the part entitled 'Earth scan' in Rasmussen's book (1996:25) relays something of both the mystery and the glory that eccentric living entails. Indeed, this thesis has placed the emphasis squarely on the assumption that the earth and her ecology has to do with 'life', in the many ways that Kelsey's project contributes. However, as Cobb (1992:119 – 120) describes the story of life on the earth and within the earth's ecology,

> This planet has not always been alive. Indeed, as Richard Overman has reminded us, if we conceive the five billion years of the Earth's past as though recorded in ten volumes of five hundred pages each, so that each page records a million years, cellular life appears only in the eighth volume… Throughout the last two volumes life proliferated, creating an environment in which more complex forms of life could emerge and prosper. Both life and the capacity to

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> support life increased millennia after millennia. Human life entered the scene on a planet that was biologically very rich indeed… But only when we reach the last letter of the last word on the last page does humanity turn the tide against life; only then does the process of killing the planet begin.

For Kelsey, God's threefold relating is the giving of life, the proper context of which is the glory of God. In the words of Peter Scott, "we find ourselves in a common realm through which God shares God's life with creatures towards the glory of one and the completion of the other" (Conradie, 2005b:334). The earth and her ecology reflects and images the glory of God by living on borrowed breath. The earth and her ecology participates in the glory of God by living on borrowed time. The earth and her ecology witnesses to the glory of God by living by another's death. The earth and her ecology is, by virtue of God relating to it, magnificently glorious. The earth and her ecology, in all its eccentricity, is also deeply mysterious. The God that relates to all that is not God is the triune living mystery, inexhaustibly mysterious in God's being and life. God's own life describes the mystery of the earth and her ecology that God relates to – the glory and the incomprehensibility and the holiness of God's life comes to describe the glory and the incomprehensibility and the holiness of the life of the earth and her ecology. The earth and her ecology images, epistemologically and ontologically, the mystery of the triune God's own life, through living on borrowed breath, borrowed time and another's death. The earth and her ecology is mysterious in its eccentricity; the epistomological and ontological mystery and mysteriousness of the earth and her ecology does not lie in itself, much like its reality and worth and value and identity does not lie within itself, but is situated within God's own mystery and mysteriousness. Both mystery and glory describe the earth and her ecology, which, itself, lies within life and death: flourishing within dying life, and distorted within living death. The ultimate identity, worth, value, reality of all living beings, all of life, all human beings – all that is not God – is eccentric, situated in *mystery* and in *glory*. The life of the earth and her ecology is therefore eccentric, situated between the mystery of God and the glory of God that it images. Indeed, God calls the earth and her ecology to certain vocations (God relating to create), draws the earth and her ecology into participation within ultimate vocations (God relating in eschatological consummation) and meets the earth and her ecology where they are to liberate them into those vocations (God relating to reconcile).

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In his project, David Kelsey argues for understanding human beings eccentrically. This thesis is an attempt to drive Kelsey's argument further, in understanding all living beings and all of life eccentrically, as Kelsey himself implicitly does within the broader scope of his project. Thus it is not only for Kelsey's project to "elaborate theological anthropology whose systematic home is at once the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of eschatological consummation, and the doctrine of reconciliation without conflating any two of those doctrines into the third" (2009:902), but also for this thesis to emphasise the constructing of a basis for ecological theology that is situated not only in the doctrine of creation, but so too also in the doctrine of eschatological consummation and the doctrine of reconciliation – again, without a conflation of the narrative logics of the respective proposals. For Larry Rasmussen, "Habitat Earth [is] the only life form we know of thus far in the universe", so that "earth as understood in light of what my eventually be recognized as the most important scientific discovery of the twentieth century, that *nature, indeed creation, is a community*" (Hessel, 1996:268; original italics). For this thesis, the God-relatedness of the earth and her ecology forms the heart of 'eccentric living between mystery and glory'. Indeed, at the end of this thesis, and together with the 2002 African Regional Consultation on Environment and Sustainability's statement on the earth belonging to God, ecclesial communities are called upon to affirm – in eccentric faith, eccentric hope, and eccentric love, and in light of the God-relatedness of all of life and all living beings – that:

(1)   *The land given to us by God does not only belong to the present community* (*Climate Change*, 2009:75; original italics);

(2)   *The land does not belong to us as people. Instead, we belong to the land* (*Climate Change*, 2009:75; original italics);

(3)   *The land does not belong to itself. Ultimately, it belongs to its Creator, the one who sustains the Earth, and who will finally restore it* (*Climate Change*, 2009:75; original italics)

The belonging of the earth and her ecology, and the place of human living beings within it specifically, is an eccentric belonging, a belonging in and for the mystery and the glory that it images in the mysterious and glorious triune God. The earth and her ecology is in crisis, but the earth and her ecology is also, continuously and faithfully,

related to by God. The earth and ecology in crisis is therefore an eccentric earth and eccentric ecology, irrevocably caught up and defined by the mystery and the glory of the living triune mystery.

