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CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THE EARTH

Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology

T&T CLARK THEOLOGY

Edited by
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Christian Faith and the Earth

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Discourse on Christian Faith and the Earth

Ernst Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond
and Denis Edwards

Ecotheology as part of an ecological reform movement within Christianity

Christian ecotheology may be regarded as an attempt to retrieve the ecological wisdom embedded in the Christian tradition as a response to ecological destruction and environmental injustices.[1] However, it is also prompted by the widespread suspicion that the root causes of the crisis are related to the impact of Christianity (as pointed out in the somewhat exaggerated claims of early critics). That Christianity is deeply implied in the roots of ecological destruction is expressed in the intuition that there is a close correlation between countries where Christianity was well established during the industrial revolution and historical carbon emissions. Claims of 'causation' may be too strong, but recognition of association cannot be denied. For example, the association between neo-liberal capitalism and its closest religious analogues, namely right-wing evangelicalism (found, for example, in wealthy nations) and the theological legitimation of the prosperity gospel (found, for example, in contexts with upward social mobility) fosters the suspicion that there are examples where Christianity has had a negative impact on environmentally responsible practices.

Just as feminist theology engages in a twofold critique, that is, a Christian critique of sexist or patriarchal culture and a feminist critique of Christianity,

[1] The first two sections of this introduction draw heavily (and often verbatim) on several similar assessments of the nature of Christian ecotheology. See, most recently, E. M. Conradie, 'Contemporary Challenges to Christian Ecotheology: Some Reflections on the State of the Debate after Five Decades', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 147, pp. 105–22.

so ecotheology offers a Christian critique of the economic and cultural patterns underlying ecological destruction, and an ecological critique of Christianity. In other words, ecotheology is concerned not only with how Christianity can respond to environmental concerns. It participates in an ecological transformation of economic modes of production and cultural patterns of consumption, but it also offers Christianity an opportunity for renewal and reformation. Paradoxically, this reformation of Christianity itself may be the most significant contribution that Christian ecotheology can make to addressing (secular) environmental concerns. Ecotheology therefore includes an attempt to reinvestigate, rediscover and renew the Christian tradition in the light of the challenges posed by environmental destruction. As an academic discourse, ecotheology forms part of a comprehensive reform movement within Christianity. Such an ecological reformation of Christianity implies that there are significant flaws in the Christian tradition – or else a reformation would not be necessary. It also implies that these flaws can be corrected – or else a reformation would not be possible.[2]

A reformation cannot be organized; it lies beyond anyone's locus of control. It is therefore a gift to be received with gratitude but also with trembling. It is usually not welcomed, not even by its own supporters and prophets. It may commence anywhere (as the example of the Lutheran reformation or Vatican II illustrates) but will soon spread to other aspects of the Christian tradition (and will thus touch upon all theological sub-disciplines): reading the Bible, a retrieval and critique of Christian histories, revisiting Christian symbols, virtue ethics, applied ethics, ecclesial praxis, liturgical renewal, pastoral care, preaching, Christian formation and education, Christian mission and missionary projects. It is, therefore, necessarily comprehensive.

On this basis one may argue that ecotheology is not so much one form of doing theology alongside other forms of self-consciously contextual theology. It has become a dimension of all theological reflection in the sense that an environmental awareness may be relevant to almost every conceivable topic raised. In the same way, *all* theologies should be gender sensitive and liberatory. However, an ecological dimension of everything else is perhaps by now more readily recognized than in the case of other forms of contextual theology.

[2] See J. A. Nash, 'Towards the Ecological Reformation of Christianity', *Interpretation* 50/1 (1996), pp. 5–15.

Such an ecological reformation of the Christian tradition continuously calls for theological explanation. The need for explanation is born from both the polemic and the prophetic nature of any such reformation. The value of such explanations should not be underestimated since it can sustain an ecological reformation and ecological retrieval. The value should also not be exaggerated. New ideas and a recovery of lost traditions do not necessarily change the world (but profound visions may well do so over a longer term!). Ideas can easily become encapsulated in the consumerist market of ideas ('Buy this latest book on ecotheology!'). The same applies to the delivery of religious goods and services that saturate the market for religious experience. There is a large market for cheap religious products, while there may be only a small niche market for products where the cost of discipleship is high. The danger is that mainstream (apologetic) theology can respond to environmental challenges without recognizing that an ecological reformation touches upon the heart of Christian doctrine.

Conflicting discourses in ecotheology

Over the past five decades, Christian ecotheology has become increasingly varied. This may be associated with its geographic spread to all corners of the world and also to its impact in most confessional traditions. While fundamentalist and dispensationalist forms of Christianity may not be affected yet (even though this is where it is most required), evangelicals and Pentecostals alike have been calling for an ecological reformation of their own traditions.

Such diversity may also be found across the full range of theological sub-disciplines. Ecotheology is clearly not only a concern in the specialized branch of environmental ethics or in creation theology as a theme in systematic theology or biblical studies. Owing to increasing specialization, this diversity is also evident in terms of the theological gurus that are selected as a source of inspiration, wisdom and guidance. In different disciplines and traditions, scholars are turning to their own heroes, martyrs and saints to engage with the ecological dimensions of contemporary challenges. Moreover, Christian scholars draw on an even wider range of external conversation partners (interlocutors) to sharpen their reflections. Ecological concerns have by

now been addressed in conversation with the full range of other academic disciplines – anything from astrophysics to the biological sciences, the social sciences, the humanities and the arts. For Christian theology, as has always been the case, the dialogue with other religious traditions and philosophies remains crucial.

Such variety should be cause for celebration. However, due to the need for specialization, the rather amorphous and burgeoning field of Christian ecotheology is currently characterized by a number of distinct discourses, each with its own interlocutors, guilds and forms of rhetoric. These include at least the following:

- multifaith collaborative discourse on 'religion and ecology', for example in the context of the Forum of Religion and Ecology, where 'religion' serves as an umbrella term for various distinct theologies and 'Earth' (if not Gaia) for the one world within which various human cultures and religions have emerged[3];
- particular engagements in interfaith dialogue, for example indigenous theologies engaging with the ecological wisdom embedded in traditional African cultures and worldviews, Asian reflections on the integrity of life,[4] or Western theologies critically engaging with modernism and secularism;
- ecumenical discourse (for example in the context of the World Council of Churches) on ecojustice with regard to the threats of economic injustices and inequalities and ecological destruction (see the debates on a 'Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society' and on 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation')[5];
- numerous contributions to applied ethics on environmental themes such as climate change, biodiversity, biotechnology, food economics and issues related to non-human animals;
- discourse on an ecological biblical hermeneutics, for example in the context of the Earth Bible series and the Exeter project on the use of the Bible in environmental ethics and Christian praxis;

[3] See the essay by Heather Eaton in this volume.
[4] See the essay by Kim Yong-Bock in this volume.
[5] Some may argue that the call for ecojustice should have a certain priority. Others would say that this remains anthropocentric and that issues concerning sustainability should have precedence even over justice. Yet others may say that violent conflict (fighting over scarce resources) soon trumps any other social concern. These three dimensions are inseparable from each other, but the tensions are undeniable.

- reconstructive work on the ecological ambiguities and wisdom embedded in particular Christian traditions (like Celtic Christianity, to mention only one example);
- theological reflection on Christian beliefs and symbols (for example, within the context of the Christian Faith and the Earth project);
- theological reflection on liturgical renewal, for example on the celebration of a 'Season of Creation';
- theological reflection on ecological dimensions of pastoral care, Christian education and Christian ministry – where it is said that we need to care for the earth so that the earth can care for us and that the healing of persons is impossible in a sickening environment;
- reflections on a wide variety of Christian earthkeeping projects, missionary endeavours and the greening of Christian institutions[6];
- reflections on the cognitive content of an even wider array of forms of creation, green or ecological spiritualities emerging in numerous contexts and traditions.

It is striking that such discourses remain somewhat disjointed from one another. These discourses are not mutually exclusive but there are clearly underlying tensions. The methodological tensions between the various theological subdisciplines (more or less following Schleiermacher's so-called fourfold paradigm) remain unresolved in this context. These tensions were explored in a recent colloquium followed by a set of reflections on the theme 'The Journey of Doing Christian Ecotheology'.[7]

This at least suggests that Christian ecotheology should not be reduced to environmental ethics as a sub-discipline of Christian ethics. Environmental ethics will tend to remain the specialized field of interest of a small group of scholars and activists with technical expertise. An ecological ethos touches on virtually all aspects of life and has implications for all ethical sub-disciplines (i.e. social, political, economic, business, medical, sexual and personal ethics).

[6] See the essay by Clive Ayre in this volume.

[7] The colloquium was held in San Francisco, 15–16 November 2011, to explore and map the methodological and other differences between such discourses. The outcomes of this colloquium were published in a set of reflections in the January 2013 edition of the journal *Theology*. See W. Bauman, E. M. Conradie and H. Eaton (eds.), 'The Journey of Doing Christian Ecotheology', *Theology* 116 (2013), pp. 1–44.

Ecotheology certainly requires a reinvestigation of Christian doctrine as well. It cannot be narrowly focused on a reinterpretation of creation theology only but calls for a review of all aspects of the Christian faith, including the Trinity, God as Father, creation, humanity, sin, providence, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, the church, the sacraments and Christian hope. Indeed, ecotheology has to offer more than environmental ethics, or a revisited theology of creation. This does not imply that ecotheology may serve as an all-inclusive umbrella term for (systematic) theology; only that the environmental crisis provides one stimulus, a lens, a window of opportunity alongside several others, to revisit the whole of Christian thinking.

Reflection on each aspect of the Christian faith is indeed necessary for an adequate theological rationale that can support a Christian earthkeeping ethos and praxis.[8] If Christians are urged to engage in earthkeeping only on the basis of a sense of crisis, or in order to make a contribution to a collective effort to retrieve a generalized form of ecological wisdom from the world's religious traditions, it will only be supported by the few who are already convinced of the need for earthkeeping on other grounds. Instead, any theological rationale for Christian earthkeeping will have to relate it to the very core of the Christian faith. As Larry Rasmussen has often argued, earthkeeping initiatives will not be sustainable in a Christian context unless we are able to relate it clearly to the deepest convictions and symbols of the Christian tradition.[9] This implies that it will have to be related to the Christian belief in God as Father, Son and Spirit (as Loving Creator, Wisdom and Life-force) and therefore to the Trinitarian heart of Christian theology. It will have to take the Christian confession seriously that the best available disclosure of who God is, may be found in Jesus Christ. It will also have to relate earthkeeping to the core message of the Christian gospel, namely the message of salvation from the destructive legacy of human sin. It will have to focus on the Christian conviction that such salvation has become possible on the basis of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[8] For a discussion of some nineteen sometimes conflicting ways in which a theological rationale for Christian earthkeeping may be constructed, see E. M. Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping: In Search of an Inspiring Vision* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2011).

[9] See, most recently, L. Rasmussen, *Earth-honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Such a retrieval of the deepest Christian convictions will not escape the need for an ecological transformation of the Christian tradition, including the ways in which the Christian faith has been understood. This was the task identified in the Christian Faith and the Earth research project – which forms the institutional background for this volume with the same main title.

The Christian Faith and the Earth Project

The Christian Faith and the Earth project was established in January 2007 with the formation of an international steering committee including Sigurd Bergmann, Ernst Conradie (convenor), Celia Deane-Drummond, Denis Edwards, Kim Yong-Bock, Fulata Moyo, Elizabeth Theokritoff and Mark Wallace. As the name indicates, the aim of the project is to explore the content and ambiguous significance of the Christian faith for a time of ecological destruction. This aim has two components, namely to describe and assess the current state of the debate in Christian ecotheology and to offer a sense of direction for the way forward. These twin aims are also reflected in the subtitle of the present volume, namely 'current paths' and 'emerging horizons'.

The project culminated in a conference, 'Christian Faith and the Earth: *Respice et Prospice*', held in Lynedoch near Cape Town from 6 to 10 August 2012. The Latin phrase *respice et prospice* derives from the motto of the University of the Western Cape, which hosted the conference. It reflects the same aims of identifying, describing and assessing 'current paths' and 'emerging horizons' in ecotheology. Most of the essays included in this volume are derived from papers read at this conference. These were supplemented by the essays on Christology and liturgy also included here. The conference programme included official responses to these papers. For the sake of space and format, these responses are not added within this volume, but they obviously shaped the thoroughly reworked essays, as is acknowledged in some of these essays.

From the outset, this project was framed as one of ecumenical collaboration in different geographical contexts and across the many divides that characterize global theological reflection. Various working groups were established with participants from all over the world. What such ecumenical collaboration entails is by no means obvious. This may be illustrated with a related project

on the interface between ecumenical studies and social ethics in the African context registered in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape. To facilitate such discussions, a Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and Social Transformation in Africa has been established. The intriguing aspect of this vision lies in the 'and' that connects these two aspects. In ecumenical discourse this is indicated by tensions between 'Faith and Order' *and* 'Life and Work', between 'ecclesiology' *and* 'ethics' and indeed also between ecology and theology.[10] Moreover, these tensions elicit questions on the place and role of the study of religion and theology in a modern (African) university. The inspiration for the chair is related to the life and work of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, the former chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, who seems to connect these two aspects quite effortlessly in his ministries and public engagements.

The Christian Faith and the Earth project itself concluded with the publication of this volume. The aim was never for the project to be a self-perpetuating exercise, but to provide a stimulus for further reflection. This project is now giving birth to further projects, for example on pneumatology, the role of the church in God's mission, the Christian confession of sin (as good news for the whole earth) and ongoing multifaith dialogue on ecological destruction.

An outline of the volume

The focus on the Christian tradition in this project is deliberately narrow. There is a double motivation for this. On the one hand, there is a need to retrieve the ecological wisdom embedded in this diverse tradition. This is in order to facilitate a reflective contribution to address the environmental challenges of our time but also for the sake of the renewal of the tradition itself. On the other hand, this narrow focus responds to the recognition of the destructive ecological impact that Christianity has had and still has, either directly or

[10] For a discussion of the tension between ecclesiology and ethics, see especially T. F. Best and M. Robra (eds.), *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997) and E. M. Conradie (ed.), *South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2013).

indirectly, by providing moral or theological legitimation for the cultural and economic patterns underlying the current global economic order.

The focus on Christian doctrine is also deliberately narrow, given the distinct discourses in Christian ecotheology as identified above. The task is therefore to retrieve, reinterpret and, where need be, reconstruct the symbols of the Christian faith. All the essays in this volume include a survey of the 'current paths' in ecotheology and a discernment of 'emerging horizons'. The weight given to these aspects is not necessarily the same in all the essays. Several authors follow the long-standing strategy of looking for a sense of direction through the retrieval of classic theologians or metaphors.[11]

The selection of the themes is therefore in line with the classic symbols of the Christian faith. There are three essays, namely by Denis Edwards, Celia Deane-Drummond and Sigurd Bergmann, providing an assessment of the state of the debate in ecotheology on the Trinity, on Christology and on pneumatology. These are supplemented with an essay by Ernst Conradie on God's work of creation, salvation and consummation – deliberately grouped together in order to investigate the way in which the story of God's work is told. This is followed by an essay on the suffering of God's creatures (providence) by Christopher Southgate, an essay on the emergence of humanity by Peter Scott and on the nature, mission and ministry of the church by Clive Ayre.

This focus on the traditional Christian symbols is not and obviously cannot be exclusive. If theology implies critical reflection on Christian praxis, then ecotheology will be impoverished if it does not reflect on the earthkeeping practices – to use one term to describe what may also be called 'earth care', 'friendship' or 'partnership' with nature, 'stewardship', 'environmental priesthood' and so forth (see again the essay by Ayre). One may argue that a Christian ecological praxis, ethos and spirituality needs to inform ecotheology, but is also in need of critical reflection in order to examine the many distortions that may plague an ecological reformation of the tradition. The volume therefore includes an essay on an ecological ethos by Celia Deane-Drummond. Likewise, the multiple connections between liturgy, theology and life call for further exploration – which is addressed in the essay by Crina Gschwandtner.

[11] See, for example, the use of Athanasius in the essay by Edwards on the triune God, and of Gregory of Nazianzus in the essay by Bergmann on pneumatology.

The focus on the Christian tradition in its variety of expressions and on Christian theology necessarily raises further questions, given the various discourses in ecotheology outlined above and the various sub-disciplines involved. The methodological issues are addressed in an essay by Heather Eaton, specifically outlining the deep tensions between discourse on religion and ecology in the field of religious studies and the assumptions of Christian ecotheology. This is finally supplemented by Kim Yong-Bock's concluding essay on inter-religious dialogue about the integrity of life in an Asian context, amid the systematic threats to life associated with neo-liberal forms of economic globalization.

2

Where on Earth Is God? Exploring an Ecological Theology of the Trinity in the Tradition of Athanasius

Denis Edwards

The story of the evolution of life involves not only competition for resources but also wonderful cooperation between species and a sustained interaction over billions of years between living creatures and the seas, the atmosphere and the land. We face a global crisis because humans have brought major changes in these systems, which have already led to loss of species and which threaten to bring further large-scale extinctions of other species and great suffering to human communities. Dealing with this crisis of our twenty-first century demands all the resources we have – including those of theology. Christian theology is called to dig deep into its own sources to offer a theological vision that can sustain and nourish an ecological conversion and way of life.

What is needed, I believe, is not simply a theology of God the Creator, but a fully Trinitarian narrative of the Word and Spirit's engagement with a world of creatures, a theology of creation, incarnation and final salvation.[1] Clearly, the approach to salvation will need to embrace not only humanity but also the rest of the natural world. It will need to locate humanity within the community of creation.

There are many possible starting points in recent Trinitarian theology, such as in Jürgen Moltmann's explicit engagement with ecology,[2] or Karl Rahner's theology of Trinitarian self-bestowal and creaturely self-transcendence.[3]

[1] See the essay by Ernst Conradie in this volume.

[2] J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London: SCM Press, 1981); *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press, 1990).

[3] K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

It would also be possible to build on the openness to science found in the richly Trinitarian theologies of Wolfhart Pannenberg[4] or Thomas Torrance.[5] The communion theologies of John Zizioulas,[6] Walter Kasper,[7] Catherine LaCugna[8] or Colin Gunton[9] can open into a theology of the communion of the whole creation in God. John Polkinghorne has taken up this approach, creatively exploring the connection between science and a Trinitarian relational ontology.[10] The Spirit theologies of Elizabeth Johnson[11] or Sigurd Bergmann[12] are already important resources for a renewed theology of creation. Leonardo Boff has shown how his social theology of the Trinity can open out into an eco-justice theology.[13] An alternative, less explicitly Trinitarian, approach is found in Sallie McFague's ecological theology of the 'Body of God'.[14]

My choice is to build on Athanasius, for several reasons. First, his theology of the Trinity is a dynamic one. It is a theology of the Trinity in action, of God creating and saving through the Word and in the Spirit. It is a theology that is biblical, economic and cast in narrative terms of God's action towards creation. Second, for Athanasius, the Trinity is not one aspect of his theology but simply the Christian way of speaking about the whole of reality.[15] Third, his theology holds creation and the saving incarnation together in one theological vision. Fourth, he has a theology of salvation in Christ as deification, which I think is highly relevant for this time, and even though the wider creation is

[4] W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1994).
[5] T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).
[6] J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press); *Communion and Otherness* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).
[7] W. Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1993).
[8] C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991).
[9] C. E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[10] J. Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity: The Christian Encounter with Reality* (London: SPCK, 2004); J. Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Trinity and an Entangled World: Relationality in Physical Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2010).
[11] E. A. Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993); *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2007).
[12] S. Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2005).
[13] L. Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988); *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997).
[14] S. McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1993).
[15] See K. Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 1, 7–8, 11.

not at the centre of his thought, he includes the rest of the natural world in the deifying transfiguration that occurs in Christ.

Athanasius's concern, of course, is not the twenty-first century ecological crisis, but the defence of the full divinity of the Word, and later of the Spirit, against alternative readings of the biblical story by his anti-Nicene opponents, whom Athanasius lumps together as Arians. My proposal is that his theology can be reinterpreted and built upon to offer hope and meaning in a very different context. In the first part of this chapter, I will take up his Trinitarian theology of creation. Then in the second part, I will engage with his understanding of deification and discuss its applications to human beings and to the rest of the natural world. In the third part, I will conclude briefly with what I see as some important ecological consequences of this theology.

Trinity in act: Creating a universe of creatures

Athanasius's Trinitarian theology of creation is grounded in the cross of Christ. Both volumes of his *Against the Greeks – On the Incarnation* begin from the scandal of the cross. Commentators have described this foundational double work as an 'apology for the cross' against its mockers.[16] Athanasius's central strategy is to show that the one who dies on the cross is truly the eternal and divine Word of God, who, by entering into death, brings salvation to the whole creation. Those who slander the cross, he says, fail to understand that the crucified Christ is 'the Saviour of the universe and that the cross was not the ruin but the salvation of creation'.[17]

It is from the perspective of the cross, then, that Athanasius begins to discuss the role of the Word of God in creating a universe of creatures. John Behr explains: 'It is the Word of the Cross, or the Word on the Cross, that Athanasius expounds by describing how all things have come into being by and for him; it is Christ himself that Athanasius is reflecting on, not the creation accounts in and of themselves.'[18] Athanasius's view of creation is grounded in

[16] K. Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 28; J. Behr, *The Formation of Christian Theology, Volume Two: The Nicene Faith, Part One: True God of True God* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), p. 171.

[17] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Greeks*, in R. W. Thomson (ed. and trans.), *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 5.

[18] Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Part One*, pp. 181–82.

the incarnation, in the experience of the Word made flesh, above all in the saving death and resurrection of Jesus. For him, creatures exist only because by God's creative act; they continually participate in this very same Word, in the Holy Spirit.

God creates through the Word in the Spirit

Based on his interpretation of key biblical texts (Prov. 8.22–31; Jn. 1.3; 1 Cor. 1.24, 8.6; Col. 1.16; Heb. 1.2–3), Athanasius sees God as creating through God's own Word or Wisdom, who has the very being of God, and who is God. Insisting on, and developing, the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, Athanasius sees creatures as having in themselves absolutely no reason for their own existence. They exist only through the sheer divine benevolence by which God creates a universe of creatures through the Word. All creatures exist out of nothing at every point, which means that they are inherently unstable – apart from their participation in the Word. So creation is not simply something that occurs at the beginning, but is a continuous divine act. It is not only that things are originally brought into existence through the Word, but that each creature continues to exist only by its ongoing participation in the creative Word:

> After making everything by his own eternal Word and bringing creation into existence, he did not abandon it to be carried away and suffer through its own nature, lest it run the risk of returning to nothing. But being good, he governs and establishes the whole world through his Word who is himself God, in order that creation, illuminated by the leadership, providence and ordering of the Word, may be able to remain firm, since *it shares in the Word* who is truly from the Father and is aided by him to exist, and lest it suffer what would happen, I mean a relapse into nonexistence, if it were not protected by the Word.[19]

The words I have highlighted translate the Greek word *metalambánousa*, which can also be translated as 'it participates in the Word'. According to Athanasius, it is participation in the Word that enables each creature to exist and the whole creation to remain firm. The one who is Word and Wisdom of the Father is 'present in all things' and 'gives life and protection to everything, everywhere, to each individually and to all together'.[20] Divine Wisdom brings the diversity

[19] *Against the Greeks*, 41 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, pp. 114–15).

of creatures into balance and beautiful harmony, keeps the oceans in place and provides the wonderful variety of green plants of Earth. As a musician tunes a lyre and skilfully produces a single melody from many diverse notes, so 'the Wisdom of God, holding the universe like a lyre', draws together the variety of created things 'thus producing in beauty and harmony a single world and a single order within it'.[21]

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this ongoing act of creation? After neglecting the Holy Spirit in his early work, Athanasius gives expression to his Spirit theology in his *Orations against the Arians*, and focuses directly on the Spirit in his *Letters to Serapion* – the first substantial theology of the Spirit we possess. In these later works, Athanasius articulates a comprehensive theology of creation as participation in the Trinity. He sees the indwelling Spirit as the divine 'bond' that unites creatures to the Word and, through the Word, to the Father.[22] The Spirit is the divine presence to creatures who activates and energizes everything that is worked by the Father through the Son: 'For there is nothing that is not brought into being and actuated through the Word, in the Spirit.'[23]

In the divine act of continuous creation, the Spirit enables each creature to be open to, and to receive, the creative Word. Creation is a fully Trinitarian act that enables a world of creatures to participate in the Word, or partake of the Word, in the Spirit. It is only through this participation that individual creatures exist and interact in the community of creation. In Athanasius's theology, both creation and new creation occur through this structure of participation of the Word in the Spirit: 'The Father creates and renews all things through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.'[24]

This theology of God's creative presence to each creature through the Word and in the Spirit, enabling each creature to participate in its own way in the Trinity, already offers a foundation for developing a contemporary ecological theology. This is true, above all, when this theology of creation is held together, as it is in Athanasius's thought, with a theology of salvation as the deifying participation of creatures in God. Before moving forward to considering

[20] Ibid. (Thomson, *Athanasius*, p. 115).
[21] *Against the Greeks*, 42 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, p. 117).
[22] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, 1.25, in K. Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 225.
[23] *Letters to Serapion*, 1.31 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 230).
[24] *Letters to Serapion*, 1.24 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 224).

deification, however, I will explore three of Athanasius's further insights into creation that can open up new meaning in today's ecological context.

The immediacy of the Trinity to creation

In Athanasius's theology, each person of the Trinity is immediately present to each creature. It is astounding to think of the divine persons as immediately present to this starling flying by my window. But this is the clear implication of Athanasius's defence of the immediacy of the triune God to creatures.

The context for Athanasius, though, is his rejection of Hellenistic and Arian views that require created intermediaries between creatures and the Creator. In these views, God is so wholly other to creatures, that such a God could only be greatly diminished by any direct contact with matter and flesh. If creatures exist by participation in God, as many assumed, then there must be an intermediary between creatures and God that can enable this to happen.

Athanasius shares the model of participation in God borrowed from Platonism, but he develops it in a distinctively Christian way. He agrees with Arian thinkers about the complete otherness and complete transcendence of the Creator, and on the infinite difference between finite creatures and the Creator. How, then, is this gulf to be bridged? In standard Platonic views, the answer is through secondary intermediate figures, such as the Demiurge and the world of Ideas, or the Logos, or the Soul. Creatures participate in the intermediary, while the intermediary participates in God, but is not God.

Athanasius's Arian opponents see divine transcendence as meaning that there can be no direct relation between God and creatures. Not only would direct connection demean God, but finite creatures would never be able to stand the blazing touch of the infinitely other God. So, they reason, the Father creates the Word as a mediator to carry out God's purposes in creation and salvation. Peter Leithart summarizes their view: the Word of God is a creature who 'serves as a buffer between God and creation'.[25]

For Athanasius, by contrast, there is no such buffer. This sharply distinguishes his thought not only from Christian thinkers such as Arius, Eusebius and Asterius, but also from various forms of Platonism. Athanasius agrees with them on the radical otherness of the Creator and shares with other

[25] P. Leithard, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), p. 91.

Christian thinkers the biblical conviction that the Father engages with creation through the Word. But he insists that the Word shares fully the Father's essence and, precisely as fully divine, bridges the gap between Creator and creatures by loving condescension. This word condescension does not have its contemporary suggestion of smug superiority, but its literal meaning of 'coming down to be with' creatures: 'For they would not have withstood his nature, being that of the unmitigated splendour of the Father, if he had not condescended (*sunkatabas*) by the Father's love for humanity and supported, strengthened, and carried them into being.'[26]

For Athanasius it is not a creature that could ever be radically immanent to creatures. Only the God beyond all created beings can bridge the gap. In Athanasius's thought, the very idea of divine transcendence is transformed in terms of the biblical categories of mercy and condescension. God is beyond all creatures precisely in the divine capacity to come down to be with creatures and in the divine generosity and loving kindness.

The Word and the Spirit, then, are in no sense created intermediaries, but share the one divine nature with the Father. Because Word and Spirit are one with the Father's essence, the Word's mediation in the Spirit also involves the immediacy of the Father's presence and activity to creation.[27] As Athanasius puts it, the one who experiences the Radiance (the Word) is enlightened by the Sun itself (the Father) and not by any intermediary.[28]

In Athanasius we find a fully Trinitarian theology of immediate presence of God through the Word and in the Spirit, by which creatures participate in God. They participate not in possessing the divine nature, but always from nothing. For Athanasius, then, the Word is a mediator, but a fully divine mediator of fully Trinitarian presence. Anatolios says that 'Athanasius's whole logic was averse to the notion of a created meditation between God and creation, since it is exclusively a divine characteristic to be able to bridge the distance between God and creation.'[29] Only God can relate the world of creatures to God's self.

What Athanasius brings to light is the idea that the true nature of the God–creature relationship, and its radical immediacy, can be understood only when

[26] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Orations against the Arians*, 2.64, in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, pp. 157–58.
[27] Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*, p. 113.
[28] *Orations against the Arians*, 3.14 in W. Bright, *The Orations of Athanasius Against the Arians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884), p. 169.
[29] Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought*, p. 162.

Word and Spirit are understood as fully divine. Only a fully Trinitarian theology enables us to glimpse the immediacy of the relationship between God and creation. Because creation is participation in the life of the Trinity, this means that ultimately 'Athanasius's perspective is that of a relational ontology'.[30] I see this line of thought as offering a Trinitarian basis for a theology of the intrinsic value of each creature within the community of creation. Every creature on Earth, every whale, every sparrow and every earthworm exists by participation in the Father through the Son and in the Spirit – 'not one of them is forgotten in God's sight' (Lk. 12.6).

The Universe of creatures springs from the dynamic fruitfulness of Trinitarian life

A second insight with meaning for today's ecological context is offered in Athanasius's view of the dynamic fruitfulness of the Trinity. It is sometimes claimed that classical Trinitarian theologies, particularly Nicene theologies of the one divine substance, result in a static, lifeless view of God and of the God–world relationship. This critique simply does not apply to the great theologians of the fourth century, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Hilary and Augustine, and it most certainly does not to apply to Athanasius.

His view of the dynamic nature of divine life becomes apparent in his delight in bringing together the various biblical titles for Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, such as those of Word, Wisdom, Power, Image, Radiance, Stream, Light and Life as well as Son.[31] He is particularly attached to the symbol of Christ as the eternal Radiance (*apaugasma* from Heb. 1.3) of the Light. He interprets the fact that the Bible gives these names to both God and to Jesus Christ as pointing to their shared divine nature. He calls these names *paradeigmata* (symbols), interprets them intertextually, and sees them as giving some revealed insight into divine being: 'Since human nature is not capable of comprehension of God, Scripture has placed before us such symbols (*paradeigmata*) and such images (*eikonas*), so that we may understand from them however slightly and obscurely, as much as is accessible to us.'[32]

[30] Ibid., p. 208.
[31] Ibid., pp. 98–100; Leithart, *Athanasius*, pp. 41–50.
[32] *Orations against the Arians*, 2.32 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 127).

The different symbols qualify and correct one another. If unqualified, the Father–Son image might be thought to imply the physicality, and the beginning in time, of human birthing. When joined to the symbol of Light and its Radiance it becomes clear that the Father must always have the Son, as Light always has its Radiance. As Peter Leithart puts it: 'The image of light and radiance thus assists in the apophatic purgation of our thoughts about God as Father and Son. One paradigm cleanses another.'[33] In the divine life, the Word is always generated by the Father, the Radiance always shines from the Light, the Stream always flows from the Fountain. This dynamic, eternal fecundity of the divine generation of the Word is the basis for all the diverse fruitfulness of creation.

One of Athanasius's arguments against his opponents concerns precisely this issue. He argues that the wonderful fruitfulness of God's creation must point back to the eternal generativity of divine life. Unlike Origen, he holds that creation comes to be as a free act of God in time, but he insists that it must be grounded in the eternal possibility of creating in the triune God. The fecundity of creation can only be grounded in the eternal dynamic fecundity of divine life.

If, as his Arian opponents suppose, the creative Word/Wisdom of God is a creature who has a beginning, then this completely undermines what Athanasius calls the eternal 'generative nature' of God.[34] Athanasius points to what he sees as the barren emptiness at the heart of his opponents' position:

> In accord with them, let not God be of a generative nature, so that there may be no Word nor Wisdom nor any Image at all of his own essence. For if he is not Son, then neither is he Image. But if there is no Son, how then do you say that God is Creator, if indeed it is through the Word and in Wisdom that everything that is made comes to be and without which nothing comes to be, and yet, according to you, God does not possess that in which and through which he makes all things (cf. Wis 9:2; Jn 1:3; Ps 104:20, 24). But if, according to them, the divine essence itself is not fruitful but barren, like a light that does not shine and a fountain that is dry, how are they not ashamed to say that God has creative energy?[35]

[33] Leithart, *Athanasius*, p. 46.
[34] *Orations against the Arians*, 2.2 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 111).
[35] Ibid. (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 111).

God is a Light with its everlasting Radiance that enlightens us in the Spirit, a Fountain always pouring forth a River of living water from which we creatures drink in the Spirit, a Father eternally begetting the Son in whom we participate by adoption in the Spirit.[36] For Athanasius, those who deny the full and eternal divinity of the Word, deny the dynamic life of God that is the very ground of the creation and salvation of a world of creatures.

Again, Athanasius's thought, developed in response to the Arian challenge, can offer new and rich meaning in an ecological age. The Trinitarian God that he defends is a God of endless life and boundless loving. God is fruitful by nature. The fruitfulness of the natural world, the dynamic evolution of the universe from the big bang 13.7 billion years ago, the evolution of life on Earth, the existence of this blue wren I seen in front of me, are grounded in the dynamic generativity and fruitfulness of the triune God.

Divine delight in creatures

A third insight that is rich in meaning for ecological theology is Athanasius's view of the divine delight in creatures. He points to the New Testament where we find Jesus testifying to the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son, and to the joy this brings (Lk. 10.22; see also Mt. 11.27; Jn 10.15, 14.7). Athanasius interprets these texts with the aid of the beautiful image from Proverbs of God delighting in Wisdom (Prov. 8.30). God rejoices in divine Wisdom, and with Wisdom takes delight in a world of creatures. In this context, Athanasius points out that God does not need a cause of rejoicing from outside God's self, because God eternally rejoices in Wisdom, who is eternally God's own:

> When was it then that the Father did not rejoice? But if he has always rejoiced, then there was always the one in whom he rejoiced. In whom does the Father rejoice (cf. Prov 8:30), except by seeing himself in his own image (*eikoni*), which is his Word? Even though, as it has been written in these same Proverbs, he also "delighted in the sons of people, having consummated the world" (Prov 8:31), yet this also has the same meaning. For he did not delight in this way by acquiring delight as an addition to himself, but it was upon seeing the works that were made according to his own image, so that the basis of this delight also is God's own Image.[37]

[36] *Letters to Serapion*, 1.19 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, pp. 217–19).
[37] *Orations against the Arians*, 2.82 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 175).

Athanasius's central point is that in spite of the Arians' misuse of Prov. 8.22, 'He created me as the beginning of his ways', God's delight in Wisdom does not have a beginning, but it is an eternal delight. The mutual delight of Father and Son in the Spirit is intrinsic to the divine being, and the biblical theme of God's delight in creatures is situated within this mutual delight. God's delight in human beings and other creatures, then, is not an addition to the divine being, but 'an inclusion of the creation into the eternal mutual delight of the being of the Father and the Son'.[38] God's relationship to creation is embraced within the divine joy of the Trinity.

Creation takes place within the mutual love and delight of the divine persons. God's delight in creatures is enfolded within the mutual delight of the Father and the Son.[39] The Holy Spirit enables the mutual delight of Father and the Word to be sharable and brings about creation as the site of the extension of the Father–Word relation beyond the divine being. Anatolios comments, 'Such a Trinitarian account of creation speaks to our contemporary ecological crisis, leading us to see that a destructive posture towards creation is blasphemous in its dishonouring of the Father–Son delight and the Spirit's gift-giving of that delight.'[40]

Trinity in act: Deification of human beings and of the natural world

The deification of humanity

Why does the Word become incarnate? Athanasius sees human beings at their creation as being given the special grace of participating in the Word, and so being made according to the Image, and thus made sharers in eternal life. But humans wilfully sinned and lost the gift of eternal life. God's response was unthinkably generous: the Word in whom all are created would come in the flesh to bring about forgiveness of sin and to enter into death and overcome it in the power of resurrection. The overcoming of death, Athanasius tells us, 'is the primary cause of the incarnation of the Saviour'.[41] The second major reason

[38] Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, p. 153.
[39] Ibid., pp. 118, 153–54, 288.
[40] Ibid., p. 288.
[41] Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation*, 10 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, p. 159).

is that we might now come to know 'the Word of God who was in the body, and through him the Father'.[42] The Word had long been teaching humanity about the Father through the Word's providence and regulation of the universe of creatures. Because humanity had neglected to hear this message spoken by the creation, the Word of creation is now made flesh.

The Word who is the Image of the Father comes to humanity to renew this image in us, to seek out the lost and to find them again through the forgiveness of sins. Christ's death abolishes our debt to death. Athanasius sees the cross in terms of a liturgical offering: he 'surrendered his body to death in place of all and offered it to the Father'.[43] In so doing, he liberates us from the evil one and, as Athanasius highlights, from the fear of death (Heb. 2.14–15).

Athanasius makes use of a range of biblical images for the death of Christ, images which he finds in Paul and in the liturgical language of Hebrews. But he also offers a large overarching vision of what God does for us in Christ's life, death and resurrection with his theology of deification. He first speaks of deification in the well-known passage in his *On the Incarnation*: 'For he became human that we might become divine; and he revealed himself through a body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father; and he endured insults from human beings that we might inherit in corruption.'[44]

In his later anti-Arian writings, Athanasius frequently uses deification language (the verb *theopoiéō*, and the noun he coins, *theopoíēsis*) to defend the real divinity of the Word, who is made flesh that we might be made divine: 'So he was not a human being and later became God. But, being God, he later became a human being in order that we may be divinized.'[45] Athanasius builds on Irenaeus and others in his theology of deification. He uses this language more often than his predecessors, and helps to clarify its meaning, very often pairing it with words that function as synonyms, including adoption, renewal, salvation, sanctification, grace, transcendence, illumination and vivification.[46]

Athanasius insists, against his opponents, that the Word of God is not deified, but is the eternal divine source of our deification. However, it is central to his thought that the bodily humanity of Jesus *is* deified by its union with

[42] *On the Incarnation*, 14 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, p. 169).
[43] *On the Incarnation*, 8 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, p. 153).
[44] *On the Incarnation*, 54 (Thomson, *Athanasius*, p. 153, modified).
[45] *Orations against the Arians*, 21.39 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 96).
[46] See N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 177–78.

the Word. It is precisely this union that enables the deification of humanity: 'For the Word was not lessened by his taking a body, so that he would seek to receive grace, but rather he divinized what he put on, and, what's more, he gave this to the human race.'[47]

For Athanasius, deification is an ontological transformation in creaturely reality that occurs through the incarnation understood as the whole Christ-event, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit. Because of the incarnation there is a divine transformation already at work in humanity and in the world. But this divine gift of grace, given in principle, has to be accepted by the human recipient and embraced in a life of fidelity. For the Christian community, this divine life is transmitted in practice through baptism and growing in the life of the Spirit according to the Image that is Christ.

Athanasius's theology of salvation is fully Trinitarian. The Word, the true Image of God, repairs and renews the image of God in humanity. In the loving self-humbling of the Word in the incarnation, Christ becomes the receiver of the Spirit in his humanity, enabling us to become co-receivers of the Spirit through him:

> The Saviour, on the contrary, being God, and forever ruling the kingdom of the Father and being himself the supplier of the Spirit, is nevertheless now said to be anointed by the Spirit, so that, being said to be anointed as a human being by the Spirit, he may provide us human beings with the indwelling and intimacy of the Holy Spirit, just as he provides us with exaltation and resurrection.[48]

As Anatolios points out, this amounts to a Spirit Christology in that the Word of God who is the divine giver of the Spirit, in the kenotic self-humbling of his humanity becomes the receiver of the Spirit, that we too might become receivers of the Spirit. And this means that we too can become God's beloved daughters and sons. Born again of the grace of the Spirit, we are 'enfolded in the inner life of the Trinity', taken up in the position of the Word in relation to the Father, and are ourselves enabled to call God 'Father' and not simply our 'Maker'.[49]

[47] *Orations against the Arians*, 1.42 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 99).
[48] *Orations against the Arians*, 1.46 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 103).
[49] Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, p. 125. See *Orations against the Arians*, 2.59 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, pp. 152–53).

The participation of the natural world in deification

How does this theology of deification relate to the rest of creation? Although his focus is not primarily the natural world, Athanasius clearly sees it as participating with humanity in its own proper way in transformation in Christ. So he writes late in his life, in his *Letter to Adelphius*, of Christ as 'the Liberator of all flesh and of all creation (cf. Rom. 8.21)', and as 'the Creator and Maker coming to be in a creature so that, by granting freedom to all in himself, he may present the world to the Father and give peace to all, in heaven and on earth.'[50]

Athanasius refers often to classic texts that include the creation in Christ, particularly Rom. 8.19–23, and to Col. 1.15–20. In his second *Oration against the Arians*, Athanasius refers explicitly to Rom. 8.19–23 and Col. 1.15–20, to include the whole creation in the liberation that comes through Christ's resurrection:

> The truth that refutes them is that he is called "firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29) because of the kinship of the flesh, and "firstborn from the dead" (Col 1:18) because the resurrection of the dead comes from him and after him, and "firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15) because of the Father's love for humanity, on account of which he not only gave consistence to all things in his Word but brought it about that the creation itself, of which the apostle says that it "awaits the revelation of the children of God", will at a certain point be delivered "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:19, 21).[51]

In the following example, from Athanasius's defence of the divinity of the Spirit in his *Letter to Serapion*, he insists that the Word and the Spirit are inseparable, and that both are at work in the incarnation for the sake of the reconciliation of the whole creation:

> Thus it was that when the Word came to the holy Virgin Mary, the Spirit also entered with him (cf. Lk 1:35), and the Word, in the Spirit, fashioned and joined a body to himself, wishing to unite creation to his Father, and to offer it to the Father through himself and to reconcile all things in his body, 'making peace among the things of heaven and the things of earth' (cf. Col 1:20).[52]

[50] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letter 40: To Adelphius*, 4 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 103).
[51] *Orations against the Arians*, 2.63 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 157).
[52] *Letters to Serapion*, 1.31 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, pp. 231–32).

In these texts, Athanasius is fully explicit about his inclusion of the rest of the natural world with human beings in salvation. In other places, he speaks more generally of creation being deified, often in the context of the divine adoption of human beings. In defending the divinity of the Holy Spirit, for example, he reflects on the way we human beings are saved and sealed with the Holy Spirit: 'When we are sealed in this way, we become sharers in the divine nature, as Peter says (2 Pet. 1.4), and so the whole creation participates of the Word, in the Spirit.'[53] While it would be possible to interpret such a text as referring mainly to humanity, in the light of the texts referred to above that speak of the liberation of all flesh and, with Romans 8 of the deliverance of creation itself from its bondage, I think it is safe to conclude that, for Athanasius, salvation and deification involve not only human beings but with them the whole creation. In another instance, he insists that the Spirit in whom the Word adopts human beings and deifies creation cannot be a creature:

> Therefore, it is in the Spirit that the Word glorifies creation and presents it to the Father by divinizing it and granting it adoption. But the one who binds creation to the Word could not be among the creatures and the one who bestows sonship upon creation could not be foreign to the Son. . . . Therefore, the Spirit is not among the things that have come into being but belongs (*idion*) to the divinity of the Father, and is the one in whom the Word divinizes the things that have come into being. But the one in whom creation is divinized cannot be extrinsic to the divinity of the Father.[54]

Through the incarnation of the Word, the Spirit binds creation to the Word made flesh that human beings might be forgiven, deified and adopted as beloved sons and daughters and to the rest of creation that it might be transformed in Christ in its own proper way. This transformation involves the unimaginable fulfilment of the rest of creation, its final liberation from pain and death, its full creaturely realization in God. We 'hope for what we do not see' (Rom. 8.25), both for ourselves and for other creatures. As the later Greek

[53] *Letters to Serapion*, 1.23 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 223). Shapland, in his translation of these letters, interprets 'creation' here as referring to the whole natural world rather than just to humanity. He notes that this reference to creation partaking of the Word in salvation seems to be a natural extension of the statement made earlier by Athanasius in his *Against the Greeks* (which I have quoted above) that all creation partakes of the Word for its very existence. C. R. B. Shapland, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: Epworth Press, 1951), pp. 124–25, footnote 15.

[54] *Letters to Serapion*, 1.25 (Anatolios, *Athanasius*, p. 225).

theological tradition makes clear, there are distinctions between creatures in their way of participation in Trinitarian life – they participate in the divine Communion according to their own proper capacity and their own proper nature. But in ways proper to each creature, the whole creation is to participate through the Word, in the Spirit, in the divine life of Trinity.

I will conclude this section by focusing on a member of a threatened species, a small Australian marsupial, the bilby. It can be said that this bilby exists because it partakes of the Word of God through the indwelling Spirit. God is present to this bilby not through any mediation but directly. In boundless generosity, condescension and benevolence, the transcendent God reaches out directly to the creature, is immanently present to it, and directly confers existence upon it. Through the Word and in the Spirit it is immediately united to the Father in the relationship of creation. It lives from the divine Communion. It is the fruit of the fecundity of divine life – existing from the bounty and generosity of divine life. It represents in Australia in its own unique way the endless generativity of the Word. It is a creature in which God takes delight, existing within the mutual delight of the divine persons. Because of the Word becoming flesh, and entering into death to transform it from within, this bilby is part of the whole creation that will participate with human beings in the deifying transformation of the whole of reality. It will reach its proper fulfilment in a way that remains beyond our imagination or conception in the divine communion.

Conclusion: Where on Earth is God?

In these reflections I have sought to outline a sketch for a Trinitarian theology of creation and deifying transformation in Christ that has meaning for today. I am conscious that making these kinds of claims about the triune God's engagement with the natural world immediately raises many issues that I am not dealing with here. One of the most important is the relationship between this view of God and the pain, death and extinction built into evolutionary emergence. Christopher Southgate's work in this volume is important here.[55]

[55] See also C. Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

I have tried to offer some reflections on this fundamental theological problem elsewhere.[56]

In the creation theology of Athanasius, God continually creates the whole universe of creatures through the eternal Word in the Holy Spirit. The divine Source of All, the Father is *immediately* present, not only to the whole universe, but to each single creature, through the Word and in the Spirit. The diverse creatures of our universe give expression to the *fruitfulness* of the eternal generativity of the life of God – they all exist in and from the eternal generation of the Word and the eternal procession of the Spirit. This whole world of creatures exists *within the delight* of the mutual relations of the dynamic life of the Three.

The God of love dynamically empowers the emergent universe through the presence of the indwelling Word and Spirit. Earth and its creatures, its insects, birds and animals, its forests and seas, its habitats and bioregions, all exist because the God of love is closer to them than they are to themselves. The Trinity of love enables their existence, their interaction and their becoming in the community of creation. The relationship of creation is one by which each creature partakes of God through the Word and in the Spirit. Each is loved, each is precious – 'not one of them is forgotten in God's sight' (Lk. 12.6).

However, the good news of Christianity is that the divine love for the world of creatures involves far more than the triune act of continuous creation. It centres on the radical self-giving of incarnation – a God who enters into matter and flesh, uniting the world of matter and flesh radically with God's self, and transforming it from within. In the incarnation, the eternal Word, in the power of the Spirit, is united not only with Jesus' creaturely reality, and not only with humanity, but also with the matter of the universe, with the evolutionary processes that constitute biological life on Earth, with all creatures. The eternal Word in whom all things are created becomes a creature of flesh and blood, made of atoms that are produced in stars, shaped by evolutionary history, subject to pain and death, in solidarity with the whole community of life on Earth.

Athanasius tells us that the incarnation is an act of radical revelation of what is in the heart of God – the Wisdom of God already manifest in the diversity

[56] D. Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

of creation all around us now comes to us and meets us in our own humanity in the midst of biological life. But the incarnation is not only revelation, but also our forgiveness, healing and transformation. It is the beginning of the end of death. It is our deification and, with us, the deification and fulfilment of the natural world. God becomes a creature of matter and flesh in order that human beings and with them the rest of creation might be deified and transformed in God, participating in the life of the Trinity. This process has begun in our world through the resurrection of the crucified Christ, the beginning of new creation at work in our world.

This incarnational theology culminates in the bodily resurrection of the crucified Jesus. He is transfigured in glory, the promise and the beginning of the transfiguration of human beings and, with them, of the whole creation. The resurrection and ascension of the crucified Jesus show that matter and flesh are forever in God. In the incarnation and its culmination in resurrection, God commits God's self to this world, to this Earth and its creatures, and does so eternally. In the risen Christ, part of the biological community of Earth is forever transfigured in God, the promise and the beginning of the transformation of all things. God has committed God's self to this universe of creatures forever.

In pondering the triptych of creation, incarnation and the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, we come to know that we cannot love God without loving God's beloved creatures. We cannot follow Jesus, the Word made flesh, without embracing the matter and flesh embraced in his incarnation. The three Christian doctrines form the basis for a Christian commitment to this Earth and its creatures. Conversion to Christ involves love for this Earth and all its creatures, an ecological conversion.

Thomas Torrance, drawing on Athanasius's view of the incarnation, writes: 'God has decisively bound himself to the created universe and the created universe to himself, with such an unbreakable bond that the Christian hope of redemption and recreation extends not just to human beings but to the universe as a whole.'[57] We may hope that this bilby too 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Rom. 8.22). This hope is based on the divine promise given us in

[57] T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 244.

Christ – in the transformation of death brought about through his death and resurrection.

As Paul says, however, our hope is not for something that we see – 'we hope for what we do not see' (Rom. 8.25). Karl Rahner long ago pointed out that we have no clear vision of our eschatological future.[58] What we have is the promise of God that we experience in the grace given now – which leads us to hope in the final fulfilment of ourselves, of bilbies and the global community of life on Earth, and the whole creation in the incomprehensible loving mystery of the divine Trinity. In the meantime, we have the words of Jesus about sparrows and bilbies: 'Not one of them is forgotten in God's sight' (Lk. 12.6).

[58] K. Rahner, 'The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions', in *Theological Investigations, Volume Four* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), pp. 323–46.