7.6   Conclusion

In the new century, environmental degradation will threaten the flourishing of life on earth. It is exactly within this threat to the flourishing of life on earth and within the earth's ecology (Conradie, 2000:294), the life and death struggle of the earth and her ecology (Moltmann, 1993:xiii), that the eccentricity of the earth and her ecology has to be affirmed. God relates to the earth and her ecology in three ways that sustains and blesses it to flourish, to blossom and to thrive, as mysterious living being that reflects the glory of the triune God. Engaging David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence* as basis for ecological theology is not only possible and valid, as chapters 2 to 6 show, but calls for various other engagements with it, not least with an eye toward theological environmental ethics and theological thinking on human dignity from his framework. Critical appropriations and study of theological language are core to engagements of this kind, but it is, fortunately or unfortunately, not enough. Gordon Kaufman insists (Santmire, 1985:6; quoting Kaufman, 1972:355) on the importance of theological thinking and logic:

> [T]he theological problem of nature is not simply one of rearranging emphases or details, lifting
> up certain motifs in the tradition that may have been neglected. It goes far deeper than that, into
> the logic of the central concepts of our religious tradition.

Kelsey's development and appropriation of the theological idea of 'God relating', built into the triple helix of God relating to create, God relating to draw into eschatological consummation, and God relating to reconcile, addresses exactly this: the logic of beliefs in the Christian tradition. This thesis, furthermore, represents an attempt to enter into the logic of the central concepts of our religious tradition and construct a basis for ecological theology from it, not only as a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine in light of the impending ecological crisis, but also with an eye to employing solid trinitarian thinking on the matter. For, as Sittler (2000:47) points out, doctrine is formulated in response to perceived threats or challenges, such as the ecological crisis of our day:

> [D]octrinal statement and development is confession-thinking to the glory of God amidst
> historical denials or pretensions which would usurp the glory. It has always been within the

clutch of a definite historical threat, or necessity, or a sheer intolerable malaise that the church has found her teaching voice. Doctrines are not born out of doctrines in an unchanging vacuum. Doctrines are evoked, clarified, refined, given force and precision within the challenge of exact circumstances.

Indeed, seeing as it becomes clearer every day that the earth finds herself and her inhabitants in an ever-growing crisis that has already impacted greatly, and will continue to impact greatly, upon the well-being of human and non-human communities alike, ecclesial communities need to discover and exercise their teaching voices anew. In the words of the late Lukas Vischer (2004:11):

In order to respond adequately to today's ecological crisis, it is essential for the churches to achieve clarity in their understanding of God's Creation and the destiny and vocation of human beings in it.

 The National Executive of the South African Council of Churches affirms that "climate change is not just a human tragedy but changes the very basis of survival on this planet" (*Climate Change*, 2009:vi). However, as Wilkinson (1980:10) articulates,

We confess these degradations of creation, yet they bewilder us. None of them came about out of malice. They are rather the result of carelessness: literally a lack of care for creation, a willingness to go about the legitimate business of building a human world without noticing the cost to God's earth. Yet in recent years we *have* noticed. The same gifts of wisdom and power – our science and technology – which have created many of the problems have also opened our eyes to the accompanying degradation.

The theological idea undergirding Kelsey's project, 'God relating', cannot accommodate a world view wherein a human world is built in a way that singularly affirms the inherent value and dignity – superiority, even – of human beings only. Existing eccentrically, outside of ourselves, is living on borrowed breath, living on borrowed time, and living by another's death, which situates human beings as those-related-to-by-God with all living beings and all of life, including the earth and her ecology. Kelsey's contribution to ecological theology may well be significant in this way, if one takes Paul Santmire's (1985:8) concern seriously:

Both extramurally and intramurally, Christian theologians today must attend to the theology of nature with a new vigor. But that theological undertaking must presuppose a critical appropriation of the received tradition. Otherwise we will doubtless continue to encounter a succession of new books, as we have in the last two decades, each of whose authors has freshly discovered the need for a new theology of nature but most of whose authors then proceed to devote themselves to that

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task generally unaware of either the strengths or weaknesses of more than two millennia of theological reflection about nature.

In concluding, two final remarks follow. Firstly, Kelsey's study provides great theological input in thinking on the place and reality of living beings related to by God, especially with regards to ecological theology. Needless to say, this thesis can only be an initial engagement with Kelsey's project, and assumes that many more creative engagements with his work will follow. Secondly, Kelsey's study does not only seem to succeed in serving as a basis for ecological theology, but provides ecological theology with an intense development of a key theological idea, namely that of 'God relating', by way of the notion of 'eccentricity'. Kelsey's three proposals – God relating to create all that is not God, to draw all that is not God into eschatological consummation, and to reconcile all to God – point to the earth and her ecology therefore having dignity, worth and value in itself only in a secondary sense, and that the source of the reality and identity of human living beings (God's threefold relating), is also the source of the worth and reality of all of life. Kelsey's project advocates neither optimism nor pessimism – especially not in the face of the ecological crisis – since "[b]oth are grounded in assessment of the dynamics and resources for radical social and moral change that are inherent in the quotidian" (2009:600) and are thus expressions of structural distortions. Rather, ecclesial communities are called upon to respond appropriately, publicly and communally, to God's threefold relating to all living beings and all of life, including human beings and the earth and her ecology: in eccentric faith, eccentric hope, and eccentric love. For the earth and her ecology, and all that is in it, belongs to the triune God, who is the source of true life for all that is not God.

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