3

Who on Earth Is Jesus Christ? Plumbing the Depths of Deep Incarnation

Celia Deane-Drummond

Introduction

The distinguishing mark of Christian faith is, arguably, belief in Jesus Christ. The history of the Christian Church is built on the recognition of Christ's significance for human life; Christ is the one who, as Saviour, delivers the world from evil and is the means through whom intimacy with God is re-established. Christology, then, takes the Christian believer to the heart of Christian existential experience. Classical faith in God as Creator, on the other hand, presupposes the absolute difference between God and creation, while maintaining that the created world is sustained in being through the ongoing presence of God as immanent in all that exists. The classic tradition is correct to distinguish not only between God and creation, safeguarded through the doctrine of creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), but also between the world as God's ontological creation of being as such and the unfolding of 'nature' through secondary causes. From this it follows that the agency that we find in the world is a real 'natural' agency, rather than necessarily one somehow imposed by God's abiding, immanent presence.[1] What happens, then, when God becomes material, enfleshed, taking on human 'nature' in the person of Jesus Christ?

I am reviewing in this chapter arguments that the incarnation is significant not just for human existential experience but for the natural world as such, for it manifests God as one with material, created being. This aspect of

[1] I discuss this in more detail in C. Deane-Drummond, 'Creation', in P. Scott and M. Northcott (eds.), *A Systematic Theology for a Changing Climate* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

Christian faith is extremely profound and often not fully appreciated. The incarnation is, in addition, a starting point for reflection on other aspects of Christology that are relevant for ecology, including that of cross and resurrection. But such an approach to Christology is somewhat different from the more traditional interpretation of Christ through his three offices of prophet, priest and king, or more classical approaches through reflection on his ascension and parousia. I should also add that Joseph Sittler was one of the first contemporary spokespersons for an ecological approach that drew on a cosmic Christology, along with a number of authors who recognized the importance of the link between Christ and creation, such as Jürgen Moltmann, Denis Edwards and Colin Gunton, to name just a few examples.[2] What is new in this conversation is that the language of 'deep incarnation' has started to be used. And using the language of deep incarnation is, I suggest, a helpful metaphor in addressing the mystery of what the Word made flesh means in an ecological context.

The term 'deep incarnation' requires some further clarification.[3] Niels Gregersen was one of the first scholars to use this term, and he applied it to the specific case of understanding Christology in evolutionary terms.[4] He was also aware of the importance of this term for other practical situations of ecological importance, including climate change.[5] For him, Christ entered into the 'whole malleable matrix of materiality'.[6] Drawing specifically on the

[2] See J. Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics,* eds. S. Bouma-Prediger and P. W. Bakken (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2000); J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (London: SCM Press, 1990); D. Edwards, *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995); and C. E. Gunton, *Christ and Creation: The Didsbury Lectures* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005).

[3] While this could in itself be a criticism of the use of this term, it captures the imagination in ways that other Christological language does not and, in that sense, opens up a richer appreciation of the significance of Jesus Christ for the natural world.

[4] N. H. Gregersen, 'The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World', *Dialog* 40 (2001), pp. 192–207.

[5] N. H. Gregersen, 'Fra skabelsesteologi til dybdeinkarnation. Om klimaforandringen som økologiog teologi', in M. Mogensen (ed.), *Klimakrisen – hvadvedvi, hvadtror vi, oghvadgør vi?* (Ny Mission, 16; Frederiksberg: Unitas, 2009), pp. 14–40. Denis Edwards also endorses Gregersen's use of this term as broadly faithful to the tradition. See D. Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), pp. 58–60.

[6] N. H. Gregersen, 'Creation and the Idea of Deep Incarnation' (plenary lecture, Louvain Explorations In Systematic Theology (LEST) 7, Congress on Discerning Creation in a Scattering World; delivered at the Catholic University of Louvain, 28–31 October 2009). A revised form of this lecture is published as N. Gregersen, 'The Idea of Deep Incarnation: Biblical and Patristic Resources', in F. Depoortere and J. Haers (eds.), *To Discern Creation In a Scattering World* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), pp. 319–42. See also C. Deane-Drummond, 'To Discern Creation in a Scattering World: Questions and Possibilities', in Depoortere and Haers, *To Discern Creation*, pp. 565–88; N. H. Gregersen, 'Christology', in P. Scott and M. Northcott (eds.), *A Systematic Theology for a Changing Climate* (London: Routledge, forthcoming); and N. H. Gregersen (ed.), *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, forthcoming).

ancient Greek meaning of 'flesh', or *sarx*, as indicative not just of vulnerable bodies, as in modern usage, but much wider than this, to include cosmic reality, Gregersen argues for the significance of the Word made 'flesh' as encompassing the natural world from the very beginning of the cosmos right up to the present day.[7] Such a view resonates with the interconnectedness stressed in the philosophy of 'deep ecology' of Arne Naess and others.[8] Gregersen does, however, resist the levelling of human moral status in relation to different aspects of life characteristic of deep ecologists. Ilia Delio has also retrieved the cosmic Christology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin but married this to a deep ecological perspective.[9]

But the problem now presents itself: has the view of deep incarnation that Gregersen presents really lent itself to making adequate distinctions? The implication, though certainly not intended, of the form of deep incarnation as Gregersen envisages it, points to the equivalent worth of all life, caught up in a matrix of *sarx*, following the ancient Greek fascination with cosmology. Gregersen's thought pays close attention to the Greek Stoic background of John's Gospel, recognized for example in the Copenhagen School of New Testament scholarship.[10] Here the term used in the prologue to John's Gospel become foundational, so that Logos is associated with the Greek 'in the beginning' (*en archē*), and thus reflects both the principle of the foundation of the universe and its continuity. Early Christian writers, such as Tertullian, also drew on Greek philosophy for their interpretation of the meaning of the Logos. Gregersen's interpretation of Logos as the divine informational resource

[7] Gregersen nonetheless recognizes associated meanings in *sarx*, including (a) the material body as such; (b) the bodily resistance of the flesh to the spirit, associated with sin; and (c) the widest realm of materiality. It is this last meaning that he believes is most relevant for evolutionary and ecological interpretation.

[8] A. Naess, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 16 (1973), pp. 95–100, later developed in A. Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy* (trans. D. Rothenberg; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). See the overview in B. R. Taylor and M. Zimmermann, 'Deep Ecology', in B. R. Taylor (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Volume One* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 456–60. Gregersen has since drawn back a little from his alignment with Naess.

[9] There is insufficient space to discuss details here, but generally Pierre Teilhard de Chardin could be seen as a prophetic voice for deep incarnation. Ilia Delio weaves her discussion of Teilhard with Franciscan spirituality and deep ecology in a way that seems to me to follow through the problems that are only hinted at in Gregersen's thesis. See I. Delio, *Christ in Evolution* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

[10] For the Copenhagen School of New Testament scholarship that has influenced Gregersen's thinking in this area, see T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); and T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). On John, see G. Buch-Hansen, *'It is the Spirit that Makes Alive' (John 6:63). A Stoic Understanding of Pneuma in John* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

for the whole of the created order is heavily informed by Stoic interpretations, even though he recognizes that Christian faith in a pre-material Logos parted company with Stoicism.[11]

Gregersen also develops the idea of Jesus' life history as an extended body: his life is always one that is shaped by and, in turn, shapes the social and ecological networks during his life.[12] The Hebrew idea of *kol-bashar* (all flesh), could mean human beings (e.g. Pss. 65.3; 145.21), or all living creatures under the sun (e.g. Gen. 6.17; 9; 16–17; Job 34.14). For Gregersen, although John makes use of polysemantic Hebrew and Greek concepts of flesh, the cosmological influence is firmly Stoic. Gregersen offers the following definition of deep incarnation:

> This is the view that God's own Logos (Wisdom and Word) was made flesh in Jesus the Christ in such a comprehensive manner that God, by assuming the particular life-story of Jesus the Jew from Nazareth, also conjoined the material conditions of creaturely existence ("all flesh"), shared and ennobled the fate of all biological life-forms ("grass" and "lilies"), and experienced the pains of sensitive creatures ("sparrows" and "foxes").[13]

Gregersen imaginatively engages the meaning of sinful flesh with that of extended flesh, by suggesting that those sinful aspects of the wider created world are also under the scope of Christ's incarnation. Hence, deep incarnation points to 'deep resurrection', a term Gregersen draws from Elizabeth Johnson.[14] Deep incarnation's significance for deep resurrection is related to Gregersen's 'strict sense' incarnation, meaning incarnation in the physical body (*sarx*) of Jesus Christ. But incarnation in the 'broader' sense relates to 'God's incarnation in, with and under all other beings', one of 'Jesus Christ sharing the depth and scope of social and geo-biological conditions of the entire cosmos'.[15] But here we reach something of an impasse. If the incarnation of the Logos in the 'broad sense' cannot be aligned with the incarnation of Christ in the 'strict sense', what

[11] See, also, N. H. Gregersen, 'God, Matter, and Information: Towards a Stoicizing Logos Christology', in P. Davies and N. H. Gregersen (eds.), *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 319–48.

[12] N. H. Gregersen, 'The Extended Body: the Social Body of Jesus according to Luke', *Dialog* 51 (2012), pp. 235–45.

[13] Gregersen, 'Christology'. This is his most recent definition to date.

[14] Gregersen, 'Christology'.

[15] N. H. Gregersen, 'The Extended Body of Christ: Three Dimensions of Deep Incarnation', in N. H. Gregersen (ed.), *Incarnation: On the Scope and Depth of Christology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, forthcoming).

purpose is the former version of deep incarnation serving in the theological enterprise? More importantly, simply stating that Christ as human shares the bodily reality of humans and so, by implication, the matter of the universe and the ecological realities that make up our complexly interconnected world does not go nearly far enough. How might such a move encourage ecological responsibility? In as much as Christ identifies with the whole of the suffering earth, including evolutionary and ecological aspects, there is a shift to a sense of divine solidarity in suffering, but do the cosmic elements take away from the historical grounded life of Jesus Christ? Gregersen is aware of the problem of evil that a theological trope such as the world as God's body never really fully addresses, but is his solution to this problem fully convincing?

Building on her earlier work, Elizabeth Johnson also presents a case for deep incarnation, again, as Gregersen, relating the cosmos to Christology using deep incarnation as a metaphor for a broad scope Christology.[16] Johnson is, however, more explicitly concerned with prioritizing concrete ecological relationships and implications for ecological ethics, while for Gregersen, such concern develops from his more theoretical understanding of cosmic, evolutionary and scientific considerations of the natural world. Both authors insist that God's presence in the world does not come suddenly with the incarnation, but, as premised on the belief in the Trinity, God is always present with the world God has made. Johnson's stress is not only on the Word as active agent in the creation of the world, but also on Sophia, Wisdom.[17] Johnson puts emphasis on the flesh as signifying the transient, finite nature of what the Word becomes, in opposition to the idea that God made an appearance on earth but remained a remote docetic deity. Like many other writers on ecotheology, Johnson is fascinated by the origins of life and the interconnectedness that ensues; human beings and all other life forms are literally stardust. It is this rich sense of continuity and connectedness that for her makes the concept of deep incarnation particularly apt. So, she can claim that the flesh that Christ became is a flesh that is shared with the cosmos as such, and, drawing on Teilhard,

[16] E. A. Johnson, 'Jesus and the Cosmos: Soundings in Deep Christology', in N. H. Gregersen (ed.), *Incarnation* (forthcoming).

[17] Johnson has been influential in my own work on wisdom, C. Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000). E. A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). Generally I am using the capitalized Wisdom when referring to divine Wisdom, but lower case when referring to practical wisdom or wisdom more generally.

gave a blessing to the union of the divine with the material. But Johnson recognizes a problem with such a shift for the last two hundred years of Christological scholarship as such, namely, its emphasis on historical aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.

Of course, too much emphasis on history leads to a somewhat barren historicism that deep incarnation can serve to correct. But Johnson is entirely on the right lines, it seems to me, to point to the difficulties of a deep incarnation informed *just* by cosmological insights, in as much as it could all too easily lead to a forgetting of social injustices and the real human tragedies that pepper the actual history of particular peoples. Johnson's way through this dilemma is to stress the idea of Jesus as having a 'deep ministry', by which she means his attention to both people *and* the earthly, natural world, but the latter has been largely ignored in the tradition. Ecological hermeneutics is, nonetheless, beginning to recover its attention to these aspects.[18] But Johnson, drawing on McFague's concept of the 'Christic paradigm', identifies the gospel of God's love and mercy as writ large across the whole of the cosmos. It is Jesus' loving ministry that undergirds compassion for the whole created cosmos. Johnson then elaborates the ideas of 'deep cross' and 'deep resurrection', following from reflection on the concrete reality of Jesus' passion in its solidarity with the violent suffering of humanity, now extending that passion into solidarity with the violent suffering and death of all creatures. But, as many other ecotheologians have done before, the significance of Christ's resurrection extends beyond the human to include the life of the world as such.[19]

Johnson has corrected some of the elements in the Stoic conception of deep incarnation, that certainly needed to be addressed by adding in ideas of deep ministry, deep crucifixion and deep resurrection. But it is worth asking if there are other ways of reading the Word made flesh that do not lend themselves to such problems in the first place? I will argue below that by returning to the text of John, a different way of interpreting deep incarnation comes to the surface. This, I suggest, allows a more grounded version of deep incarnation to be developed, one that complements the more abstract Stoic understanding that tends towards remoteness from the earth, which is of

[18] D. G. Horrell et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

[19] See the chapter in this volume by Denis Edwards, for example.

course the very opposite of the overall intention of deep incarnation, namely, to ground Christology in earth processes. I will also develop an approach to Christology in general and deep incarnation in particular that takes its cues from the concept of theo-drama, drawing on the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar.[20] I depart from Hans Urs von Balthasar, who uses the term 'theo-drama', in arguing for a more expansive and less rigid approach in a way that is more inclusive of the agency of all human actors and is also inclusive of other creaturely kinds, rather than being exclusive to human beings. Balthasar's Christology is orientated towards the existential and experiential, but there are cosmic elements in his thought derived from Maximus the Confessor. It therefore has significance for the relationship between Christ and humanity as grounded in that ecology. Furthermore, my understanding of drama is more deeply grounded in scientific knowledge about ecology and evolution. I also hope to give rather more emphasis to the role of the Holy Spirit in the theo-drama and the implications of deep incarnation not just as a way of reminding us of the cosmic significance of Christ but as an imperative for practical human action.

The Word became flesh[21]

In common with Gregersen's and Johnson's work discussed above, the significance of the Gospel of John – where 'the *Logos* became *sarx*' and, beyond that, 'in the *sarx* is seen divine *doxa*' – is of fundamental theological importance for interpreting the meaning of the incarnation. In John's Gospel, the 'Logos' in some sense stands for 'Sophia', or Wisdom, so that Logos is another way of expressing the language of Sophia and both speak of the second person of the Trinity who becomes *sarx*.[22] Biblical exegetes have argued for some time that behind the prologue of John, there is an ancient cosmology

[20] I have developed this idea of a broader theo-dramatic reading in a number of places, most notably, C. Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).

[21] See also, C. Deane-Drummond, 'The Wisdom of Fools? A Theo-dramatic Interpretation of Deep Incarnation', in Gregersen (ed.), *Incarnation* (forthcoming).

[22] For a clear exposition of these links, see M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992). See also B. Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Deane-Drummond, *Creation through Wisdom*, pp. 49–52.

that portrays a particular *Weltanschauung* or ideological or metaphysical framework.[23] The Hellenistic and possibly Stoic influence is not under dispute in historical criticism.[24] In the ancient world, cosmology refers not simply to an understanding of the geographical or physical features of the world, but represents deeper reflection on the significance of that world and humanity's place in it.[25] Both Johnson and Gregersen focus on *sarx* in the term 'the Word made *sarx*', rather than on 'the Word'. Hence, while the language of Logos in the prologue of John's Gospel is associated with cosmological themes characteristic of Genesis 1, such as 'in the beginning', 'creation', 'light', 'darkness' and so on, it is also associated with historical accounts of ancient Israel, more characteristic of the specifically Hebrew emphasis on the action of God in history, such as 'the tabernacle', 'glory' and 'enduring love'.[26] In this way, in the prologue of John's Gospel, the coming of Christ is viewed in clear continuity with Israel's history, but it is now placed in a cosmological setting.

In John's Gospel as a whole, the influence of a Jewish emphasis on contingency in the human and natural world exists somewhat in tension with a more Hellenistic stress on universalism, but all aspects become woven into the prologue of John's Gospel. Hence, in the Jewish tradition, Word is also associated with 'deed', so that Word always implies more than just abstract speculation. The 'Word of the Lord' (*dabar Yahweh*; *logos kyriou*) in Hebrew thought (such as Hos. 1.1 or Joel 1.1) had a particularly dynamic energy in conveying a double aspect of word and deed. In other places, the Word of the Lord was associated with life-giving (Deut. 32.46–47); healing (Ps. 107.20; Wis. 16.12); illumination (Ps. 119.105, 130); as well as being creative (Gen. 1.1; Ps. 33.6; Wis. 1.1).[27] In this sense, the way that John uses the Logos terminology in the prologue may be closer to the Hebrew *dabar* rather than the more abstract philosophical usages of the Greek *logos*.[28] This means, also, that the

[23] J. Painter, 'Theology, Eschatology and the Prologue of John', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993), pp. 27–42 (28).

[24] See, for example, P. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (London: Continuum, 2006); P. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

[25] R. Brague, *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought* (trans. T. Fagan; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 4–25.

[26] I am grateful to biblical scholar Sr Kathleen Rushton for this particular insight, personal communication, 26 April 2011.

[27] R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John* (Anchor Bible Series, 29; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 519–24.

[28] Again, I am grateful to Sr Kathleen Rushton for this insight, personal communication, 26 April 2011.

Word is associated with life from the beginning in its concrete expression, it is an 'earthed' understanding of the Word in a way that parallels the way contemporary formulations of ecology are rather more inclined to stress contingent elements when compared with ecological philosophies of even a hundred years ago that stressed the stability of ecological systems.[29] It is the concrete, then, rather than the universal that is implied by *dabar*.

Yet this is not the only way in which the universal is united with the particular in the prologue of John's Gospel. A second major theme is the association of the language of Word with that of Sophia, or Wisdom. Both Sophia and Jesus are sent by God into the world and 'pitched their tent among us' (cf. Sir. 24.8). John 1.14 interprets Jesus as one who lived among us, while Sophia delights in the human family (Prov. 8.31) and seeks a place to abide in the created world (Sir. 24.7). In the prologue, we find the passion narrative compressed into a few paragraphs, and it therefore anticipates what is to follow in the whole gospel. Sophia is the cause of division and experiences rejection (Prov. 1.20–33) like Jesus (Jn 1.11). Only some in a small community will accept Sophia, and Jesus likewise draws together a community and shares a close relationship with his disciples. But the really crucial difference in relation to an understanding of the uniqueness of the incarnation is important. For while Sophia 'appeared on earth and lived with humankind' (Bar. 3.37–38), Jesus actually 'became flesh'. It is not theologically irresponsible, therefore, to suggest that such texts imply that in some sense Jesus is the incarnation of both Word and Wisdom.

Deep incarnation, death and theo-drama

The next question, therefore, that needs to be addressed is how to relate the events of the incarnation with the passion, an exercise that has occupied theological reflection from the earliest history of Christian thought. Here the incarnation is about God's identification through the Logos with creaturely mortality and death rather than simply the coming into history of a frail, human infant. The incarnation is 'deep' in the sense of being deeply embedded

[29] D. M. Lodge and C. Hamlin (eds.), *Religion and the New Ecology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); C. Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 29–38.

in the frail, suffering and mortal history of the flesh. But as Johnson has been at pains to point out, it is a particular and unique history that is of importance here in the person of Jesus Christ, but that particular history also has universal and profound significance. The question that then comes to mind is: How and in what sense might that particular history relate to the wider history of other human beings, and beyond that, to the history of all creatures in their ecological relationships? But in that case, are cosmological readings really serving environmental practices if they detract from the concrete historical problems of ecology?

One way to avoid this dis-incarnation through speculation is through what I would call an extensive, expansive, ontological model, where the suffering flesh of Christ stands for, or represents, all suffering and dying human flesh, and beyond that, for the concrete instances of the dying, suffering creaturely world as such. Gregersen and Johnson both argue that deep incarnation points to a deep cross and deep resurrection. Such a model seems to emerge from cosmological interpretations of Christology (as found in, for example, Col. 1) that echo not just the Genesis story of origins but ancient liturgical texts on Wisdom. Here the blood of the cross becomes pivotal in the new interpretation of ancient Wisdom.[30] But even here, the reliance on Christ in his humanity as the central axis of mediation between God and the rest of the created order seems to push to one side the possible significance of other creaturely kinds. But another problem looms, for Christ's incarnation seems to be standing in for salvation and eschatology, sometimes labelled in derogatory way as 'Christomonism'.

As an alternative, just as human beings image God in terms of action, rather than just in constrictive ontological categories, so too Christology needs to be interpreted in terms of how Christ acts in history, rather than just through speculative ontological accounts of his nature as divine and human shared in one person. Yet that does not mean that by beginning with such a historical approach that ontology is excluded, otherwise there would be a reduction of God to history, which is just as problematic. John's Gospel is profound in that it was able to adjudicate between ontological and historical approaches in a way that pointed to the fullness of the divine mystery of the incarnation.

[30] V. Balabanski, 'Hellenistic Cosmology and the Letter to the Colossians: Towards an Ecological Hermeneutic', in Horrell et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics*, pp. 94–107.

At the same time, a historically grounded approach is less likely to evolve into forms of mystical speculation that are completely removed from concrete experiences, but that does not mean that all mystical experiences should be discounted. It is in deep contemplation of the wonder of the world as it is that we begin to appreciate and love that world in a new way. Deep incarnation, therefore, needs to be thought of as deeply personal; Christ becomes incarnate in the human person, Christ in us, the hope of glory. In this sense, Hans Urs von Balthasar was correct, for he recognized that theo-drama is not simply a narrative that happens, as it were, from outside human experience, but is deeply embedded in lyrical, mystical experiences from which human action flows. Drawing particularly on the insights of Ignatius of Loyola, he could claim that Christ is in all things, but at the same time the challenge or standard of Christ is one that relativizes human achievements, spurring the believer on to greater obedience to God's call. It is the capacity for human wonder in the face of the natural world, then, that is a prerequisite to understanding or appreciating the significance of deep incarnation.

I suggest that the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar is of special importance because of his focus on the death of Christ as a crucial aspect of the dramatic action of God in history. Here he uses the language of drama deliberately as a way of showing up the specific action of God in contingent events. Drama differs from grand narrative in that, while it includes narrative elements, it focuses attention down onto the specific, contingent elements that are important, while narrative, in as much as it morphs into grand narrative, carries a sense of inevitability and fatalism.[31] Here we need to be clear that the category of drama does not take out *all* narrative elements, but becomes wary of false objectivity. Drama also includes a more contemplative element noted above, what one might term 'lyric', which is a more mystical way of interpreting events. Theo-drama is situated somewhere between narrative and lyric, and tries to avoid the dangers associated with both. It therefore, and importantly, mediates between what might be termed an 'ontological' approach and a 'historical' approach to Christology. Here the ontological approach is framed by reflection on the drama of the passion narrative rather than separate from it.

[31] I have discussed the practical, ethical significance of such a shift in C. Deane-Drummond, 'Beyond Humanity's End: An Exploration of a Dramatic versus Narrative Rhetoric and its Ethical Implications', in S. Skrimshire (ed.), *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 242–59.

The cross is of crucial importance for Balthasar in the drama, so that 'God's entire world drama hinges on this scene. This is the theo-drama into which the world and God have their ultimate input; here absolute freedom enters into created freedom, interacts with created freedom and acts as created freedom.'[32] He understands such a drama as a revelation of the Trinity, rather than its actualization, so that such an action is a mirror of the immanent Trinity expressing itself in absolute self-surrender. In other words, for Balthasar 'it is the drama of the "emptying" of the Father's heart, in the generation of the Son, that contains and surpasses all possible drama between God and a world'.[33] In saying this, he seems to be trying to avoid the difficulty that could arise if the cross becomes somehow *necessary* as a way of describing Trinitarian relationships. It is therefore self-giving love, rather than the cross itself, that Balthasar argues is at the heart of the immanent Trinity and at the heart of the incarnation. One way to understand deep incarnation, therefore, is not just as incarnation into the mortality and fragility of human existence but *also* as a way of revealing what God is like, the deeply loving, self-giving and 'emptying' of God. This is important as it gives an ontological thread in interpreting both Christology and the incarnation. Like Johnson, then, I recognize the vital importance of love as expressing the way God is with the world. From the beginning of creation through to the incarnation and consummation, the Trinitarian movement is the dramatic movement of God's love and grace in the world. Creation, then, is not so much the backdrop against which human history is played out but the first act in the overall drama, which eventually comes to expression in the incarnation of the Word made Flesh.

But in order to stay faithful to the heart of the incarnation as the Word made *flesh*, a return to a closer consideration of the reality of death, of mortality, in common with all creaturely beings deserves fuller attention alongside the basic common interdependence of all life, including the dependence of all human life on the lives of other creatures. We are, in Alastair McIntyre's words,

[32] H. Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama: Theo-dramatic Theory, Volume Four: The Action* (trans. G. Harrison; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 318.

[33] Balthasar, *Theo-drama, Volume Four*, p. 327. There are, nonetheless, problems with the way Balthasar characterizes the relationship between the Father and the Son in the passion account. See C. Deane-Drummond, 'The Breadth of Glory: A Trinitarian Eschatology for the Earth through Critical Engagement with Hans Urs von Balthasar', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010), pp. 46–64.

dependent, rational animals. I suggest that such a view be kept in mind when considering the theological significance of the death of Christ.[34] For just as an ontological view of Christology can be drawn out in a more inclusive way, so too the particular action of Christ on the cross reaches in scope beyond the human community.

Environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston III has used the term 'cruciform' to connect the suffering in the natural world with that of Christ.[35] This language would seem to fit with the language of deep incarnation in its broad sense, as developed by Gregersen. However, I prefer the language of theo-drama in relation to the action and activity of other creatures for a number of reasons. First, the language of theo-drama always looks beyond the event of the cross to the resurrection in a way that 'cruciform' does not. Second, 'cruciform' marks out suffering and death as a necessary part of overall evolutionary and ecological processes. The way that I am interpreting the cross implies not so much the necessity of suffering, but its inevitability. Third, 'cruciform' fits more easily with the idea of evolutionary history as a grand narrative. There is therefore a stronger sense of human agency in a theo-drama. Balthasar's temptation towards necessity emerges from his perception of the determined action of God, and God's role in the drama, rather than through natural necessity as in Rolston. Both approaches, I suggest, weaken a sense of human responsibility, understood as sin, and therefore responsibility for the way humans treat the natural world.[36]

A crucial issue is what precisely Christ's deeply incarnate action entails. One of the more original aspects of Balthasar's account of theo-drama is his reflection on the significance of Holy Saturday, when Christ sinks into the world of the dead.[37] Christ's entry into Hades is an entry into the world of the human dead, and in as much as this represents sharing in the existential, human fear of death, including that associated with ecological devastation and climate

[34] A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 2009).

[35] Holmes Rolston III has referred to this concept on a number of occasions, but for an early example, see H. Rolston III, *Genes, Genesis and God: Values and Their Origins in Natural and Human History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 306 and further.

[36] Balthasar's account also tends to force his view towards a grand narrative and away from the contingent elements that I believe make the theo-dramatic approach attractive. See B. Quash, *Theology and the Drama of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 6–40.

[37] See, for example, B. Quash, 'Theo-drama', in E. T. Oakes and D. Moss (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 143–57.

collapse, it is a sharing in solidarity with those humans who are dying, perhaps as a result of ecological or climate devastation, and who, uniquely among other animals, share a profound fear of what lies beyond death. The difficulty, of course, is how far Balthasar's speculations about Christ confronting absolute sin in Hell represent an unfortunate type of dis-incarnation, a removal from the Word made *flesh*.

I suggest that God's love in the face of death is much better expressed through envisaging God as acting through improvisation, even in solidarity with the world of the dead, and holding onto the importance of the humanity of Christ, understood as a genuinely incarnate humanity grounded in the life of other creatures. But the continuance of human life beyond death is important in as much as it shows the capacity for humans to engage in an existential sharing with creatures beyond the grave. Christian religious experience is full of accounts of communion with the saints, visions and so on as hints at the salvation history that is to come. The tradition has been slow, however, to acknowledge what this might mean for the earth as such, and not just for humanity.

Human beings, in contemplating closely the particular death of Jesus Christ, will find their own perceived role in the theo-dramatic account of history (including the history of the earth) radically revised in an analogous way, as certain key events in our shared human history (including those of birth and death) then have a profound impact on our own decision-making processes, on how we respond in the drama of our own history. But if human beings are in shared relationships with other creaturely kinds, then our decision making cannot be separated off from those kinds, for how we act will impact on the lives of countless others. Our action in the drama impinges, then, on other players. But this raises the important theological issue of the particular action of the Holy Spirit in facilitating the way this theo-drama unfolds. Theo-drama, in the way I am interpreting it, therefore allows for some improvisation in the action of God in history, but the overall direction is towards the flourishing of all of life and its eventual re-creation. The next question to address is in what sense other creatures in all their ecological variety are caught up in the theo-dramatic account of salvation history. I prefer to envisage such implications in terms of a woven and shared history of theo-drama.

Deep incarnation and pneumatology

I suggest that such an expansive approach to theo-drama also makes more sense compared with more static ontological models of Christology in the light of contemporary philosophies of ecology. Current understanding of ecology has shifted over the last quarter century towards an understanding of ecological dynamics in terms of flux rather than stability. Ecology in its original formulation viewed ecological systems as essentially closed, self-regulating, free of disturbance and independent of human influences. The idea of 'wild' nature untouched by human interference captured the imagination of pioneers in environmental ethics.[38] As research progressed, ecosystem boundaries came to be viewed as being far more fluid than previously thought, so that the prospect of self-regulation seemed unlikely, and at best, in any one ecological situation, there seems to be a given equilibrium state, rather than a persistent equilibrium. This leads to the view that ecological systems are in a state of flux, are open to external as well as internal influences, are subject to a multiplicity of complex control systems and are open to human disturbance.

While the earlier idea of stability would fit reasonably well with the idea of an ontological expansion of Christology so that it includes other creatures, drawing on more Stoic concepts of cosmology, the contemporary notion of ecological flux fits far better with envisaging the dynamic relationship between Christ and creation in terms of theo-drama and as evoked by the action of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that ontology is unimportant, but that it is interpreted historically through reflection on theo-drama. Of course, Balthasar did not allow for such an elaboration of his view in relation to ecology and tended to think of the ecological world as a kind of fixed 'stage' in which human history was played out. Balthasar redeemed this position somewhat by his understanding of the analogy of being, which allowed for an affirmation of beauty, truth and goodness in the natural world in a way that was much more difficult for his Protestant contemporary Karl Barth. However, such aesthetic affirmation still did not permit him to include creatures other than humans in salvation history, except to a very limited extent, and certainly not in a theo-drama. But once we liberate ourselves from such a restriction,

[38] For a brief review, see Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature*, pp. 29–38.

then it becomes possible to include other creaturely kinds in the drama in a way that affirms the place and promise of other creatures quite apart from their simple usefulness to humankind.

In making such a claim, I am conscious of the fact that the way in which other creatures might be envisaged to enter theo-dramatic history is not going to be exactly the same as that for human beings, which is predicated on a strong sense of creaturely freedom. The idea that we can envisage other creatures as in a dramatic relationship with each other is certainly not new and has been suggested by other biologists as well as theologians.[39] However, the unique position of human beings in ecological and evolutionary terms means that they are specialized for a particular evolutionary and ecological role. In the theo-drama, I envisage this to be expressed as a self-conscious awareness of God and a response or rejection of the divine invitation to act after the pattern of God's Son. In evolutionary history, the evolution of the human ability to respond to God must have come prior to any awareness of acting in that history. I have no problem, therefore, with scientific speculations about the evolution of a religious consciousness or capacity to respond to God. What is not subject to evolutionary analysis is precisely how human beings might then interpret divine action in history or, more precisely, how they might then act as a result of that consciousness. Evolutionary theory, therefore, gives only very generalized guidance as to how human beings may respond and develop religious awareness, just as it can give general guidance about how human beings may cooperate with one another or may be inclined not to.

For other creatures, the manner in which they can enter into the theo-drama will depend not just on their relative capacity for agency in comparison with human beings, but also on what might be called their natural capacities for estimative sense.[40] The difference with respect to humans is that I consider it unlikely that other creatures would be self-aware of any response to the divine, even if by a stretch of imagination, we might not want to rule out the possibility that they can be caught up in salvation history in a way that implies a more active, rather than a simply passive process. What is crucial in this respect is

[39] J. F. Haught, *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God and the Drama of Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).

[40] For a discussion of animals and estimative sense, which comes from Aquinas, see J. Berkman, 'Towards a Thomistic Theology of Animality', in C. Deane-Drummond and D. Clough (eds.), *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals* (London: SCM Press, 2009), pp. 21–40.

that, for the Christian theological account of the cross, the drama does not end in death, but in resurrection. So the cross is always filtered through that lens, and the cross when viewed on this side of the resurrection, displays marks of the glory that is to come. But in order to see or perceive this aspect of the drama, the third person of the Trinity needs to come onto the centre of the stage, for the meaning of the incarnation cannot be understood apart from the Holy Spirit.

I am making the claim, therefore, that deep incarnation should be understood not so much as the spatial descent of God into creation, or even the ontological extension of Christ into creation, but most profoundly as the transformative and dramatic movement of God in Christ, who takes centre stage in the theo-drama. Such a transformative movement is accompanied by the active presence of the Holy Spirit, so that deep incarnation can be envisaged as an aspect of pneumatology as much as of Christology, and points towards an eschatological vision of glory. Here we find pneumatology in the space between creation and re-creation, in the creation as it is now and in the promised eschatological hope where God will be all in all.

Deep incarnation, presence and action

There are dangers, too, in an exclusive insistence on keeping alive the way God acts in human, evolutionary and ecological history, if God's transcendence becomes compromised. I am anxious to distinguish more clearly between a simple focus on evolutionary or ecological history and the theo-dramatic account I am arguing for here. In reacting to overly abstract accounts of Christology, it is important also to keep in mind its ontological and transcendent significance. A similar danger exists where the incarnation is made coextensive with a more general sense of divine presence in all that is. For if Christ's incarnation becomes part of a grand narrative where evolutionary history becomes just one step towards the emergence of humanity and Christ, then God's transcendence and the radical nature of the incarnation, the *Word* made flesh, seems compromised.

The general presence of God in creation is to be thought of as a more providential presence that follows from belief in God as Creator who

continually accompanies creation in its evolutionary emergence. This presence is important in that it provides one way to conceive of how God acts in creation. I suggest that deep incarnation can be understood, theologically, to act at the boundary of creation and new creation, where Christ enters into human, evolutionary and ecological history in a profound way so that through the living presence of the Holy Spirit, the history of the earth is changed in the direction of God's purposes for the universe after the pattern of Christ. Traditionally, such transformation was restricted to the ecclesial community. However, the community of creatures in the earth can also become a site for God's sacramental presence, but only in so far as creatures are enabled to participate in this path towards transformation. Following Romans 8, this inclusion of other creaturely kinds requires not just the concession of human beings, but their active participation. The expectant longing of creation is therefore real in that it hangs on how humans choose to act in history.

Therefore, in so far as deep incarnation is drama, it is not only sharing in the drama of living history, but also invites human beings to reflect more fully on the profound significance of their creaturely existence and to exercise their particular and distinctive vocation in responsive humility towards God, other people and the natural world and all its creaturely kinds. While human beings are creatures alongside other creatures, they also bear a special responsibility to act in a way that follows the pattern of service and self-offering marked out by the passion of Christ. Deep incarnation, therefore, if it is to follow the full significance of the prologue of John's Gospel, is also a call to act out in proper respect for the natural world and all its creatures. It is, in other words, unavoidably an *eco*theology marked out by a call to build a community of justice, one that challenges humanity to reconsider its place in the natural order and behave in a manner that befits one of the most powerful actors on the world stage. Human beings are also called to use their power responsibly, rather than out of self-interest, both within and between human communities, and wider than this in the community of other creatures.

The intense problems within human communities and the injustices therein, noted also by Johnson, have sometimes been viewed as being in tension with responsibility towards the earth. Yet the implications of deep incarnation for human action resists a reduction to act in favour of either people or planet, but calls instead for a holistic approach to issues that draws on the practical

wisdom that is tempered by knowledge of the limitations of human reasoning. Such practical wisdom recognizes the close dependence of human beings on the natural world, and how peace between peoples presupposes peace with the natural order. The call for human action evoked by deep incarnation is therefore no less than the radical call of the prophet, to act justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly with the Lord (Mic. 6.8).

Possible ways forward

I have reviewed in this chapter a significant development of Christology in terms of the incarnation as deep incarnation, as inspired by the work of Niels Gregersen and developed by Elizabeth Johnson. I have also suggested that the full significance of the Johannine concept of the Word made flesh needs to be addressed by taking the Hebrew stress on history, which is influential in the Gospel of John prologue, just as seriously as the Hellenistic cosmological elements. Wisdom, or Sophia, interpreted in a Sophianic Christology is suggestive in thinking through how to unite the universal with the particular, but it also carries the temptation for detached speculation. Rather than simply understanding deep incarnation as the ontological extension of the enfleshment of the divine into all of creation, I argue for the use of theo-drama as a starting point. It is important to note that theo-drama occupies what might be termed a boundary position between historical and ontological accounts of Christology and, therefore, also of the meaning of deep incarnation. While the idea of theo-drama is most developed in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, I am critical of those aspects of his work that put stress on divine power in a way that seems to mask the action of other players on the stage. Furthermore, I argue for an extension of an understanding of theo-drama so that it is inclusive in scope, widening out to the universal reach of God's love shown in Christ to all creatures. But that love is only apparent in retrospect in the light of the resurrection, thus bringing in an eschatological element to an understanding of deep incarnation. The profound significance of the incarnation allows human beings to contemplate the fear of what is beyond death, as well as death itself. But this then allows human beings to contemplate more fully not just who they are in the light of the action of the Holy Spirit, but also what they

might become through God's grace and their particular vocation in the world. If we are to follow deep incarnation to its limits, then it is associated with an ethical demand to take an active part in the shared drama, a common history of the earth, and therefore to love God and neighbour, acting with sensitivity and responsibly towards the earth and its creatures. Further work on deep incarnation needs to focus on developing these practical implications in the light of concrete instances of ecological and creaturely relationships.

4

Where on Earth Does the Spirit 'Take Place' Today? Considerations on Pneumatology in the Light of the Global Environmental Crisis

Sigurd Bergmann

'Come, Holy Spirit, Come!'

In the context of ecological destruction, climatic change with increasing global injustice and fetishizing mammonism as the most successful practised religion, the central challenge for Christian theology is to reconstruct the two-thousand-year-old prayer, 'Come Holy Spirit, come!' This chapter will explore the theme of this volume through the lens of pneumatology – the doctrine of the Holy Spirit – and it will emphasize the spatial dimension of the Spirit at work. In my view, the most central systematic-theological question sounds: where does the Spirit, who gives life and liberates nature, take place today?

The working group on the Spirit in the Christian Faith and the Earth project has been characterized by a communicative calm rather than a blazing heat.[1] Nevertheless, several theologians in and outside the project have made substantial contributions in order to revise not only the doctrine of the Spirit but the whole of creation theology through a re-envisioning of pneumatology. These include contributions by Jürgen Moltmann,[2] Elizabeth Johnson,[3] Geiko

[1] See the collection of essays 'Ecumenical Perspectives on Pneumatology and Ecology' published in the *Journal of Reformed Theology* 6/3 (2012), pp. 189–305, with contributions by Ernst Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Mark Wallace, Charles Fensham, Robert Owusu Agyarko, Christo Lombard and Cornelis van der Kooi.

[2] J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992).

[3] E. A. Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993).

Müller-Fahrenholz,[4] Mark Wallace,[5] Denis Edwards,[6] Sigurd Bergmann,[7] and Grace Ji-Sun Kim,[8] and a volume of essays edited by Lauren Kearns and Catherine Keller.[9] One interesting contribution by Marthinus Daneel explores the link between Spirit and ecology from within the praxis of earthkeeping in Zimbabwe.[10]

Recent contributions on ecology and pneumatology, each seeking to discern the movement of the Spirit, come from diverging perspectives, including liberation theology, process theology, ecofeminism,[11] the legacy of Teilhard de Chardin, New Age mysticism, neo-pagan practices,[12] indigenous theologies and various forms of creation spirituality. At the same time, there are a number of other contributions which seek to retrieve the vision of classic Christian theologians such as Basil of Caesarea[13] and Gregory of Nazianzus.[14] Yet other contributions are situated within the context of ecumenical dialogue on 'Faith and Order' or 'Life and Work'.[15]

In the following, I will, in the first section, envision pneumatology as ecological soteriology and explore the Spirit as a giver and liberator of life. Rather than as a diffuse power or energy of the Father and the Son, I would like to interpret the work of Sister Spirit on Earth as an all-embracing space and a liberation movement at specific times and places. In the second section, I suggest that the doctrine of the Spirit may be reinterpreted in the context of the spatial turn of theology in terms of faith in the Spirit's inhabitation.

[4] G. Müller-Fahrenholz, *God's Spirit Transforming a World in Crisis* (New York: Continuum, 1995).
[5] M. I. Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 1996).
[6] D. Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004).
[7] S. Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2005).
[8] G. J.-S. Kim, *Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[9] L. Kearns and C. Keller (eds.): *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).
[10] M. L. Daneel, 'African Independent Church Pneumatology and the Salvation of All Creation', *Theologia Evangelica* 25/1 (1992), pp. 35–55.
[11] See especially Johnson's monograph *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, and the essay by Sharon Butcher entitled 'Grounding the Spirit: An Ecofeminist Pneumatology', in Kearns and Keller (eds.), *Ecospirit*, pp. 315–36.
[12] See Mark Wallace's attempt to speak of a revisionary Christian paganism, adopting the image of a cruciform creator Spirit as the 'Mother Bird God' hovering over creation. This may be found in *Finding God in the Singing River: Christianity, Spirit, Nature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) and in Wallace's earlier *Fragments of the Spirit*, 139–144.
[13] Edwards, *Breath of Life*.
[14] Bergmann, *Creation Set Free*.
[15] Müller-Fahrenholz, *God's Spirit*.

The third, concluding section will offer a longer argument for an ecological pneumatology in synergy with animism, an approach which investigates the critical potentials of resisting and overcoming the fetishism of late modern capitalism.

The all-embracing space and eco-liberation movement of the spirit

In the contemporary context one of the most challenging perspectives is found in Paul's letter to the Romans (8.20-23), where he declares: 'in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God'.

The strongly moving image of 'the whole creation . . . groaning as in the pains of childbirth [*synoodinei*] right up to the present time' is introduced here. Consequently one can – according to Denis Edwards[16] – imagine the Spirit in this scenery as midwife; a midwife for the painful and joyful birth of a new creation to come.

Paul's emphasis on one common community of all beings who groan, long, and experience redemption together can be interpreted as a belief in creation as one common space of life that is embraced by the creator Spirit. Concepts of space are, however, in the long Western tradition, characterized by a fatal simplifying tendency to reduce space to a lifeless container that merely offers a stage for others to play on.

Analogous to the decline and marginalization of the image of the Spirit in Christian theology, the externalization of space in Western images of the world has also harmed our perception of nature and ourselves as parts not only *of* it but deeply *within* it. The challenge therefore is to 'restore' our image of the life-giving Spirit in order to appreciate and internalize space as a fully *lived space*.[17]

[16] Edwards, *Breath of Life*, pp. 110–12.

[17] B. Warf and S. Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2008). Cf. S. Bergmann, 'Theology in its Spatial Turn: Space, Place and Built Environments Challenging and Changing the Images of God', *Religion Compass* 1/3 (2007), pp. 353–79, and 'Prelude: Alive in, with, and through Space', in my *Religion, Space and the Environment* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2014).

This challenge needs to move to the top of theological agendas for the sake of the world.

In my view, such a move can be captured in the notion of the Spirit as an all-embracing space. Such an approach would make it possible to establish a connection and constructive revisiting of older classical Christian beliefs where *physis* and *cosmos* represented a space of life which embraces the emergence, the endurance and the transience of life, in contrast to the Latin *natura*, which gives priority only to the coming-into-being.

Imagining the Holy Spirit as an all-embracing space of life would allow the development of a differentiated topography of the Spirit at work at many diverse places in creation; an understanding that may thus nurture fruitful exchanges with indigenous cultures, non-Christian belief systems as well as with geopolitically enlightened social movements striving for a deeper spiritual anchorage of their practices.

The environmental movement, for example, nurtures its hope with the vision of one common *sympathetic* natural space where the living flourish in manifold-interrelated communities characterized by justice. The concept of 'ecojustice' in environmental ethics further deepens this interconnectedness by construing a common moral space to which all organisms and their environments belong.[18]

The image of the Spirit as an all-embracing space of life would catalyse reflection about where and how God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, fosters the 'integrity of creation' as a deepening of spatial and environmental justice.

Especially urban space would require careful and differentiated consideration in such a future pneumatology, as urbanization in itself catalyses globalization and produces specific modes of spatial injustice.[19] These have to be related to the work of the Spirit that biblical sources describe as remembrance of the suffering and advocacy of the poor.

Grace Ji-Sun Kim therefore circumscribes the intention for a revised understanding of the Spirit as an intention to motivate 'to live a sustainable

[18] Cf. C. Deane-Drummond, 'Deep Incarnation and Eco-justice as Theodrama: A Dialogue between Hans Urs von Balthasar and Martha Nussbaum', in S. Bergmann and H. Eaton (eds.), *Ecological Awareness: Exploring Religion, Ethics and Aesthetics* (Studies in Religion and the Environment, 3; Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), pp. 195–208.

[19] Cf. E. W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

life in a world filled with the toxins of empire, colonialism, consumption and greed'.[20]

Continuing my earlier work on the spatiality of religion,[21] I would like to supplement my emphasis on the Spirit as all-embracing space with the dimension of motion and movement in our understanding of the liberating work of the Spirit.

The history of salvation – as one common world history of all in need of liberation – would then take place as interconnected and spatially mobile events, of the life-giving Holy Spirit at work in the circular line that runs through many diverse places of creation. Earth and its many places would then – in accordance with biblical and traditional sources[22] – in itself appear as an active partner in God's redemptive work. Indigenous beliefs in Mother Earth, as in Latin America; in Father Sun, as in the indigenous Arctic; or in the ancestors' dreamtime, as in aboriginal Australia, would then not necessarily represent pagan pantheist beliefs in opposition to classical Christianity, but rather offer alternative and complementary perspectives on the Spirit's all-embracing movement in, with and for sacred nature.

Such an approach would also correspond wonderfully with the interpretation of the Spirit in the patristic age, where the Spirit – according to Gregory of Nazianzus – 'dwells among us' (*Or.* 31.26).[23] Even if Gregory (in *Or.* 28.8) says that God has no definite place (*topos*), and that the Holy Spirit

[20] Kim, *Colonialism, Han, and the Transformative Spirit*, p. 2. Kim concludes her book, which strongly provokes and inspires Christians to let the Spirit motivate resistance against and transform injustices on Earth, with a pneumatology that departs from God's sending of the Spirit 'to provide the wisdom to harvest and distribute justly and the motive to make these tasks ours' (ch. 4, p. 60). Still such an, often in Protestant and Evangelical spheres common, understanding of the Spirit reveals a lack of interconnecting the Spirit of life, present in *all* life forms, ecosystems and landscapes on Earth, with the Spirit of the believers, driving them out of their closed circles into creation. If the Spirit not only provides the wisdom to harvest but is found herself in the soil, the tree and the fruits to be harvested, the same Spirit would empower us as believing human beings as she embraces and vivifies the creation awaiting its liberation. The 'transformative Spirit', which Kim so inspiringly emphasizes, would then be at work both within us and around and ahead of us, both in our past and in our common future. The life-giving Spirit would then not only motivate us to sustainability but be found as the driving force within sustainability itself.

[21] S. Bergmann, *Raum und Geist: Zur Erdung und Beheimatung der Religion – eine theologische Ästh/Ethik des Raumes* (Research in Contemporary Religion, 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).

[22] Cf. E. Moltmann-Wendel, 'Rückkehr zur Erde', *Evangelische Theologie* 53/5 (1993), pp. 406–20.

[23] For the theologian 'everything is through the Spirit' (*Or.* 34.15). According to Gregory, 'the Spirit consummates creation; the pneuma is the power of deification, and this power for consummation flows from the source of the Godhead' (*Carm.* 1.2.1.1). For all sources of Gregory of Nazianzus, see the bibliography in Bergmann, *Creation Set Free*.

is not spatially bound in any way (*Or.* 32.27), the work of the Spirit creates a distinct topography that brings a 'cosmic spring' to the Earth (*Or.* 44.12).

In a highly creative theology, Gregory hereby offers us a differentiated interpretation of Paul's Spirit groaning with the creation in need of liberation. Such an eco-soteriological pneumatology emphasizes the dimensions of space, movement and communication.[24] In a highly creative Trinitarian theology, the Spirit acts together in a synergy and redemptive cooperation with the Son in his historical and bodily work on Earth. After the ascension of the Son returning to the Father, the Son's incarnation is followed by the Spirit's inhabitation.

In eastern patristic theology 'inhabitation' is therefore a central term. The notion of God's inhabitation offers not only a rich link to our common past, but it also provides us with a metaphorical thinking that responds to the spatial turn to which Christian theology has started contributing from its rich sources. If God has made Godself at home on Earth, what does it mean for us human beings as images of such a God, as images of the Spirit, who strive to make themselves at home anew in a world which we ourselves have damaged through ecological disasters?

The Triune's inhabitation: The spatial turn in pneumatology

The life-giving Spirit of the letters to the Romans, which celebrates the whole of creation, is also the Spirit who indwells the creation in a blessed change of positions between the Son and the Sprit in the event of ascension. Gregory of Nazianzus summarized this vision:

> Now the Spirit [himself] dwells [*empoliteuetai*] among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration [of himself] (*Or.* 31.26).[25]

If the Trinity acts within a historical process where liberation takes place in the enlightened world, the Earth filled by the indwelling Spirit breathes the hope of redemption for all its inhabitants and elements of life.

Where do we perceive and experience the forces of the life of the coming world? How does God in the Spirit encounter that which becomes visible in

[24] Cf. Bergmann, *Creation Set Free*, pp. 108–11, 129–33.

[25] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 31.26. The word 'dwell' (*endomesantos*) means to be at home and to be a citizen in a city. The New Testament uses the verb to mean 'be at home in the body' (2 Cor. 5.6).

the cross and suffering of nature? The loss of biodiversity, land degradation, increasing water scarcity and climatic change are not simply topics for economic and environmental management, but at its depth it is a question of the spiritual essence of life as a gift of the Creator. It, in fact, concerns the inhabitation of the Spirit itself in her created world.

From Cappadocian theology, we can learn to keep together Christology and pneumatology by intertwining incarnation with inhabitation. The experience of God's indwelling represents a foundational characteristic of Jewish and Christian faith. The spatial dimension hereby moves into focus, as we have seen. Inhabitation does not mean that the world *is* God. God dwells in the world but God *is* not the world – as Sallie McFague, and to some extent also Jürgen Moltmann, have claimed with emphasis.[26] Quite the opposite; God continues to be a God who dwells in the darkness. Inhabitation is an ongoing dynamic process where God goes into and beyond the world and transfigures it from within. The Creator remains a sovereign God who fulfils in love what God has begun. As theologians we need to give much more emphasis than usual to the perception of space and life. And we need to sharpen the pneumatological lens on practices with and discourses about the synergy of the Holy Spirit inhabiting natural and built environments and cohabitating them. In short: *where* does God dwell here and now?

Experiences of God dwelling in creation are richly found in our tradition:

- On Mount Sinai God responded to the people: 'Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them' (Exod. 25.8).
- John summarized the mystery of incarnation: 'Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us' (Jn 1.14).
- While the Spirit of Genesis was 'moving over the surface of the chaos waters' (Gen. 1.2), the wisdom literature established a deep relation between the breathing of God, *ruach*, and the emergence and preservation of the living: 'When you send your life-giving breath, they are created, and you replenish the surface of the ground' (Ps. 104.30).
- The ecumenical creed finally summarized such experiences in locating the Spirit as the Life-giver and the Life of the world to come.

[26] S. McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001); J. Moltmann, *Science and Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

The point made by the Christian doctrine of the Spirit is that God's Holy Spirit can work *in*, *with* and *through* all places, spaces and scales of creation. Humans cannot put limits on God's work. The opposite of inner and outer does not represent any border for the Creator. All natural and human borders are always open for the transcending Spirit. We can meet the Life-giver in the most unexpected places.

The Spirit enters the stage and leaves it, moves between the places. God's Holy Spirit *scales* between the personal inner and the cosmic life spaces. The created beings can perceive and experience the atmospheres of the Spirit who acts, even if not everywhere and at the same time in all places.

The Spirit of inhabitation is neither a machine nor a building nor an impersonal energy. It is not a rationalized truth which can be bound together into an agglomeration of signs in a book either. We cannot dwell in the Spirit, but the Spirit dwells in us, in others and in the space-in-between them and us. The Spirit is the 'Go-between God'.[27] By following and cooperating with her, we can navigate in God's horizon, negotiate in the centre and at the periphery of the globalized world in a new way. We can follow the Spirit into a transfigured creation.[28]

The Holy Spirit among Spirits: An animist countervailing power against fetishism

Finally, I would like not to separate but to relate the Spirit to the spirits, by sketching an eco-pneumatology in synergy with animism. Such an attempt could be historically defended; the mission history of the Christian faith has never simply functioned as an applied dogmatic from above, but as a contextualizing process of exchanges from below and above. In this process, animism has played an interesting role which has seldom been investigated.

Systematically, Christian belief in nature as creation can be regarded as some kind of divine animation of life and its forms and beings from within.

[27] J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

[28] Maybe the 'lost ecumenical vision' of Pentecostalism could be recovered in this way. See W. J. Hollenweger, 'Crucial Issues for Pentecostals', in A. H. Anderson and W. J. Hollenweger (eds.), *Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 176–96.

Animism would then offer a more differentiated continuation of what has often been circumscribed positively as 'pan-en-theism'. While panentheists formulate a general statement about God's Spirit in all things, a Christian animism would focus on specific places and beings and seek the Spirit in what has been animated by her.

Without speculating much about animism as the origin and source from which all types of religion evolve, as Tylor once (falsely) claimed,[29] we can depart from a general understanding of animism as an essential human capacity. Animism allows humans to perceive and interact with non-human life forms as living beings with unique and individual person-like identities. The faith in the Holy Spirit as Giver of Life then appears naturally in the horizon of perceiving the environment as an animated biography and topography, created, inhabited and perfected by the triune Creator. God animates creation through, or better *as*, the breathing and indwelling Spirit.

From this perspective, animism appears not as the opposite of belief in the Spirit but as a mode of belief that should be respected as an expression of the life-giving Spirit and transformed in accordance with central codes of classical pneumatology. It serves as a shield against anthropocentrism when not only humans but also other beings can possess a soul.

Accordingly, spirits are not regarded as pagan counter-beings but as co-workers with and guardians of the Holy Spirit; spiritual animations of natural life forms are not seen as simply superstitious and magic but as valuable cultural skills to make oneself at home in Creation with the Spirit and to restore our home, the Earth, in synergy with her. Even if such an approach would need to explore the common, but also dissimilar, experiential grounds of pneumatology and animism much deeper, I would like to focus on one potentially critical and constructive skill, namely the resistance against fetishism as a central cultural force in late modern capitalism.

How are animism, fetishism and pneumatology connected? Inspired by the rich discussions of social anthropologists,[30] I depart from the hypothesis that modernity and its capitalist economy is anchored in the Cartesian dichotomy

[29] On the history of the theory of animism see D. Chidester, 'Animism', in B. R. Taylor (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Volume One* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 78–81.

[30] N. Bird-David, '"Animism" Revisited: Personhood, Environment and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology* 40/1 (1999), pp. 67–91; A. Hornborg, 'Submitting to Objects: Fetishism, Dissociation, and the Cultural Foundations of Capitalism', in G. Harvey (ed.), *Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2013), ch. 19.

of humankind and otherkind, which is mainly possible through the historical repression of animist worldviews and practices.

Modernity builds, as Karl Marx has shown clearly, on the commodified relations between humans and things, including the alienating split of human workers and the products of their labour. According to Marx, the shift from the perception of the 'physical relation between physical things' to fetishization has its roots in the accelerating trading system: 'This Fetishism of commodities has its origin . . . in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them.'[31] For Marx, fetishism was 'the religion of sensuous appetites'.[32] This is an even stronger reason for its relevance as theme for critical Christian theology.

Modern monetary systems of exchange presuppose alienation and operate through, on the one hand, a commodification of things which are treated as lifeless objects, and, on the other, an adoration of money as the highest object with an intrinsic value. Put briefly, traditional animism is replaced with fetishism.

While traditional animism departs from the given quality of animations in a larger relational system of interconnections between humans and things (perceived as personal beings), fetishism shifts the skill to animate to the human him- or herself. Fetishism makes it possible to decontextualize and delocalize objects – natural objects as well as artefacts – and to reconnect them anew across local and historical borders. Oil, for example, emerging from the planet's long natural history can be turned into a commodity and traded and transported translocally through money and technology.

If relations between humans and objects are fetishized, the relational epistemology of animism is replaced by a hierarchy of relations and asymmetrical translocal processes of exchange which are defined and managed through the fetishization of money and commodities. Value is attributed to lifeless money, things and machines – and nowadays one can add, also to experiences – in a fetishizing way. All of these mystify unequal processes of exchange where local, historical and individual identities are destroyed for the sake of a decontextualized system of asymmetrical and delocalized relations. Both technology and monetarism thus become immune to political critique.[33]

[31] K. Marx, *Capital, Volume One*, chapter 1, section 4.
[32] K. Marx and F. Engels, *On Religion* (Atlanta: ScholarsPress, 1982), p. 22.
[33] Hornborg, 'Submitting to Objects'.

Falsely, they are regarded as value-neutral entities, which are vital to our modern life.[34]

Alf Hornborg takes the discussion further by relating animism to fetishism and shows how fetishism after the replacement of animism turns into a crucial essential driving force of modern capitalism.[35] Animated beings of different kinds are turned into lifeless objects, which are attributed value again in the process of fetishizing money, things and technologies.[36] One would be terrified to imagine what such fetishization has meant and means for the world of lived religion. Can the life-giving Spirit still take place in such a world of fetishes? Can she blow new life into enslaved life forms and things?

It should be obvious that the challenge to revisit animism touches the heart of modernity itself, and the cultural capacity of fetishization appears as a central method in the ongoing process of globalization, which perverts and damages intersubjective relations as well as human–nature relations. Whereas fetishization is a human process that transforms an unanimated being into an animated one, which is attributed with power over others in a larger cultural system of perceptions, beliefs and practices, classical faith in the Holy Spirit is not situated in a *man*-made environment but in a world characterized by divine gifts and God-givenness. While a fetish receives its 'life' through the action of man, the all-embracing Spirit breathes life.

Fetishism and faith in the Spirit, following the older paths of animism, perform along contradictory codes. While the fetish is enchanted by humans, the created life is breathed by the Holy. When she sends her 'life-giving breath, they are created' (Ps. 104.30). While the fetish works as an instrument for the power of the one over the other, the life-giving Spirit embraces all in one common world and history and nevertheless respects the face of every individual identity. While fetishism turns the given nature into a lifeless world where only the useful is animated, traditional animism and Christian pneumatology

[34] On the deconstruction of technology's supposed value-neutrality cf. S. Bergmann, 'Technology as Salvation? Critical Perspectives from an Aesth/Ethics of the Spirit', *European Journal of Science and Technology* 3/4 (2007), pp. 5–19.

[35] A. Hornborg, 'Comment on Bird-David', *Current Anthropology* 40/1 (1999), pp. 80–1.

[36] Cf. A. Hornborg, *The Power of the Machine: Global Inequalities of Economy, Technology, and Environment* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2001); 'Symbolic Technologies: Machines and the Marxian Notion of Fetishism', *Anthropological Theory* 1/4 (2001), pp. 473–96; 'Machine Fetishism, Value, and the Image of Unlimited Good: Towards a Thermodynamics of Imperialism', *Man* 27 (1992), pp. 1–18.

perceive the intrinsic value of all beings in their specific environments. While fetishism aggravates spatial and environmental injustices, faith in the Holy Spirit reveals the perfect, just and true community of the Trinity, and it opens a path to walk towards the (not yet seen) 'land that I will show you' (Gen. 12.1). An animist pneumatology enhances the circles of life, which indigenous theologians have helped us to recognize.

The challenge to an ecological pneumatology, which wants to drink from its own classical wells and respect its synergies with traditional animism in the history of mission, is to resist the authority of life-threatening animations and to overcome the power of fetishization. Faith in the Holy Spirit as an all-embracing, life-giving and liberating movement can break down belief systems where fetishized commodities, money and technologies turn the gifts of life into instruments for domination.

Anthropogenic climatic change represents, in such an analytical horizon, nothing more than the outermost consequence of fetishization as a cardinal human sin: the disenchantment of sacred Earth and life as a gift of the Spirit, and the unjust fragmentation of its life forms and artefacts into tools for power *over* each other. In the lens of a Christian ecological pneumatology, an understanding of power as power allows us to perceive the Holy Spirit at work in the struggle of fetishized and animated life forms in our manifold environments, a work that generates power *with* each other.

Crucial in such a life-giving and liberating inhabitation of the Spirit with the spirits in creation is the understanding of our neighbour, human and non-human, as the other. God's Holy Spirit takes place when the other appears not as a commodity to animate but as an equal subject to love, as a 'Thou' in Martin Buber's sense.

The most violent consequence of fetishism, as it is practiced in capitalism, is the reduction of the other to a commodity. When poor global citizens in the South are excluded from human dignity, value and rights, which are taken for granted among the rich of the North, the Spirit who dwells with the other is violated. When natural life processes are treated as resources for the accumulation of capital, for obtaining wealth and power by some, the Spirit, who embraces all, and the Creator, who bestows rain and sunshine on all, is offended. When human skills, such as the artistic and innovative capacity to produce artefacts, are abused for the animation of things and machines in a

fetishized way so that their function and intention is blurred, the creator Spirit is humiliated.

In earlier days, such humiliation would be condemned for heresy, which we can see from the Christian critique of the financial usury system through the ages. According to Lk. 6.35 one shall love one's enemy and lend money without hope of receiving a profit. According to Cappadocian theologian Gregory of Nyssa, the life of the one who lends money for profit is useless and insatiate; interest-taking is therefore attacked as pure robbery.[37] Thomas of Aquinas simply describes usury as sin,[38] while profiteering is for Martin Luther simply against nature because money is by nature unfertile and cannot increase as a tree or an acre carrying fruits.[39] References like these show how deeply one could respond to the slowly increasing, but in modernity rapidly accelerating, fetishization of money. Valuing money as a fetish in Marx's sense represents a central sin against the Creator and against creation as the gift of life.

Pneumatology must, in such a context, necessarily resist the fetishizing commodification of the other, where the other includes human as well as non-human neighbours. Mark I. Wallace follows Martin Buber, who located the Spirit 'not in the I but between I and You'.[40] In his performative approach, Wallace formulates practical ethical criteria for theological truth claims about religion that 'is deemed valid whenever the belief or practice enables commitment to the welfare of the other'.[41] Wallace appropriately regards 'the Spirit as the breath of God who animates all life . . . present in the spaces opened up between persons who risk themselves for the other'.[42]

As I have shown in this contribution, such a claim needs to be taken further from the general horizon to the particular social context, where the life-threatening fetishizing mode of 'animating life' needs to be resisted and overcome, practically as well as ideologically and theologically.

Sociologists of religion have shown how a critical neo-animistic approach quickly develops in social movements, even if this is seldom connected to a

[37] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio Contra Usurarios*: 'Whoever receives money through usury takes a pledge of poverty and under the pretence of a good deed brings ruin on someone's home'.
[38] Cf. Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Secunda Secundae, Question 78: Of the Sin of Usury that is Committed in Loans*, from 1274.
[39] Cf. at length Luther's work *On Trading and Usury* from 1524.
[40] Quoted in M. I. Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit*, p. 10.
[41] Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit*, p. 8, cf. 213.
[42] Ibid., pp. 10, 40.

clear critique of fetishism. In so-called green worldviews, the belief in the spirituality of non-human beings can function as an implicit force where the commitment to embody empathy for non-human life forms and to perceive the personhood of others is clothed in the language of what one could call 'soft animism'. Explicitly, it can also appear as a distinct characteristic for environmental groups who identify themselves as eco-pagans.[43] The challenge to differentiate between the spirits therefore does not simply disappear in my approach, but it is sharpened by the demand for the other or the strange.

The history of Christianity shows that the doctrine of the Spirit has been revitalized in times of social crisis; there is no doubt that the contemporary state of modernity again offers such a critical threshold, an ecological *kairos*. As a crucial pathology in our perception of the environment, a reflection and revisiting of animism can assist our striving for an alternative future, one that we may have in common with many 'others'.

If the Holy Spirit reveals the Trinity on Earth, she also performs in synergy with us as the One who brings the new world to come. As a liberating movement she takes place today in the struggle against fetishist idolatry at those places on the planet where creatures groan and suffer from environmental and spatial injustice fuelled by the sin of modern fetishism. If God, who is humiliated through such sin, does not turn his/her face away, the challenge to believers and faith communities today must be to become aware of and move to the specific places where the inhabitation of the Spirit is evident and to act in synergy with the spiritual forces of her life-giving and liberating space. The old prayer, which remains central in all forms of liturgy, sounds in such a critical context with a new cosmic tenor: come, Holy Spirit, come!

[43] G. Harvey, 'Animism: A Contemporary Perspective', in Taylor (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, pp. 81–83. Cf. also G. Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

5

What Is the Place of the Earth in God's Economy? Doing Justice to Creation, Salvation and Consummation

Ernst M. Conradie

The whole work of God

The term 'God's economy' may elicit some resistance, but inside the Christian tradition, it refers to the whole work of God. This follows the classic distinction between the immanent and the economic trinity, between who God is and what God does, between God's identity and character and God's engagement with God's own beloved creation. From a theocentric perspective, God's engagement with the world has much to say about the world of politics and the economy. Indeed, one may speak with Douglas Meeks of 'God the Economist'.[1] This would employ the ecumenical root metaphor of the 'whole household of God' to reflect on the ecological, economic and social dimensions of this household and also on the specific place of the church in this household.[2]

This essay will invite reflection on a Christian understanding of the story of God's work with respect to this household. The focus is therefore not on our work of 'saving the earth' within this household but on how this is shaped by the narrative within which we live and move and have our being. This story is not merely one dimension of religion, namely its cosmological narratives or

[1] See M. D. Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

[2] See E. M. Conradie, 'The Whole Household of God (*Oikos*): Some Ecclesiological Perspectives', *Scriptura* 94 (2007), pp. 1–28.

its sacred texts; Christians suggest that all living beings exist within the 'world' created by God's economy.

Elsewhere, I have suggested that seven 'chapters' of this narrative may be identified, namely creation, ongoing creation (evolution), the emergence of humanity in all its grandeur and misery (the fall), God's providential care to curb the subsequent impact of evil, the history of salvation, the formation, up-building, governance, ministries and missions of the church, and the consummation of God's work.[3] This essay will focus on three of these chapters, namely creation, salvation and consummation. How is the story of God's work to be told in such a way that justice is done to all three these aspects? To mess up the story may have grave consequences for an ecological praxis, ethos and spirituality. This will thwart Christian efforts to contribute to secular and religious discourse on 'saving the earth'.

The first three sections of this essay will offer a review of recent (mainly English) literature, emerging in the context of Christian ecotheology, on each of the themes of creation, salvation and consummation. The purpose is to capture the current state of the debate in this regard. I then explain why it has been so difficult to do justice to all these three dimensions of God's work. The next section investigates four ways in which the story of God's work is being told, namely with reference to the concepts of replacement, recycling, restoration and elevation. In the concluding section, I offer a proposal for a way forward, namely by suggesting that the word 'creation' (as *creatura*) may be regarded as a counter-intuitive reinterpretation, redescription and ascription of the world as we know it, in all its grandeur and misery.

Creation theology revisited

It is often assumed that creation theology lies at the core of Christian ecotheology. If so, the relative paucity of major contributions to the doctrine of creation (as *creatio* and not only as *creatura*) is surprising, even if it is (rightly) maintained that ecotheology cannot be restricted to creation theology or environmental ethics. There have been several contributions on the ecological significance of

[3] E. M. Conradie, 'The Earth in God's Economy: Reflections on the Narrative of God's Work', *Scriptura* 97 (2008), pp. 13–36.

biblical creation theology that cannot be reviewed here (by scholars such as Bernhard Anderson, William Brown, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim, Norman Habel and Theodore Hiebert, to name a few scholars writing in English), many from the perspective of discourse on science and theology (sometimes with allusions to ecological significance), considerable excitement in contributions by Christian scholars regarding the ecological moral of the story of the universe as reconstructed by contemporary science (for example, by scholars such as Thomas Berry, James Conlon, Heather Eaton, John Haught, Anne Primavesi, Larry Rasmussen, Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker – which again cannot be reviewed here), quite a few contributions on the particular ethical implications of ecumenical discourse on creation,[4] but not that many systematic contributions.

In most of the major contributions to literature in ecotheology, one may find a chapter revisiting creation theology, but these are seldom developed into a systematic treatise.[5] The most significant contribution to creation theology in the context of ecotheology remains Jürgen Moltmann's *God in Creation* (1985), while one may also mention Colin Gunton's historical study entitled *The Triune Creator* (1998), Michael Welker's brief study *Creation and Reality* (1999) and Norman Wirzba's *The Paradise of God* (2003).[6] These more classic contributions are challenged by the constructive work of Gordon Kaufman in *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (2004), by Dorothee Sölle's *To Work and to Love* (1984) and in the context of process theology by the evocative work of Catherine Keller, especially her book *Face of the Deep* (2003).[7]

[4] See H. Bedford-Strohm, *Schöpfung* (Ökumenische Studienhefte, 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001); P. Lønning, *Creation and Ecumenical Study* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989). The considerable body of literature on the theme 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' is relevant here as well. See also U. Duchrow and G. Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989); W. Granberg-Michaelson, 'Creation in Ecumenical Theology', in D. G. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), pp. 96–106.

[5] See, for example, J. A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

[6] See J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985); C. E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 1998); M. Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); N. Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). In German, see also C. Link, *Schöpfungstheologie angesichts der Herausforderung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1991).

[7] G. D. Kaufman, *In the Beginning . . . Creativity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004); D. Sölle, *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); C. Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Other contributions with 'creation' in the title actually focus on soteriology (see below) or on the ethical implications of discourse on creation as *creatura*. Most would concur with Duchrow and Liedke that 'creation' may be perceived in three ways, namely as continuing creation (God's faithfulness in suffering), as dangerous and encouraging recollections (God's original intention for creation) and as a dangerous and encouraging promise (creation liberated in Christ).[8] However, although attention to the first chapter of God's work cannot be separated from God's other work, it would not do to fuse it either. Any theology of creation that does not address creation 'in the beginning' will become reductionist.

In general, one may suggest that it is no longer quite clear what the question is that creation theology has to address. The question of *how* the world was created is still addressed in debates on creationism but is now widely discredited. By contrast, the question of *whether* the world was indeed created (and not the product of pure chance or determinacy) lies at the centre of contemporary discourse on science and theology. Here the plausibility of any Christian truth claims is subjected to scrutiny. In order to move away from speculative questions about the origins of the world, others suggest that the question as to *who* created should be foregrounded. This is in line with the polemical and doxological nature of the biblical witnesses. The Barthian emphasis on Christ as the one through whom all things were made has given way to a Nicene consensus on the identity of 'the triune Creator'. However, the plausibility of this confession is undermined where there is a lack of attention to the logically prior question, namely, whether the world was indeed created.

Yet others focus on the question as to *why* the world was created. This allows for a teleological and indeed an eschatological line of inquiry. The purpose of God's work of creation can then be brought in line with God's identity and character. A God of love would create an object to love, hence *creatio ex amore Dei* instead of *creatio ex nihilo*. This approach is also helpful to retain the soteriological thrust in the biblical roots of the Christian tradition. However, it begs the question of how such purpose would be known. Some may derive that from a cosmic design but this would prompt critiques of natural theology. Others may call upon revealed knowledge of such purpose,

[8] See Duchrow & Liedke, *Shalom*, pp. 96–106.

but this is often claimed in isolation from what is known about the world from the various sciences and not subjected to further scrutiny. Yet others reflect on the meaning of the activity of creating, for example in terms of birthing, becoming, creativity, ordering or flourishing.

A more traditional approach is to focus on the question as to *what* was created. This allows for a more graphic depicturing of the beauty and magnificence of God's work, enjoyed by children and grown-ups alike. This too is in line with the doxological thrust of the Psalms and the wisdom literature. Yet, the track record of theological reflection in this regard has been disastrous to say the least. Claims to know what God has created serve as theological legitimation for domination in the name of differences of gender (and patriarchy), racial superiority, class and caste (allusions to the 'children of Ham'), sexual orientation and species (claims for human superiority). Neo-Calvinist apartheid theology in South Africa offers one notorious example. Since God presumably created different races, racial integration goes against God's creation ordinances. Christians should therefore call upon government to keep such races apart, if necessary through law and order – hence apartheid. Intractable ecclesial debates on homosexuality offer another example, also with devastating consequences.

In response, it may be necessary to confess that we really do not know what God created. After all, Job 37–39 should remind us that we were not there in the beginning. Moreover, the world as we know it has been subject to dramatic evolutionary changes throughout the history of the universe. To claim to know God's original intention on the basis of what we see around us is therefore dangerous. To claim revealed knowledge that it was indeed created will continue to dumbfound scientists looking for the origins of the universe. The same apply to Aristotelian attempts to determine the *telos* of something. We can only speak about God's original intentions on the basis of contemporary theological constructs (not theological or scientific reconstructions of a cosmic design). Moreover, according to Christianity's own confession, the world as we know it has been shaped, always already, by the destructive impact of what Christians call sin but also by the history of salvation, including the ambiguous influence of Christianity itself. Finally, our attempts to gain knowledge of the world is influenced by the social construction of reality but also by the distortion brought about by the many faces of sin.

In the final section, I suggest that we need to keep the paradox alive: we really do not know what God created 'in the beginning', but Christians nevertheless confess that *this* world, in all its present misery and grandeur, is the triune God's beloved creation. This world is thus redescribed as God's creation (*creatura*). On this basis, one does not need to speculate about what God created but may reflect theologically on categories such as nature, evolution, other animals, the built environment and so forth. Such contributions abound in Christian ecotheology and cannot be reviewed here.

Soteriology revisited

The themes of creation (as *creatura*) and salvation are both embedded in well-known phrases such as 'human dignity', 'women's emancipation', 'black liberation', 'human development', 'cultural authenticity' and 'environmental sustainability'. A retrieval of a theology of creation alone would therefore not suffice for an adequate ecotheology. Despite criticisms raised by authors such as Matthew Fox against a fall–redemption scheme for ecotheology, a mere emphasis on any 'original blessing' will not be able to resist the forces that lead to environmental destruction.[9] Although soteriological language is used almost inevitably and is therefore touched upon everywhere (also in secular discourse on sustainability), until recently there have been rather few systematic contributions on soteriology and ecology.[10] This may be partially understood as a critical response to the preoccupation with the theme of salvation in many other theologies and the tendency to marginalize the doctrine of creation. Some therefore eschew soteriology as anthropocentric or subsume such reflection under the doctrine of creation.

A few earlier contributions addressed soteriological themes through a discussion of the relationship between nature and grace. Joseph Sittler's *Essays on Nature and Grace* (1972) is perhaps the most significant example.[11] One may also mention Robert Faricy's *Wind and Sea Obey Him* (1982) which

[9] See M. Fox, *Original Blessing* (New Mexico: Bear & Co., 1983).

[10] For a discussion on what salvation could mean in terms of the suffering of organisms in terms of ecology and evolutionary biology, see L. H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology, and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 196–201.

[11] See J. Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics* (eds. S. Bouma-Prediger and P. W. Bakken; Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2000).

explores approaches to a theology of nature but within the tension between sin and salvation.[12]

One significant recent contribution is Willis Jenkins's *Ecologies of Grace* (2008). Jenkins offers a typology of three ethical strategies and associated ecological spiritualities on the basis of three soteriological metaphors ('ecologies of grace'), namely sanctification, 'redemption' and deification. He investigates each of these strategies in more detail, drawing on three classic representatives of such notions of grace, namely Thomas Aquinas, Karl Barth and Sergei Bulgakov, respectively.[13]

Jenkins also hosted a colloquium related to the Christian Faith and the Earth project at Yale Divinity School, 11–12 December 2008, in which the following question was addressed: how is the Christian notion of salvation to be understood in the context of environmental threats? At this colloquium I read a paper entitled 'The Salvation of the Earth from Anthropogenic Destruction: In Search of Appropriate Soteriological Concepts in an Age of Ecological Destruction'. The paper, together with a number of responses, other versions of a conceptual map and some constructive contributions, was subsequently published in the journal *Worldviews*.[14]

In my contribution, I noted the conflicting diversity of concepts that have been employed in soteriological discourse.[15] I offered a conceptual map of such pneumatological concepts, from a point of departure in Gustaf Aulén's famous typology of the Christological doctrine of atonement, noting the dangers that are embedded in any such mapping. A brief description of these soteriological metaphors may indeed offer a map of some of the available literature in this regard. In short, the argument is that the notion of salvation has been understood in especially three quite different ways in the Christian tradition:

- as God's victory over the forces of evil, death and destruction on the basis of the resurrection of Jesus Christ – including healing[16] in the case of

[12] R. Faricy, *Wind and Sea Obey Him: Approaches to a Theology of Nature* (London: SCM Press, 1982).

[13] See W. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[14] See E. M. Conradie and W. Jenkins (eds.), *Worldviews* 14/2&3 (2010).

[15] E. M. Conradie, 'The Salvation of the Earth from Anthropogenic Destruction: In Search of Appropriate Soteriological Concepts in an Age of Ecological Destruction', *Worldviews* 14/2&3 (2010), pp. 111–40.

[16] One example is the volume by N. G. Wright and D. G. Kill, *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993). See also H. A. Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011).

sickness, victory amidst military threats, rescue from threats to safety, rain in the context of droughts, feeding in the context of famine, liberation from political and economic oppression,[17] overcoming the impact of disasters (including environmental disasters), the establishment of good governance amidst anarchy and corruption, exorcism from the power of evil spirits and pervasive ideologies and, finally, new life (resurrection), even in the face of death itself;

- as reconciliation in a context of alienation,[18] with specific reference to the cross of Jesus Christ, which becomes possible on the basis of a liberating word of forgiveness – in the context of personal relations, in terms of intergroup conflicts (labour disputes, war, civil war, colonialism, apartheid), in economic transactions where debt is incurred, in terms of jurisprudence in order to address injustices through a word of legal pardoning or amnesty, in the cultic bringing of sacrifices in order to restore social harmony and, in religious terms, with reference to the relationship between God and humanity (typically using these same metaphors to describe the healing of such a relationship); and
- as finding an inspiring moral example to follow in order to cope with the demands of life and to adopt a caring ethos (or sometimes merely to find personal fulfilment), but also to build a better society, to engage in education and moral formation, upliftment, development[19] and social reconstruction – typically with reference to the life, ministry, parables, wisdom, suffering and death of Jesus Christ, but also with reference to the judges, kings, prophets, and priests of Israel and to the saints, martyrs, church leaders, and theologians in the history of Christianity – where these examples are then codified in moral codes, books of wisdom, catechisms, and even in a bill of rights.

[17] See the contributions by Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995); *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997) and Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). See also S. Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2005); C. Birch, W. Eakin and J. B. McDaniel (eds.), *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990) and M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers, Volume Two: Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1999).

[18] See the title of Thomas Berry's book *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic: Twenty-third Publications, 1991).

[19] The huge corpus of literature on sustainable development is relevant here albeit that it is seldom connected to Christian soteriology.

Each of these metaphors implies a particular understanding of the underlying predicament (see below). From this perspective there is ample available literature although this is seldom connected to classic Christian soteriologies. It is especially striking how scant references to the core Christian themes of reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins are.[20] There is clearly a need for further work in this area.

The working group of the Christian Faith and the Earth project on creation, salvation and consummation subsequently also produced two edited volumes on the relationship between the Christian doctrines of creation and salvation. This is of course a classic theological problem also recognized in ecotheology.[21] The first volume explores the approaches of a number of classic theologians, from Irenaeus of Lyons to John Calvin, who have shaped Christian discourse on creation and salvation.[22] The second volume focuses on a number of recent theological movements that shape current ecumenical discourse on creation and salvation for better and for worse.[23] These volumes provide a barometer of the current state of the debate in Christian ecotheology on this point.

Eschatology revisited

Eschatology has elicited considerable interest in Christian ecotheology.[24] This is clearly in response to escapist understandings of Christian hope. There has been a long-standing tendency to portray the Christian message of salvation as narrowly focused on the redemption of human beings. At worst, this has been described as redemption *from* the earth. This may be illustrated with the

[20] See E. M. Conradie, 'Confessing Guilt in the Context of Climate Change: Some South African Perspectives', *Scriptura* 103 (2010), pp. 134–52.

[21] In addition to the contributions by Sittler mentioned above, see also the article by George H. Kehm, 'The New Story: Redemption as Fulfillment of Creation', in D. T. Hessel (ed.), *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-justice and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 89–108.

[22] See E. M. Conradie (ed.), *Creation and Salvation: A Mosaic of Essays on Selected Classic Christian Theologians* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011).

[23] See E. M. Conradie (ed.), *Creation and Salvation: A Companion on Recent Theological Movements* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2012).

[24] The most significant monographs include in chronological order J. F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1993), J. Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), E. M. Conradie, *Hope for the Earth: Vistas on a New Century* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), G. Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung: Systematisch-theologische Untersuchungen zur Hoffnung auf das 'Lebem in der zukünftigen Welt'* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009) and T. D. McCall, *The Greenie's Guide to the End of the World: Ecology and Eschatology* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2011).

apt image of a rescue operation to save passengers from a burning ship. The famous comment from Dwight L. Moody, a premillennial dispensationalist, comes to mind here: 'I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said, "Moody, save all you can".'[25] Or, to adapt the imagery, the passengers (humanity) is saved from the burning ship (the earth) by a rope (Jesus) hanging from a helicopter (God's Spirit) and brought to safety (heaven). In terms of this image there is little hope for the burning ship itself. In response, virtually all contributions to Christian ecotheology have insisted that it is the earth itself that has to be saved (the redemption *of* the earth). Accordingly, the cosmic scope of God's salvation implies a loving concern for the burning ship itself. This leads to the question 'How can a vision of hope for the earth itself be articulated?'

Numerous contributions to ecotheology seek to offer an adequate response to this question. In a typology of approaches to ecotheology, John Haught distinguished between apologetic approaches (based on notions of stewardship or priesthood), sacramental approaches (emphasizing the sacredness of nature) and eschatological approaches.[26] He noted that such an eschatological approach can draw inspiration from very different sources, including Jürgen Moltmann's political theology, Wolfhart Pannenberg's futurist eschatology, the evolutionary theology of Teilhard de Chardin and process theology.

The core intuition behind such an eschatological approach is that it is hardly possible to motivate people to care for the earth unless they are convinced that there is indeed some future for themselves on earth. Despair in the face of the environmental crisis will lead to a spirit of resignation. Haught asks: 'If this final wreck and absolute extinction is the last word about the universe, then why seek now to preserve it against the inevitable void that seems to be its destiny?'[27] Without hope, an environmental praxis will lose its impetus and will fight a losing battle. The problem is that the dialectic between ecological destruction and global poverty is so intractable that this elicits unmitigated despair. Despair becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when it leads people to think that action is futile. Only a persistent hope can therefore energize environmental praxis.

[25] For a discussion, see Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, pp. 55–9.
[26] See Haught, *The Promise of Nature*, pp. 88–112.
[27] Ibid., p. 24.

Nevertheless, an eschatological approach to ecotheology is not without some serious pitfalls. For many, biblical eschatology, with its unleashing of a dream of future perfection, is inimical to environmental concerns. It may become aligned with the myth of progress. Such critics sense in the prophetic vision of a better future an ecologically dangerous feature of Christianity.

The question therefore seems to be 'Where can a clear vision of hope for the earth be found amidst such a sense of environmental despair?' How can a vision of hope for a new earth be made intelligible within the parameters of contemporary cosmology that indicate the radical finitude of species, of life in general and of the earth itself?[28] While the eschatological office has been reopened in the twentieth century, the conflicting myriad of eschatological approaches tends to undermine a clear and inspiring vision of hope for the earth. Apparently, we do not know what we hope for, only that we hope, or, even worse, that to hope is rather important. Tragically, this leaves room for the overconfident apostles of technological progress, or for apocalyptic prophets of doom, to dominate the market by producing visions that incite consumerist aspirations or install anxiety and despair.

Any response to these questions therefore needs to guard against the temptation of selling cheap forms of hope. Whereas cheap grace may undermine the integrity of the gospel, cheap hope will inevitably undermine its plausibility. This happens whenever Christian hope becomes unrelated to the future of the earth, society and individual human beings, and therefore uninspiring for the present. Such forms of hope cannot empower an environmental praxis. The form of hope thus elicited will remain futile, in vain, and escapist.

Why is it so difficult to do justice to both creation and salvation alike?

The need to do justice to both the theme of creation and of salvation is widely recognized. An ecological theology that cannot do justice to salvation (*saving* the earth) and to creation (saving the *earth*) is fatally flawed. Precisely for this reason, ecological threats provide Christians with an opportunity for renewal,

[28] For a discussion of recent literature on envisaging this world in the eschaton, see C. Deane-Drummond, *Eco-theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), pp. 164–78.

transformation and conversion. The social significance of this problem extends to many other issues, including the quest for indigenous theologies, the 'gospel and our culture', faith and science, theological reflection on homosexuality, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, death and dying, human labour and a host of issues in ethics.

Questions around creation and salvation are perhaps expressed most acutely whenever the theodicy problem is raised. This forms the experiential heart of discourse on creation and salvation: the apparent tension between God's creative power and redemptive love.[29] Inversely, the theodicy problem can only be addressed on the basis of an adequate understanding of the relationship between creation (God as the omnipotent Creator) and salvation (God as the loving Saviour). Indeed, without reflection on the relationship between creation (*creatio*) and salvation and on the question what creation (*creatura*) is to be saved from, discourse on the theodicy problem would easily take a theological shortcut by failing to address the origins of evil (especially sin) and the consequences of sin (evil).

Despite this obvious need to do justice to both creation and salvation, managing that is far easier said than done. In fact, one may observe that there is a widespread inability in classic and recent Christian theologies to do justice to both the first and the second article of the Christian creed. In his famous address to the New Delhi assembly of the World Council of Churches, Joseph Sittler observed that ever since Augustine, Western Christendom has been unable to relate the realm of grace to the realm of nature, owing to the influence of a Hellenistic dualism between the spiritual and the temporal. This encouraged the conclusion that redemption should be understood as an escape from that which is finite, material and concrete.[30]

This may well prompt distortions in ecclesial praxis and Christian spirituality, with grave consequences, given the environmental impact of Western Christianity and, in particular, the association between right-wing evangelicalism and neo-liberal capitalism. At the very least an inability to do justice to both creation and salvation would inhibit Christians from unmasking

[29] See K. Nürnberger, *Regaining Sanity for the Earth* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011), pp. 185–86, 220–21.
[30] Sittler, *Evocations of Grace*, pp. 38–50.

the ideologies that either over- or underemphasize that which is material, bodily and earthly.

The theological problems regarding the relationship between creation and salvation depend on whether the focus is on *creatura*, on *creatio* or on the *Creator*. In my view, the problem is at least fourfold[31]:

(a) First, there is the noetic problem of how knowledge of God is possible in the first place. If all notions of what transcends us come from below (from the world of nature), how on earth can we claim to know anything about God? How should the category of God's 'revelation' be understood with reference to what we know otherwise about the evolutionary history of the planet? Can a distinction still be made between the 'book of nature' and the 'book of Scripture' or between 'general revelation' and 'special revelation'? How can the dangers of natural theology – as represented by a German theology of 'blood and soil' and by apartheid theology in South Africa – then be avoided? Linked to the very possibility of God-talk is the question of how something happening in the world can be ascribed to God's work (of creation or of salvation). Inversely, how should one understand the highly complex problem of divine action in the world?

More specifically, there is a long-standing debate on whether or not knowledge of God as Saviour is noetically prior to knowledge of God as Creator. Is creation theology in the biblical roots of Christianity merely an extrapolation of experiences of God as Liberator? How is it possible to know God as Creator if we can only speak about 'the beginning' by way of social construction? Inversely, how could we recognize an experience of salvation as the work of a divine Saviour without some notion of the relations between the divinity and the world?

(b) Secondly, there is the classic theological question: How does (salvific) grace affect nature? This is a vexing theological problem, not least because of contested views on the 'nature of nature' and on the elusive concept of 'matter'. What the 'nature of nature' is (whether defined in terms of essence, potential or purpose) is necessarily a social construct from within a particular social context.

[31] For a more detailed discussion, see E. M. Conradie, *Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on 'Re-creation'* (Studies in Religion and the Environment, 8; Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013), pp. 9–50.

How, then, can one begin to untangle theological positions on the impact that the Christian message of salvation may have for nature as God's beloved creation (*creatura*). This begs several further questions: what could it mean that the earth is to be 'saved'? Moreover, how does God's work of salvation relate to our human efforts to save the planet? Is talk about God's work just a decorative way of saying something about ecclesial missions? Can we humans save the planet if we cannot destroy it – although we now have the capacity to destroy almost all life on earth?

The meaning of the phrase 'the salvation *of* creation, if not *from* creation, is certainly not self-evident. If this phrase is investigated more closely, several subsidiary questions emerge:

(i) *What exactly is it that has to be 'saved'*. One may take this phrase in the narrower anthropocentric sense to mean the salvation of humanity from the impact of anthropogenic ecological destruction. Such salvation may actually boil down to maintaining industrialized civilization, continuing with a consumerist culture and safeguarding the benefits of neo-liberal capitalism for some. The task of 'saving the future' and discourse on sustainability can easily be reduced to attempts to stretch the use of natural resources a bit further through standards of efficiency (in terms of production) or to safeguard one's standard of living as far as possible (in terms of consumption). Indeed, for many living in a secularized context the concerns over 'health' and 'security' have functionally replaced the need for Christian discourse on salvation. In response, many others would suggest that salvation refers to the victims of the globalized economy. The poor, oppressed and marginalized have to be saved from the environmental and economic impact of the powerful. Alternatively, one may widen the scope of the phrase to mean the salvation of all forms of life on earth from anthropogenic ecological destruction. The focus would then still be on the structural consequences of human sin. However, what the salvation of all forms of life could mean is again not self-evident in an evolutionary world where specimens become food for others and where species become extinct, also through mass extinctions. One may qualify the phrase by seeking to avoid unnecessary pain inflicted by humankind upon otherkind and the destruction of ecosystems that could have been avoided. What is needed here is not the survival of specimens or species but the 'projective

thrust' (Holmes Rolston) of ecosystems, namely their ability to adapt to evolutionary changes and to continue flourishing.

(ii) *What is creation to be saved from?* This obviously influences an answer to the question of how salvation is then understood. Inversely, the nature of the problem can perhaps only be understood in the light of the solution. We may recognize our guilt only when offered forgiveness. Either way, this begs many further questions about the nature of the (human) predicament. For some, sin remains the primary and resolvable problem that has to be addressed. Accordingly, environmental destruction may be redescribed in terms of the structural consequences of sin as power (not only guilt). The assumption is that creaturely suffering results directly or indirectly from sin. Salvation is thus understood as salvation from sin, liberation from oppression and victory over evil, albeit that not only the human victims of sin would be considered. In Christian ecotheology, sin is often redescribed as anthropocentrism (pride), consumerist greed (desire), domination in the name of differences of species (and gender, race and class) or as alienation from the means of production, from one another, from nature, from the earth as our home and from God's love (the privation of the good).

However, it has been far from easy to maintain such a focus on sin as the primary problem, once questions about the origin of sin (including the notion of original sin) are explored. Where does sin come from? From evil, but where does evil come from? From the devil, but where does the devil come from? From God? The classic Christian position is that sin is finally inexplicable and that, if anything, humanity as a whole is to be blamed. However, the temptation to explain sin does not go away easily. Sin may, for example, be 'explained' with reference to the 'selfish gene' or human anxiety over finitude. The focus thus shifts to the underlying structures of being embodied, especially to mortality, transience and the limitations of human power and knowledge. If so, God's good creation becomes part of the problem.

In contemporary (eco)theology, this line of thinking typically begs further questions about natural suffering.[32] Would an emphasis on human sin not underestimate the problem of natural suffering? Can all forms of suffering really be derived from human sin? What other sources of suffering may be

[32] See the contribution of Christopher Southgate in this volume.

identified?[33] Has something gone wrong with the evolution of life on earth, irrespective of the emergence of the human species? Is there a sense is which nature too has to be redeemed (irrespective of human impact), for example with reference to the violence and brutality that characterize relationships between non-human animals? Are (some) non-human animals moral agents too? In short: what exactly is the problem from which the earth has to be saved? Alternatively, might it be possible that this world (with the natural suffering related to evolutionary history embedded in it), rather than some future perfection, could reflect the will and ordering of God? As Lisa Sideris notes,

> [T]he belief that such natural processes are bad in themselves may reflect a theological perspective that supposes nature was once devoid of suffering and death and that evolution itself is somehow symptomatic of human sinfulness and nature's fallenness. This bias, in turn, produces an ethic of redeeming and restoring nature to conditions that are, in effect, unnatural, and such an ethic can only make things worse for the environment we are trying to "save". This ethic misunderstands nature itself and the role that humans ought to play in caring for the natural world.[34]

If natural suffering becomes the primary problem, more than the impact of human sin will have to be addressed. In the history of Christian theology, such an extension of salvation to address the problem of mortality is well known. One may of course argue that death is the consequence of sin only, but this is difficult to maintain in the light of evolutionary history. It is therefore far from easy to restrict one's inquiry to sin as the primary problem. Typically, salvation, or at least eschatological consummation, is regarded as a response to both sin *and* mortality, if not to human finitude in general, including mortality, transience and the limitations of human power and knowledge.[35]

[33] Elsewhere, I have suggested that at least five sources of suffering may be identified, namely the impact of one's sins on oneself, being sinned against more or less directly (e.g., in the case of rape), structural violence (e.g., apartheid), natural suffering (which itself has several dimensions as the text here suggests) and contingency (being in a place just at the wrong time). See E. M. Conradie, 'On Responding to Human Suffering: A Critical Survey of Theological Contributions in Conversation with the Sciences', in C. W. du Toit (ed.), *Can Nature be Evil and Evil Natural? A Science-and-Religion View on Suffering and Evil* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006), pp. 165–88.

[34] Sideris, *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 200–201.

[35] I have addressed such questions at some length in *Hope for the Earth* (2005).

(iii) *How, then, is the nature of salvation as a response to the underlying problem to be understood?* If the focus is on the sins of one sector of humanity (rapists, patriarchs, oppressors, capitalists), then a notion of salvation as liberation from oppression and victory over evil suffices. If all of humanity is found guilty, then God's forgiveness is required. If the potential for (human) flourishing is there, but this is hampered by scarcity or shortcomings, then something like education, development and proper management is called for. If creation itself is at fault, then far more than forgiveness is required. Then something like healing or resurrection from death and destruction is necessary. If Godself is the primary problem, then only some form of theodicy will do. In the next section, I will return to this question.

(c) Thirdly, a different kind of problem emerges when creation is understood as an act of God (*creatio*) and not so much as the outcome of such creativity (*creatura*). Most contemporary theologians are fully aware of the danger of separating or compartmentalizing these two acts of God in a step-by-step sequence, since this would allow for an independent interest in the so-called 'orders of creation' ordained by God 'in the beginning'. Such 'orders' are deconstructed by others as nothing but social constructions of reality that entrench positions of domination.

The opposite danger is one of fusion. Accordingly, in line with the biblical witnesses, God's work of creation and salvation cannot be separated. The suggestion here is that God's work of creation is 'salvific' (establishing some order amidst chaos), while God's work of salvation is 'creative'. Such views are attractive but are sometimes (e.g. in process theology) radicalized to question any notion of creation 'in the beginning'. Upon further reflection, fusion begs intractable questions. What is it that has to be saved? Where does it come from? Is chaos not itself creative? Who is this Saviour and how is that Saviour related to the world? What is the source of such creativity? How can such work of salvation be ascribed to God's work? On such questions, contemporary theologies remain deeply divided. Liberal, secular and process theologies can argue that God-talk is a symbolic way of talking about human activity or cosmic becoming and thus resolve the problem. However, others continue to seek ways of making cosmological sense of God's immanence and transcendence. Typically, that is understood in terms of God's logically prior acts of creation.

(d) Finally, all these problems resurface when the focus shifts towards the identity and character of this God. In Trinitarian theology this begs numerous questions regarding the relationships between Father, Son and Spirit. Despite the renaissance of Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century, it remains far from clear how the work of the Father (the Creator) and that of the Son (the Saviour) is related, even if creation and salvation are both regarded as the work of the triune God. Given the challenges posed by Gnosticism, Manichaeism and various other forms of dualism, it has been an immense problem to keep the first and the second articles together. Today these tensions surface in other ways, for example regarding the claims to universality (postmodern critiques) and particularity (the uniqueness of Christ). Likewise, the relationship between the work of the Son and that of the Spirit has been the subject of long-standing ecumenical debates about the *filioque* problem. The relationship between the Father and the Spirit also begs questions regarding the identity of the Spirit (of Christ) in an age where numerous forms of spirituality flourish.

One may conclude that it is far more difficult to do justice to keeping God's work of creation, salvation and consummation together than it may appear at first sight. Typically, the one is subsumed under the other or under a third category.

How is the plot of the story structured?

It should be clear from the above that the relationship between creation and salvation cuts to the very core of any theological position. Moreover, it is scarcely possible to separate one's views on creation and salvation from views on sin, providence, the emergence of humanity, the church and the consummation of God's work. At a colloquium hosted at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa in 2007, the question was reformulated as 'How are they telling (or distorting) the story of God's work?'[36]

I suggest that the plot of the story of God's work of creation, salvation and consummation (not necessarily in that order) can be structured along four axes, namely, as the replacement of creation with a new creation not subjected

[36] See E. M. Conradie (ed.), 'How are they Telling the Story?', *Scriptura* 97 (2008), pp. 1–136; 98 (2008), pp. 137–243.

to current problems, as the restoration of (an aspect of) creation, as the elevation of creation, or merely as recycling or becoming, a continuation of the evolutionary process for better or for worse.

(a) A plot structured in terms of replacement is widely discredited in Christian ecotheology but not easily discarded. It suggests that God's creation will have to be replaced by something completely new. The old shoes may be thrown away and replaced with a new pair. In some Anabaptist and most dispensationalist theologies, this signals salvation from the earth that hardly supports an ecological spirituality, ethos and praxis. In fact, climate change may need to be furthered since that will hasten the return of Christ.

Nevertheless, this position is much harder to avoid than may appear at first sight. Wherever the problem of natural suffering becomes central, the only solution may well be a new dispensation not subject to the pain, suffering, degeneration and mortality of the world as we know it. The term 'new creation' is then used to express the hope that God will act anew in future. Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope, despite its clear intentions to the contrary, has often been criticized for its emphasis on this radically new creation.[37] The emphasis on discontinuity is clearly important in order to address current suffering, but what kind of continuity may we hope for? Moltmann does suggest that 'the new creation takes the whole of the first creation into itself as its own harbinger and prelude, and completes it.'[38] Such 'completion' or 'perfection' of the world to be without suffering or violence may then be understood as 'elevation' rather than 'replacement'.

Notions of salvation seeking to overcome human finitude have been widely criticized, especially in ecofeminist circles. While the biblical witnesses to God's Spirit seem to indicate a passionate love for that which is concrete, particular, embodied, finite and mortal, mortal human beings (especially males?) often hope to overcome such finitude. This is expressed in an implicit disgust for that which is bodily, capricious, corruptible and perishable (flesh, defecation, degeneration, mortality), often viewed as our 'bondage to decay'. In response, salvation is understood as countering the gravitational pull of transience.

[37] It needs to be noted that Moltmann has rejected this criticism. For a discussion, see Conradie, *Saving the Earth?*, pp. 277–320.

[38] See Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, p. 266.

Sharon Butcher comments: 'Horrified by the Eucharistic liquidity of life, we have developed and carried through an articulation of Spirit an autoallergic reaction to our own humus, our mortal flesh and earthly habitat. Sublime Spirit has been opposed to futile flesh and underscored by a dissociative abhorrence of the material, organic, biotic aspects of being. Loathing insures that, while we are within the force field of the earth, we hold ourselves "apart from" the earth.'[39]

(b) In response, some ecofeminists suggest a plot that may be interpreted as the 'recycling' of that which is bodily, earthly and material. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for example, suggests that we as human beings should accept our own finitude, our own human scale and death as the final relinquishment of individuated ego into the cosmic matrix of matter and energy. The earth is the womb out of which we arise at birth and into which we are content to return at death.[40] Accordingly, all the component parts of matter and energy that coalesced to make up our individuated self are not lost, but are taken up in the great matrix of being and thus become food for new beings to emerge.[41] In response to Ruether, Moltmann argues that Christian hope is thus turned into 'a pantheistic omnipresence of the everlasting matrix of life.' He adds that 'this eulogy on the good earth overlooks the fragility and destructibility of the earth's organism and thus the earth's own need of redemption.'[42]

The question that one has to raise is how God's agency is understood here, if at all. What difference does it make to speak about hope in God or in the continuation of the cycles of nature, or in the cosmic process of becoming?[43] One could say that the hope of being recycled is almost guaranteed but given the laws of entropy, hardly yields a vision of hope. This may show an appreciation for natural cycles but comes at the price of a sacralized secularism. If theologies of replacement often remain deist, theologies of recycling tend

[39] See S. Butcher, 'Grounding the Spirit: An Ecofeminist Pneumatology', in L. Kearns and C. Keller (eds.), *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), pp. 315–36 (325).

[40] See R. R. Ruether, *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 211.

[41] See R. R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 258.

[42] J. Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 276.

[43] The allusion here is to Catherine Keller's 'theology of becoming', in *Face of the Deep* (2003).

towards pantheism – for which ecofeminist theologies have often been criticized, although the charge is usually refuted.

(c) A theology of restoration typically understands the aim of creation in terms of God's glory. Human sin is the root problem that has to be addressed. The incarnation is a response to the fall of humanity *only* and is aimed at a restoration of the broken relationship between the Creator and (human) creatures. This is radicalized in Arnold van Ruler's notion of the incarnation as an 'emergency measure' in response to the predicament of sin.[44] Sin has a non-necessary character, while salvation is aimed at allowing creatures to exist before God once again.

In the reformed tradition of Swiss, German and Dutch origins, the term 're-creation'[45] has been used widely to suggest that the eschatological completion of God's acts of salvation is indeed creative but aimed at healing God's own creation. The emphasis is thus placed on the continuity of God's work – in contrast with the concept *nova creatio* where the emphasis is on discontinuity.[46] Salvation and consummation are not completely new acts of God but are to be understood as *ex vetere* (John Polkinghorne). Re-creation is not a second creative act leading to a different creation by God, replacing the old, but an act of creating something new out of the old. It is not merely a form of eternal maintenance but a salvific act of healing that which is broken. In short, salvation means 'creation healed' (Howard Snyder).[47]

Both continuity and discontinuity are important for an adequate eschatology, but this tension is exceptionally difficult to maintain.[48] A lack of continuity would lead to an escapist eschatology and would cast a dark cloud over the work of the Father. Does the work of the Spirit remain true to the work of the Father? Does the Father remain true to this earth? Are Christians therefore also called to remain true to the earth? It would take away any consolation if there were little or no continuity between my life and eternal

[44] See, for example, A. A. van Ruler, *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics: Essays towards a Public Theology* (ed. J. Bolt; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), p. 131.

[45] For a detailed investigation, see Conradie, *Saving the Earth*.

[46] It should be noted that the concepts *re-creatio* and *nova creatio* express different views on the biblical metaphor *kaine ktisis* (new creation). The distinction between a metaphor and a theological conceptual model is therefore important for the sake of clarity. The concept *nova creatio* is not merely a translation of *kaine ktisis* but one particular (contested) interpretation of it.

[47] See Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, p. xii, and the subsequent argument of his book.

[48] For a more detailed analysis, see chapter 16 of my *Hope for the Earth*.

life, this world and the world to come. But in what does such continuity lie? Is there only an ideal continuity (the immortality of the soul) or also some form of material continuity (the resurrection of the body)? Or is the only continuity to be found in Godself, in God's identity, character and loyalty? Or perhaps only in God's eternal memory? But what salvation is embedded in an omniscient computer that forever keeps suffering, injustices, and evil? Clearly, one can entertain thoughts about discontinuity (or glorification) only once every form of Gnosticism, Manichaeism and Platonism have been banished.

By contrast, a lack of discontinuity would lead to a stoic or fatalist despair in the light of present suffering, oppression and evil. It would yield a reductionist eschatology which disallows any creative acts by God. Indeed, the discontinuity in the loving and saving work of God may precisely express God's loyalty to the 'old' creation. A lack of discontinuity would express the hope of the ruling class to retain the status quo. Too much emphasis on discontinuity would prompt Nietzsche's urge to remain true to this earth; too much emphasis on continuity would prompt a critique of Nietzsche's notion of 'will to power' and of social Darwinism.

The plausibility both of continuity (how is life beyond death possible?) and of discontinuity (how can a new dispensation emerge; where does the 'new' come from?) has to be demonstrated. The failure to address such plausibility can only lead to fatalist despair (if only continuity holds) or to escapist denial (if only discontinuity is maintained) or to a form of Gnostic elitism (where no material continuity is required).

For Christians, the clue to understanding such continuity and discontinuity is obviously the (bodily) resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the celebration of the Eucharist in the presence of the risen Christ and the hope for the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection provides a sign of hope that God can indeed do something anew.[49] But what form of continuity suggested by the 're-' in resurrection is possible? The problem cannot be resolved on the basis of the symbol of resurrection alone. Intriguingly, the question remains whether the resurrection resolves the problem of sin or of mortality, or both.

If the emphasis is on restoration and thus on continuity, with what is that continuity? If the continuity is with reality (that which is material, bodily

[49] See, for example, Thomas, *Neue Schöpfung*, pp. 386–87.

and earthly) as we currently know it, that entails continuity with death and destruction. If not, a distinction is needed between what reality is and how it ought to be and presumably was before human sin emerged (which will be contested). However, how would one know what reality (or 'nature') was like before it was affected by sin? Such a distinction would necessarily be based on a theological construction, which would offer an expression of hope for the future, more than a description of the past.

If the emphasis is on restoration, how can one then guard against apartheid theology, where the message of salvation was portrayed in terms of the restoration (through law and order) of the diversity of races that are supposedly embedded in the created order [*sic*]? What is it that is to be restored? This is a pertinent question in the current South-African context. What would the notion of land restoration suggest if not a return to precolonial times – which is obviously not possible and for most not attractive either. The point is that the apartheid past is unattractive and the future daunting. The restoration of some previous, cohesive social order would be inappropriate since there has never been such a social order.

How, then, can one know what has to be restored? Most of the problems related to theologies of restoration emerge from a focus on what God has created – which is then used as a point of departure for further reflection. The meaning cannot be that 'creation' is restored, as this would suggest an a-historical, non-evolutionary notion of creation. It can scarcely entail a return to the beginning or to some previous state or earlier phase. What is restored is not that which is material, bodily or earthly as such, but something about that which is material, bodily or earthly. What that 'something' is, remains open to dispute: it could be understood as a return to its evolutionary potential, to its full fruitfulness, its ability to flourish, to a sense of orientation, to the original goal, to its relatedness with God, to a reciprocal covenant relationship with God and so forth. The healing of creation cannot be an aim in itself. However, the flourishing of creation would still need to come to terms with the 'arrow of time', with transience and mortality. Ecologically, not every specimen of every species can flourish. Would only the strong be able to flourish then?

The question is, in other words, what the 're-' in a whole range of theological concepts entails. Between repristination and elevation one finds a series of theological concepts where a sense of both continuity and discontinuity

is acknowledged but with diverging connotations: reanimation, rebirth, rebuilding, recapitulation, recollection, reconciliation, reconstruction, recovering, redemption, reflection, reformation, refreshment, regeneration, reinvigoration, remembering, remuneration, renewal, reorientation, reparation, representation, reproduction, respect, restitution, restoration, resurrection, revitalization, revolution, but in short, re-creation (not to be confused with recreation).

(d) The alternative to a theology of restoration is to allow room for eschatological completion, fulfilment and consummation. Accordingly, salvation makes the ennobling, and not merely the restoration, of creation possible. The aim of creation is related to God's will to have a relationship of love with (human) creatures. This aim to allow human creatures to share in God's own being is realized in Christ. The incarnation was therefore necessary irrespective of sin. Christ is portrayed as the highest expression of humanity.

There are at least two candidates for an extension of salvation beyond the roots of evil (sin) and the consequences of sin (evil), namely classic notions of salvation as sanctification, elevation or divinization, and modern liberal notions of salvation as 'moral education', evolution (or progress), social 'upliftment' and 'development' or cultural refinement.

In Christian ecotheology any notion of salvation as elevation is typically questioned. The feminist suspicion of interlocking dualisms has helped all of us to resist notions of salvation where ideas, the soul, the spirit, reason and heaven are regarded as more important than matter, the body, the letter, emotion and earth, respectively. Nature is good, but culture is better. Likewise, any notion of salvation as the elevation towards a higher goal of that which is natural is frowned upon. On this basis the hope for immortality, for going to heaven, for divinization has rightly been criticized as escapist or at least in need of reinterpretation. The danger is that such a notion of salvation can easily revert to a denigration of that which is material, bodily and earthly. It can breed contempt for the fragility and mortality of being embodied.

An alternative would be to acknowledge that this world is imperfect and that the gospel is aimed at making it a somewhat better place. This line is taken by Klaus Nürnberger: 'The world is not perfect and never has been. It means that the world process must be accepted, as imperfect as it may be, and channelled into the most wholesome directions available at any point in time. Acceptance

implies forbearance, patience, responsibility and the willingness to suffer for the sake of a transformation that goes in the direction of comprehensive optimal well-being.'[50] If so, God may be understood as 'the transcendent Source and Destiny of reality as such and as a whole' whose 'transforming acceptance of the unacceptable is the pervasive and non-negotiable precondition for the existence of reality as such'. On this basis he adds: 'This imperfect world is the world God is busy creating and the world that God loves! God shares the agonies of the victims of natural, biological and social evil and invites the survivors to join him in his creative and redeeming work.'[51] He concludes that God targets any deficiency in well-being and invites humans to participate in God's creative and redemptive project.[52] A Manichaeist position may indeed be avoided through an evolutionary or process understanding of God's engagement (of exploratory experimentation) with the world. But what would be the grounds for such evolutionary optimism that the future holds promise for overcoming former deficiencies?

The modern liberal tendency is to equate salvation with the flourishing of inherent potential, with education and development, if not progress, with the dynamics of building a better society, with moral upliftment through moral education. Here 'elevation' may well be understood in terms of the development of an inherent potential, allowing for evolutionary change, historical progression and increasing complexity.

An analogy from parenthood may illustrate the lure of this approach. When a baby is born, a parent would describe the baby as 'beautiful' despite outward appearances. Beauty here is probably the potential and the welcoming of a new person enriching the household. That which is bodily and earthly is affirmed for the moment, but obviously regarded as insufficient in the longer term. Many aspects still have to come to fruition. The baby needs to grow, learn to walk, to speak, to read and write, to develop her talents, intelligence, expertise and skill. Even more important is moral development, learning to show respect to others and to acquire appropriate virtues. Even that would not suffice. Parents would want their children to learn to appreciate the finer things in life. Together with that may also emerge an appreciation for

[50] See Nürnberger, *Regaining Sanity for the Earth*, p. 235.
[51] Ibid., p. 243.
[52] Ibid., p. 246.

science, cultural refinement, literature, the arts and religion. The child needs to come to an understanding of the secret and mystery of life – the art of living and dying (*ars moriendi*). There may be many obstacles in the way of such education, including bodily disabilities, mental health, a challenging cultural environment and all the structural effects of sin (evil) with which the child may be faced. However, the path to what parents would hope for their children is clearly not merely a continuation of what was there in the beginning, but the flourishing of potential towards full maturity. If so, salvation cannot be merely a restoration of what was there originally (at birth). Some form of 'maturation' is also required. Salvation also cannot lie in the completion of the life story of the baby since that would be the point of death. Neither can any one phase of the story be regarded as the one that has to be 'restored'.

The underlying question is whether room should not be allowed for a hierarchy of complexity in order to avoid the dangers of reductionism. This begs the question of how the relationship between inorganic matter and organic matter, between being an animal and being a hominid animal, between brain and mind, between body and soul, between matter and spirit, between the real and the ideal, between facts and values, between being and language should be understood. How is the emergence of such higher levels of complexity to be understood theologically? In contemporary theories of emergence, it is typically argued that such higher levels of complexity are only possible on the basis of, and have to abide by, the laws that govern lower levels of complexity. Yet, theories of emergence are aimed at countering the dangers of reductionism and thus appreciating complexity. Is some form of 'elevation' associated with that? Is such elevation somehow salvific or at least required for salvation? How can the image of a hierarchy organized under a single authority be reconciled with a Trinitarian theology that celebrates a vast diverse richness, held in embracing love?

Theologically, the question is how to understand the relationship between the Word that became flesh and words about the Word that became flesh (the gospel), between word and sacrament, word and salvation, gospel and culture, church and world, theology and sociology. How can the gospel transform the world? Merely through the spread of new ideas? Through new information and the communication of knowledge? Can ideas really change the world or does change come only through material processes, through bottom-up causation?

Or through the transforming presence of the Saviour? Is the gospel more than a mere idea, a different perspective, another interpretation framework, a view of the world, the 'eye of faith', seeing the world through God's eyes?

This is a particularly difficult problem for traditions where a strong emphasis is placed on the preaching of the Word. Salvation is thus understood as *ex auditu Verbi*. This is essentially a word of forgiveness. But could that forgiveness not be expressed through embrace too? Does that imply a thinly veiled preference for the ideal over the material, the spiritual over the bodily? Is the ear more spiritual than the eye since faith is not a matter of seeing but of believing, since God's forgiveness cannot be seen but can only be heard? Are words (directed at the ear) 'higher' or more 'significant' than other, more 'natural' signs (perceived by the human eye), as has been presumed since Augustine?

How, then, can one do justice to both the verbal (word) and the bodily (flesh)? This remains a vexing problem, given the tendency towards a spiritualizing and alienating escapism (where knowledge of the word provides an escape from that which is bodily, fragile, subject to change), on the one hand, and scientific reductionism (where words are regarded as a function of genes, brain chemistry, economic conditions, sexual drives, etc.), on the other. The value-richness of higher levels of complexity should be recognized without reducing salvation to that – otherwise ignorance would be regarded as the main underlying problem, while salvation may be equated with education, cultural evolution or development. The salvation of the earth has to include the biophysical levels that make the emergence of such 'higher' levels of complexity possible in the first place. Salvation therefore cannot be associated with the word as if it is the word that has to save the flesh by elevating it to the level of the verbal.

Christianity has often been criticized for harbouring various forms of dualism. However, strangely enough, such dualisms are preferable to the extremes of escapism and reductionism. At least both poles of the dualities are recognized and held in tension with each other (e.g. a soul without a body is a ghost; a body without a soul is a corpse), albeit at the cost of disconnecting them from each other. This allows a fluctuation from the one pole to the other, typically explaining the one in terms of the other. This leaves too much room for domination on the basis of such distinctions.

(e) The question therefore remains whether the salvation of the earth may be understood as a response to sin or to finitude or to both. Theologies of restoration have to face a stern test. How and where does sin enter into this tension between flesh (the libido) and word (the tongue)? Is the human will indeed the *locus domicilium* of sin? The long-standing danger is to associate sin with variability, fragility, the need for food (gluttony), money (desire), friendship (envy) and sexual expression (lust), thus, with nature. But sin can also be linked with idolatry, pride and rebellion against God (thus, the desire to transcend 'nature'). And salvation then? Does salvation enter from the side of the flesh (through genes, medicine, muti, economic upliftment, money, bread and wine) or from the side of language, culture and ideas? If the distortion caused by sin is ontologically not 'something' but exists only on the basis of the privation of the good (*privatio boni*), salvation cannot be 'something' (material, bodily, earthly) that is added to creation either. How, then, is the salvation of the earth to be understood in ecumenical discourse?

In my view, the reformed emphasis on the contrast between sin and grace remains highly appropriate. It helps, for example, to maintain the primary focus on the anthropogenic causes of ecological destruction. Our main problem is not the normal fluctuations in the climate but anthropogenic climate change. Likewise, at least in the African context, our problem is not merely mortality in general but premature death due to curable diseases, economic inequalities, government corruption, famine, murder and war. Our main predicament is not vulnerability but rape; not transience but that the days of our lives are filled with injustices.

The question is whether this focus on salvation from sin as the primary problem can be maintained eschatologically. Not surprisingly, positions remain divergent on this point. What is urgently needed in an age of ominous environmental tipping points is nothing less than the salvation of God's beloved creation. But how should this story be told? The dominant theologies focusing on either the restoration or the elevation of that which is material, bodily and earthly cannot be easily reconciled with each other. They each harbour disastrous distortions. The alternatives based on notions of replacement or recycling are less attractive. As far as I can see, a middle position, compromise, dialectic, paradoxical *interplay* or alternative way is not available either.

'Creation' as a counter-intuitive redescription and ascription of the world

How, then, can one do justice to God's acts of creation, salvation and consummation? How can one do justice (also requiring a sense of ecojustice) to that which is material, bodily and earthly, on the one hand, and avoid the traps of reductionism, on the other. Clearly, one needs to account for mystery, for hiddenness and for an eschatological reserve. I offer a few pointers for a way forward in this regard:

I suggest that 'from below' Christians share in the common human quest to find adequate answers to the mystery of the world, to find answers by which one can live and die. This would include answers to questions around the origins and destiny of the world, on what makes the world go round, how we as humans fit into the bigger picture, how we should live and, especially, how we can cope with or overcome pain, suffering, injustices, evil, death, and destruction, from the outside and from inside our own communities and our own hearts and minds. This is indeed a common human quest, alongside other disciplines, in which the roles of indigenous knowledge, the wisdom of the laity, the sciences, philosophy, the arts and various technical skills are all indispensable.

Christians believe that they have found in Jesus Christ the best available clue to the ultimate mystery of the world. We share with some others the conviction that this ultimate mystery may be called 'God' and that this God is the Creator, but in Jesus Christ we have found a very particular clue to who God is (the God of the vulnerable, the marginalized, of runaway slaves) and to what God's character is (mercy, compassion and justice) – leading us to the confession of faith in the triune God and to explaining this by telling the story of God's economy. Actually, retrospectively, we would prefer to say that we have been found by this clue, not that we have found the clue. It is a matter of social reception not only of social construction. This clue redefines our understanding of the common human quest. It challenges any other constructions of the ultimate mystery and even umbrella terms to capture different constructions of that mystery – including words such as 'ultimate', 'common', 'religion' and 'mystery'. Since this provides us with an orientation within which we can live and die, Christians wish to share with others the clue

that we have found, recognizing that the clue remains nothing more than a clue to a mystery that cannot be fathomed.

This clue entails a reinterpretation of the world as we now know it, a redescription and ascription of this world in the form of the confession that this world is the triune God's beloved creation. That this world is God's own beloved creation implies that God created it, that God's messianic representative regarded it as worth dying for and that it is being sanctified and glorified through God's Spirit.

In reflecting on this core confession, two aspects have to be kept in paradoxical tension: (a) We do not know what God created (or how it was created); (b) This world in which we now live – in all its materiality, in all its misery, pain and suffering – was, is indeed, and will remain God's own beloved creation.

The problem with theologies of restoration is that they affirm the second part of the confession too quickly without realizing that this is a counter-intuitive claim – and then make deductions from 'nature' as to how God's work of restoration may be understood. The problem with theologies of elevation is that they are too hesitant in affirming the second part of the confession.

This confession may also be understood in terms of the double movement of entering and exiting the Christian liturgy. We enter the liturgy with our existing social constructions of reality (our natural theologies, heresies and idolatries together with our joys, sorrows and anxieties) and we exit from the liturgy having learnt anew to view the world in the light of the Light of the world. The liturgy enables us to get a glimpse of the world as viewed from God's perspective, as God's beloved creation, as something worth dying for. The liturgy therefore functions as an opportunity towards reorientation, suggesting a movement from orientation to disorientation to reorientation through which one can locate oneself within a continuously revised system of co-ordinates. To have found one's way again is to be better orientated than before. For Christians, such orientation has as point of reference the Orient, that is, the cross on Calvary. This does not imply a fixed or stable frame of reference, only a sense of direction for navigating a journey through an unchartered landscape.

This confession that the world is the triune God's beloved creation remains counter-intuitive for several reasons. First, it is not self-evident that the world

was indeed created and not the product of randomness, luck, fate, intelligent design or a wicked plot. Secondly, claims to know who this Creator is remain contested. Thirdly, given the recognition that pain, suffering and death form a necessary and integral part of the evolution of life on earth, it must strike one as odd that a God of love would create such a world. Once God is known as the God of holy love, it is far from evident that this triune God would also be the creator since the world as we know it does not necessarily reflect such love. How could one say that this world, with all its misery, comes from a loving God?

Precisely since this confession that this world is God's beloved creation is so counter-intuitive, the confession cannot be left just there. It is necessary to tell the rest of the story, including God's work of providence, salvation and consummation. This story can only be told from below, as a narrative redescription of the world in which we live. This story can be told in many ways, over many Arabian nights. It is not important where one starts or how one ends the story. The only protection against distortions is to ensure that the story continues, that all the other aspects of God's work are brought into play. Here I suggest the image of a juggler who has to ensure that all the cones are kept in play. To catch and hold any one cone may mean dropping all the others.

Nevertheless, the significance of this redescription of the world should not be underestimated. To see the world as God's creation is very different from seeing nature in a romanticized way as a source of beauty and inspiration (focusing one-sidedly on a sense of beauty and harmony in the world), or as a threat and a source of fear (focusing one-sidedly on the conflict in the world, the problem of natural suffering, seeing nature as 'red in tooth and claw', inviting a struggle for the survival of the fittest also among human communities), as a commodity that can be traded (as nothing but 'real estate'), as a set of resources available for human use if not exploitation, as something so sublime that it is to be worshipped, or as something that is essentially inferior and to which value must be added, as something in need of being elevated or spiritualized.[53] The same applies to the redescription of life suggested by

[53] See the discussion of various 'warped views' of nature as identified and described by Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, pp. 42–5.

the phrase 'God of life'. It counters both nihilist and hedonist views of life. It also questions anthropocentric views of humanity as the crown of evolution and modernist temptations to view humanity as autonomous, self-sufficient or self-explanatory.

Ecologically, it does make a world of difference what image of the world is adopted. Christians may sustain an ecological praxis, ethos and spirituality by drawing on rich biblical metaphors for re-imaging the world as a fountain of life, the clay of a potter, a product made by an artisan, a work of art, the body of God, God's own child or God's household. However, the inner secret of such a redescription lies in the ascription that this world belongs to none other than the triune God. The identity and character of this God make all the difference.

6

Does God's Care Make Any Difference? Theological Reflection on the Suffering of God's Creatures

Christopher Southgate

In focusing on the suffering of God's creatures, I will consider here only that branch of natural evil that can be termed 'evolutionary evil' – the harms to non-human creatures that are caused by other creatures and their environment, in ways that are characterized by the sciences as part of the evolutionary process. I will not be considering in the first instance the myriad harms caused to non-human creatures by the greed, folly and cruelty of human beings, though I end by touching on the implications of God's care for creatures in relation to the human vocation to creation care.[1]

The problem

The problem of evolutionary evil may be simply stated. A Darwinian perspective on the natural world shows us that nature is in Tennyson's phrase 'red in tooth and claw', moreover, that it 'cares nothing' for 'the type'.[2] The suffering of individual creatures, and the extinction of species, is intrinsic to the way nature works.

This problem was evident to Darwin when he wrote 'what a book a devil's chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horridly

[1] I thank many colleagues for contributions to my thinking, and especially Ms Nadia Marais, my respondent at the conference where this paper was first given, and Ms Bethany Sollereder who kindly read an earlier draft.

[2] Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'In Memoriam A. H. H.' 56.13, 16, in *Tennyson: A Selected Edition* (ed. C. Ricks; Harlow: Longman, 1989).

cruel works of nature!'[3] Yet Darwin could also write that 'There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.'[4] In other words, he saw the evolutionary narrative that his work made possible as *ambiguous*, full of disvalue, even of horror, yet also full of value of all sorts, in particular elegance of adaptation, and, when considered overall, suggestive of grandeur.[5]

It is important for the ecotheologian to make clear decisions as to what constitutes value in creaturely life. In my monograph *The Groaning of Creation* (2008),[6] I located value in the individual, especially in flourishing (however brief that flourishing might be) – experiencing the full possibilities of what life as that creature might offer (ch. 4). As far as ecological systems went, I located value in beauty, diversity and complexity (p. 16) – again, ultimately, because all of these promote richness of creaturely experience. I would now be inclined to add cooperation as a value, both because cooperation in itself promotes complexity and because it opens up possibilities of self-giving.[7] But these are guesses as to what constitutes value, and other theodicists may choose different values and therefore construct different good–harm analyses.[8] I note also Holmes Rolston's careful discussion of the possibility of claiming any objectivity for such a scheme of creaturely value.[9]

The first step in my argument, then, is to affirm the reality of creaturely suffering, and of the disvalue that is the (natural) extinction of species. It is

[3] C. Darwin, letter to J. D. Hooker, dated 13 July 1856, www.darwinproject.ac.uk (accessed 5 July 2013).

[4] C. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 490. Fascinatingly, in the second and subsequent editions, Darwin inserted after 'breathed' the words 'by the Creator'.

[5] Lisa Sideris, importantly, points out that awareness of the realities of a Darwinian world is a neglected element in ecotheology. See L. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[6] C. Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

[7] This was recently explored by Sarah Coakley in her 2012 Gifford Lectures. See S. Coakley, 'Sacrifice Regained: Evolution, Cooperation and God', http://www.faith-theology.com/2012/05/sarah-coakley-2012-gifford-lectures.html (accessed 5 July 2013).

[8] On such analyses, see C. Southgate and A. Robinson, 'Varieties of Theodicy: An Exploration of Responses to the Problem of Evil based on a Typology of Good–Harm Analyses', in N. Murphy, R. J. Russell and W. Stoeger, SJ (eds.), *Physics and Cosmology: Scientific Perspectives on the Problem of Evil in Nature* (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory/Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 2007), pp. 67–90.

[9] H. Rolston III, 'Disvalues in Nature', *The Monist* 75 (1992), pp. 250–75 (251–52).

important to be realistic about these things. We must not imagine that the suffering of other creatures too closely resembles human suffering, or that it contains the sort of crushing of hope that an advanced theory of mind makes possible. Nor should we imagine that pain, by itself, is necessarily always a negative element in life – it is a vital part of being alive as a complex organism. But acute observation of animals does show us something more than mere pain – it shows us animals avoiding noxious stimuli and 'favouring' a hurt limb. We see social animals crying out for assistance, and the distress of creatures caught in severe trauma, especially as they experience trauma from which there is no possibility of release. Death from predators is sometimes quick, but sometimes not. It may take a leopard over a minute to bring down a full-grown antelope. A whale may be literally eaten alive by sharks or orcas, over a period of hours. Neurophysiological studies on animals in distress show similar patterns of hormone and neurotransmitter release to those found in humans. So – with all due caution – it is reasonable to regard creaturely experience as including the possibility of real suffering, across a certain range of types of creature that are complex enough to feel such.

What of extinction? Species, arguably, have natural spans of effectiveness, after which their viability disappears because of competition or environmental change. (As an aside, a chilling possibility in the current era is that the human species may be in such a phase.) But extinction removes from the biosphere, for ever, a certain strategy of being alive, a certain way, to pick up an important motif from the Psalms, in which God is praised by God's creation. So extinction is always a disvalue. Extinction may benefit a whole range of other future species – the loss of the dinosaurs meant that other possibilities could be explored – but it remains a tragic loss to creation, the loss of a whole strain of music from the symphony of creaturely praise, a loss, therefore, also to God's own experience of that creation.

It is worth noting that both natural selection of heritable variants and the processes giving rise to heritable variation are sources of suffering. Natural selection will tend to lead to creaturely distress falling particularly on weak and vulnerable individuals, who are likely to be the least able to evade the source of trauma. But natural selection can only work on heritable variations, and we now know that these arise through various processes of mutation (including the recombination made possible by sexual reproduction). We also know that most of this mutation is either neutral or harmful; it may occasion great

suffering, as we know from the various heritable diseases that have survived in the human. In other words, *both natural selection itself and what makes it possible are sources of suffering, and this suffering is, as we have noted, intrinsic to the processes of creaturely change*.

The traditional solution

The traditional Christian answer is that disvalues in creation are the result of the Fall. We can be clear now that that is simply an understandable pre-scientific anachronism – yes, it is true that modern humans have been devastators of their environments and precipitators of many extinctions, but we also know that processes of predation and disease, and other much larger extinction events than the ones yet caused by humans, long preceded the evolution of humankind. Human sin did not cause nature to be red in tooth and claw.

There remains the possibility of a fall of creation caused by primordial angelic rebellion, or some other mysterious cause. This suffers from two major problems, one theological and the other scientific. Theologically, it places another power of comparable force to God at work in the processes of creation, a power capable of frustrating the purposes of the Creator at every turn. Put simply, a narrative of creation that depends on such a frustrating power, as the source of all violence and suffering in the creation, implies that God desired to create straw-eating lions (cf. Isa. 11.7), and this frustrating power was able to prevent God from doing so. This is at variance with all that the Christian tradition has wanted to confess in terms of God's sovereignty and creation *ex nihilo*. Scientifically, a primordial fall is problematic because it ignores the point that it is the very processes that involve creaturely suffering that engender creaturely sophistication, and intricacy and diversity of function.

I admit that there are problems on both sides. The alternative to saying that the loving purposes of God in creation were interfered with by a free and rebellious agent is to say that God was in some way constrained as to the sort of creation God could give rise to that would 'work' in terms of those loving purposes. The first option diminishes God's sovereignty over other agents; the second seems to limit God's absolute *ex nihilo* omnipotence and freedom, and moreover to implicate God in the violence of creation.[10] I continue to regard the

second option as substantially the lesser 'evil', both in terms of the conversation with science and in relation to the doctrine of God. To hold that there are certain limitations in the set of possibilities that could give rise to creaturely life seems to anyone trained in the sciences (as opposed to philosophical theology) to be eminently reasonable. The limitations would have to be logical ones if God's omnipotence is to be safeguarded – our problem is that we do not know, probably cannot know, the logic in question. That does not prevent the guess that there *are* logical limitations, from being a reasonable guess. Indeed, it seems appropriate that the set of possibilities for life is not an infinite set, since the possibilities themselves are creatures; they are not themselves God.

A compound theodicy

The first plank in my constructive proposal in evolutionary theodicy, then, is that there are indeed (logical) constraints on God's creation of life-bearing worlds, and that *a world of competition and natural selection was the only way God could give rise to creaturely values of the sort we know to have evolved in the biosphere of Earth*. As so often, this is particularly well expressed by Arthur Peacocke, who wrote:

> If the Creator intended the arrival in the cosmos of complex, reproducing structures that could think and be free – that is, self-conscious, free persons – was there not some other, less costly and painful way of bringing this about? Was that the only possible way? This is one of those unanswerable metaphysical questions in theodicy to which our only response has to be based on our understanding of the biological parameters . . . discerned by science to be operating in evolution. These indicate that there are inherent constraints on how even an omnipotent Creator could bring about the existence of a law-like creation that is to be a cosmos not a chaos, and thus an arena for the free action of self-conscious, reproducing complex entities and for the coming to be of the fecund variety of living organisms whose existence the Creator delights in.[11]

[10] The latter, in particular, is Neil Messer's great concern, see N. Messer, 'Natural Evil after Darwin', in M. S. Northcott and R. J. Berry (eds.), *Theology after Darwin* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp. 139–54.

[11] A. R. Peacocke, 'The Cost of New Life', in J. Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (London: SPCK/Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 21–42 (36–7).

Is that enough, then? Can one simply retort to whoever complains at God that this is the best type of system for generating creaturely value, however great the cost? Most biologists would be inclined to respond in these terms, to say that nature is a 'package deal'. You cannot have the values without the disvalues.[12] But I have argued strongly that that by itself is not an adequate defence of the goodness of God. God is not merely the God of systems, but of individual creatures. It is not enough to say to the limping impala calf picked off by hyenas; or (in Holmes Rolston's famous example)[13] to the second pelican chick pushed out of the nest to starve, by its stronger sibling; to creatures whose lives know no flourishing, that God is the God of the system and the system is a package deal – the bad with the good. So the 'only way' argument cannot subsist by itself. It should not be advanced as a knock-down argument in philosophical theodicy, as though we could be absolutely confident as to the range of worlds God might have created, and as though we could know how God might have chosen between them. That would be both hubristic in terms of our knowledge and impoverished in terms of our view of God. Rather, we need to insert this 'only way' understanding within a richer account of the narrative of God's ways with the world. I now outline briefly a series of moves that are needed to supplement the 'only way' argument:

First, the need to invoke the co-suffering of God with all creatures, an increasing emphasis in the theology of the last hundred years, and applied to the non-human world in the work of theologians such as Arthur Peacocke

[12] A related argument has been advanced by Robin Attfield in *Creation, Evolution and Meaning* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), chapters 6–7. The 'only way' argument is essentially the approach defended by Michael Ruse, in his *Can a Darwinian be a Christian? The Relationship between Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 130–38, and by R. L. Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 152–53, 222. Michael Rota, drawing on the work of Peter van Inwagen, notes that a miraculous world in which suffering was continuously prevented would not only be a world unable to evolve under selection pressure, but also a world that compromised divine hiddenness and/or divine faithfulness to the regularities of the world. See M. Rota, 'The Problem of Evil and Cooperation', in M. Nowak and S. Coakley (eds.), *Evolution, Games and God: The Principle of Cooperation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 362–74. Michael Murray's analysis of possible theodicies also lays stress on the good of what he calls 'nomic regularity'. See M. J. Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[13] H. Rolston III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), p. 144.

and Jay McDaniel.[14] Every theologian would concede that God is present to every creature both in its flourishing and in its suffering, and that therefore no creature suffers or dies alone. In the Christian tradition this suffering is focused and exemplified at the cross in a way that inaugurates the transformation of the world. Niels Gregersen's work on 'deep incarnation' emphasizes the solidarity of Christ not merely with humans but with all creatures, and particularly the victims of evolution.[15] So it is a short step from there to the supposition that God does indeed suffer with every suffering creature, and that that suffering, at some deep existential level, makes a difference, both to God and to the creature.

Second, the need to suggest that creatures whose lives know no fulfilment may experience fullness of life in some eschatological reality, a 'pelican heaven' in McDaniel's phrase. A number of theologians have explored this line recently in various ways, including Jürgen Moltmann, Robert J. Russell and Denis Edwards.[16] If we take altogether seriously the loving character and purposes of God, I think we cannot believe that lives consisting of nothing but suffering are the end for those creatures that experience them.

Please note where this engagement with evolutionary theodicy has taken us. We have had to part company with the notion of a perfectly good initial creation corrupted by some mysterious process. So we have had to accept the profound ambiguity of that creation. We have also had to abandon the perfect impassibility of God so beloved of classical tradition, in favour of a God who grieves and laments with suffering creatures, very possibly in the very same process in which God takes joy from the flourishing of other creatures. And we have had to abandon the conviction – also strong in the tradition – that animals know no redemption, in favour of a view of a heaven rich in creaturely diversity.

[14] See A. R. Peacocke, 'Biological Evolution: A Positive Theological Appraisal', in R. J. Russell, W. R. Stoeger, SJ and F. J. Ayala (eds.), *Evolutionary and Molecular Biology: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City: Vatican Observatory/Berkeley: Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1998), pp. 357–76; J. B. McDaniel *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989).

[15] N. H. Gregersen, 'The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World', *Dialog*, 40/3 (2001), pp. 192–207.

[16] J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (trans. M. Kohl; London: SCM Press, 1990); R. J. Russell, *Cosmology: From Alpha to Omega* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); D. Edwards, 'Every Sparrow that Falls to the Ground: The Cost of Evolution and the Christ-event', *Ecotheology* 11/1 (2006), pp. 103–23.

The last element in what I have called 'a compound evolutionary theodicy'[17] is a sense of the high calling of redeemed humanity as co-redeemers with God in the drawing together of all things (see below).

It will be clear that I cannot follow Holmes Rolston in his conviction that if God watches the sparrow fall, he does so from a great distance.[18] A God of love, the quality of love we see on the cross, is not distant from creaturely suffering, nor is that God only a calculator of overall best of all possible worlds, or yet only a user of creatures for long-term goals, however profound and redemptive.

I share with Jay McDaniel, and indeed with the general thrust of all process theology, and with Arthur Peacocke, and indeed with the rather different model of divine companioning in Ruth Page,[19] a conviction that indeed God is with each individual creature both in its flourishing and in its suffering. As God is with every human being, and most profoundly present to them at the time of their death, so God is also with other creatures, in such a way, for each type of creature, as may be meaningful, as may make a difference. I return to *what* difference below.

Current paths

A volume dedicated to 'current paths and emerging horizons' is a helpful place to explore what are the motifs that are currently attracting the energy of scholars, and which themes will shape the future debate. Among current paths I identify four. The first is the persistence of fall-language among those who simply cannot accept that violent and (to human eyes) ugly infliction of suffering can be part of God's economy of creation. We can pass rather quickly over two somewhat bizarre models. The first is that of retro-active causation offered by William Dembski in *The End of Christianity*,[20] which I discard not just because of its sheer oddness, but because for all its appeal to stretch of logic it does not do work towards a theodicy of non-human suffering. A God who

[17] Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, p. 15.
[18] Rolston, *Science and Religion*, p. 140.
[19] R. Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1996).
[20] W. A. Dembski, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (Nashville: B&H Group/Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009).

would inflict suffering on myriad creatures over millions of years simply so that the first humans could reflect on this and see it as a possible consequence of their sin, does not seem like a God of either love or justice. The second is that of Stephen Webb in *The Dome of Eden*,[21] with his sense that issues of good and evil were wrestled out with the first humans in some sort of protected space, while beyond that space evolution was profoundly tainted by the activity of Satan. In both Dembski and Webb, a hankering for biblical literalism leads to a position plagued by all the scientific and theological problems I outlined earlier when discussing the Fall.

A much more sophisticated fall-based account is found in the writing of Neil Messer, who draws on Barth's concept of *das Nichtige* to explain how disvalue can enter creation without its being an expression of the divine will.[22] David Clough indicates in *On Animals* that this is also where his sympathies would lie.[23] I am concerned that Messer's scheme accords neither with the evidence of the Hebrew Scriptures (unless these are all to be read through the lens of Isa. 11.6–9), nor with the scientific narrative of the co-emergence of values with disvalues, nor indeed with a theology that takes divine sovereignty seriously.[24]

Mention of the work of David Clough takes me to the second current path in this area – that of the extrapolation of theological discourse previously reserved for humans, to include other animals. Most of this extrapolation stresses the qualities and moral stature of other animals as subjects and, indeed, as created in some measure in the image of God.[25] But there is an interesting subsection of this work around the question of whether other animals can be said to sin.[26] I myself doubt whether this language can be usefully extended far beyond our most immediate primate relatives. It will not, therefore, be able to form the basis for a theodicy reliant on the free choices of creatures.[27] What sense does it make to say that a tiger can choose to eat grass rather than goats, or that it

[21] S. Webb, *The Dome of Eden: A New Solution to the Problem of Creation and Evolution* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010).
[22] Messer, 'Natural Evil'.
[23] D. L. Clough, *On Animals, Volume One: Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2012).
[24] See C. Southgate, 'Re-reading Genesis, John and Job: A Christian's Response to Darwinism', *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 46/2 (2011), pp. 370–95.
[25] Clough, *On Animals*.
[26] Clough, *On Animals*, chapter 5.
[27] Contrary to the view developed by Joshua Moritz, in his 'Evolutionary Evil and Darwin's Black Box: Changing the Parameters of the Problem', in G. Bennett et al. (eds.), *The Evolution of Evil* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), pp. 143–88.

sins by not so doing? Explorations of 'sin' in other primates may, however, shed important light on the emergence of the property of sacrificial self-giving, a property that, in humans, made humanity a vehicle for God's gift of the divine Son in the incarnation.

Messer's ingenious attempt to bring Barth's language of 'nothingness' into the service of a theodicy has intersections with a third current path in the debate, that of the invocation of mystery. Just as we cannot quite grasp Barth's *Nichtige* as invoked by Messer, so also Celia Deane-Drummond and Nicola Hoggard Creegan both acknowledge the extent of the disvalues in evolution and offer parabolic description, rather than explanation. So Deane-Drummond talks of the inevitability of 'Shadow Sophia'.[28] Nicola Hoggard Creegan invokes the parable of the wheat and the tares,[29] without making it clear who is the 'enemy' in relation to evolutionary evil, or indeed what can be regarded as tares and what wheat. This formulation, elegant as it is, seems not quite to do justice to the intrinsic nature of the connection between values and disvalues – that it is the very speed of the cheetah, the power of the orca, the ingenuity of the primate group, that gives rise to suffering in its victims. Arguably, this same category of appeal to mystery also applies to the use of the term 'cruciformity' in the writing of Rolston. To call nature 'cruciform', or 'a passion play', is not so much theodicy as mystical description, though I offer below a further comment on cruciformity that may prove helpful.[30]

Hoggard Creegan's book contains a fine account of the shifts in evolutionary theory brought about by an increased emphasis on cooperation[31] – the fourth and last of my 'current paths'. It is worth examining in a little detail the claim that, because there is more cooperation in evolution than is sometimes claimed in hard-line neo-Darwinism, the problem of theodicy in respect of evolutionary suffering is lessened.[32] The first observation to make is that the

[28] C. Deane-Drummond, *Christ and Evolution: Wonder and Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), pp. 185–91; 'Shadow Sophia in Christological Perspective', *Theology and Science* 6 (2008) pp. 13–32. I remain unconvinced that this attractive terminology gives any *reason* for disvalue, as opposed to appealing to mystery.

[29] N. H. Creegan, *Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[30] Rolston, *Science and Religion*, p. 144.

[31] Creegan, *Animal Suffering*, chapter 8.

[32] Coakley, currently the most significant theologian reflecting on evolutionary cooperation, acknowledges that 'There is no less suffering or "wastage" on this [a more cooperative] model of evolution'. See S. Coakley, 'Evolution, Cooperation and Divine Providence', in Nowak and Coakley (eds.), *Evolution, Games and God*, pp. 375–85 (383).

presence of cooperation does not prevent natural selection from operating, any more than the phenomenon of flight negates gravity. There will still be winners and losers, even in an evolutionary game in which cooperation is abundant. The observations of Martin Nowak, as interpreted by Coakley in her 2012 Gifford Lectures, are extremely interesting, and may, in time, offer fascinating insights into the emergence of sacrificial behaviour – voluntary losing – within evolution.[33] But the point remains that traits will still be selected for, and against. Cooperation in groups may confer advantage in the use of ecosystemic resources – it may even sometimes allow a resource to be useful that could not be so to individuals in isolation, but because, in the end, these resources are always finite, this advantage will always be at the expense of other individuals or groups. In the end there will always be losers, and it is in these individuals that the balance between suffering and flourishing may be particularly adverse. Thus the instance of the insurance pelican chick could be represented as an example of cooperation – the parents cooperate with the elder chick (if healthy) in ensuring the exclusion and therefore the starvation of the younger. This is an effective strategy in maximizing the efficiency of food use, but it is not a strategy that eliminates losers, or mitigates suffering. Indeed, this (slightly mischievously chosen) example shows that cooperation might seem to make the moral problem for God, of creaturely suffering, worse rather than better. It is not merely the weak or the unlucky that suffer, but the many who happen to fall outside the networks of cooperation that such an evolutionary system engenders.

Reflection on cooperation may, however, clarify the issue of parasitism, one of the most disturbing causes of suffering in nature. Darwin himself was much disturbed by the behaviour of the *Ichneumonidae*, wasps that hatch their progeny in caterpillars that nourish this incubus and are then progressively eaten away from the inside. That may trouble the aesthetic sensibility of the human observer, but it is not necessarily a particularly problematic example of suffering, depending on the complexity of pain-sensing and inner life in caterpillars. Unquestionably, however, the parasitizing of higher animals by

[33] I am inclined to agree with Coakley's intuition that 'the cooperative tendencies of evolution themselves suggest a natural *praeparatio* in the processes of selection for the potential later heights of saintly human self-sacrifice (only ultimately comprehensible as a response to the divine grace)'. Coakley, 'Evolution, Cooperation', p. 382.

various pathogens causes great suffering.[34] Parasitism may be regarded as an inevitable by-product of evolutionary systems that predispose to cooperation, and indeed to 'sacrifice' – 'voluntary losing', as I called it above. Where such conditions pertain, involuntary losing, because symbionts 'cheat', can and does readily occur. Parasitism may evolve out of symbiosis, or may indeed evolve into it again, as with the many intestinal flora in the human gut. In respect of parasitism, then, one might construct what Robinson and I have called a 'developmental by-product' good–harm analysis[35] – the good of all sorts of possibilities of creaturely cooperation is, or may be, accompanied by the harm of the suffering caused by evolutionary cheats. Such cheating is not intrinsic to an evolutionary process that allows cooperation but is a near-inevitable by-product of it. As I indicated above, such thinking does not constitute a complete theodicy – that would make God only a consequentialist calculator of goods and harms, but it makes a contribution to an understanding of how God might have come to allow such phenomena to occur within creation.

The status of predation is slightly different. Strategies of cooperation could, theoretically, develop without parasitism. But it is very hard to imagine some of the properties of the higher animals evolving without the stimulus of predator–prey relationships, both in creating evolutionary 'arms races' that refine the abilities of creatures to extraordinary extents and in providing large sources of pre-packaged nutrition for the successful predator.[36] So predation looks more like an instrument of the generation of certain types of evolved value than a by-product of that generation. It requires, therefore, a slightly different good–harm analysis, one that emphasizes to the full the inextricability to which I referred above.[37] This is the problem of evolutionary theodicy at its sharpest – what I have called elsewhere the teleological aspect of the problem, suffering as the instrument of the generation of value, and therefore, presumably, a means to divine ends.[38]

[34] See the comments of John F. Haught in 'The Boyle Lecture 2003: Darwin, Design and the Promise of Nature', *Science and Christian Belief* 17 (2005), pp. 5–20 (8). Holmes Rolston is less exercised by it. See his 'Disvalues in Nature', pp. 255–56.
[35] In Southgate and Robinson, 'Varieties of Theodicy'.
[36] Rolston, 'Disvalues in Nature', pp. 253–54.
[37] Disvalue 'close-coupled with value' – as Rolston puts it in 'Disvalues in Nature', p. 254.
[38] Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, pp. 9–10.

Emerging horizons

I turn now to emerging horizons in this fascinating debate. First, I note a very significant development in the divine-action debate, which over time will necessarily affect how we think of God's interaction with the evolving biosphere. The work of Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp on divine action has done much to shift that debate away from mechanism and back to issues of divine morality. Their conclusion – that God can, morally, offer only 'axiological communication' at the mental and spiritual level[39] – is open to challenge, but it provides a language in which to speak of divine invitation without the need to 'buy' the whole package of Whiteheadian metaphysics that has tended to dominate that language of lure, indeed of divine longing.

Second, I suggest that the work of Ruth Page on divine companioning of creatures[40] is an underused resource, and I note its influence on my own student Bethany Sollereder.[41] To make that relationship between God and creature central to theodicy, rather than beginning from the nineteenth-century debates about devil's chaplains and disguised friends, may well take this aspect of theodicy in new and exciting (if always speculative) directions. Again, the work of Clayton and Knapp, and that of Thomas Oord and others in open theism,[42] will be important shapers of such moves.

Finally, I thank another student of mine, Derek White, for prompting me to consider another potential new horizon. The 'only way' argument, expounded by many scholars in various forms, is essentially an argument in the theology of creation. What worlds could God have made, should God have made any? Robert J. Russell has helpfully shown that such arguments must be complemented by moves in the theology of redemption.[43] The closer that moves in creation and in redemption can be brought together, the richer the resulting theological picture is likely to be.[44] Thus, one could

[39] P. Clayton and S. Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), chapter 3, quotation on p. 61.
[40] Page, *God and the Web*.
[41] B. Sollereder, 'The 99% Problem: Evolutionary Extinction and the Goodness of God' (paper read at the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, November 2012).
[42] T. J. Oord, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010).
[43] Russell, *Cosmology*, chapter 8.
[44] See the essay by Ernst Conradie in this volume.

hold two types of 'only way' argument together. First, holding that a world of evolving creatures is indeed the only sort of world in which the sorts of creaturely values with which we are familiar could arise. Second, further holding that a world containing free creatures would always stand in need of redemption, and that the sort of world we live in is the only sort of world that could make possible that redemption of free creatures to which the Christian gospel testifies – reconciliation to God through the incarnation, death and resurrection of the divine Son.

The world, then, had to be such that, eventually, the divine life could be incarnate in a creature, out of whose self-giving life and death redemption could come. This, in turn, might provide some purchase on the term 'cruciformity', which has been used in the debate up to now without any real clarity as to what was meant theologically. It seems at least possible that a redeemable world has to be a cruciform world, at least in the sense that costly self-giving (as a response, as noted above, to divine grace) has to be an emergent property of such a world, and that free creatures will often not respond in love to self-giving but will abuse it for their own purposes. So perhaps this is the reason why Rolston might be right to say not only that this world contains 'the slaughter of the innocents' (in the sense of the myriad general sufferers within evolution) but also that it is a passion play.[45] My suggestion above implies that there may be deep theological reasons for that.

What difference does God's care make?

A common (though contested[46]) distinction in the divine-action debate is between general divine action, God's creating and sustaining of systems, and special divine action, God's particular response to particular situations. God's individual care for, love for, presence to, each individual creature in its individuality seems to fall into the latter category, and I would criticize my recent work for not giving sufficient emphasis to special divine action. The theodicy questions thrown up by the natural sciences tend to draw

[45] Rolston, *Science and Religion*, p. 144.
[46] See C. Knight, *The God of Nature: Incarnation and Contemporary Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

answers at the level of the system, of general divine action in creation, and there is a danger of giving only a systemic answer, indeed a deistic answer. Attfield's skilful and painstaking analysis in *Creation, Evolution and Meaning* is an example.[47]

So it is important to pose the question 'What difference does God's care make?' How does God act in the experience of the individual creature in a way that makes a difference? I noted above that the divine action debate is shifting now back into the territory of theodicy – can God's action, morally, be anything more than 'encouragement' – a question that Philip Clayton has posed with particular force in relation to human minds, though as yet with no indication as to how his model would apply to species without humans' level of mentality. Indeed 'encouragement' – the instilling of courage – might be one way of expressing the impact of God's care. Another would be my suggestion in *The Groaning of Creation* that the creature, in whatever state of extremis – knows, to whatever extent it can know – that it is not alone.[48] Knows, perhaps, at some level or other, that the universe is not that place of 'unfeeling immensity' of which Jacques Monod spoke,[49] or yet that place of fast-receding hope Matthew Arnold captured in 'Dover Beach'.

How can we speak of, characterize, that knowledge in a non-human creature? I agree it is profoundly problematic. Yet I suggest we would want to speak of that knowledge in a very young baby, or a dementia sufferer. So I think the extrapolation has some theological plausibility to it, hemmed around as it must be by caveats about our lack of knowledge of other creatures, and indeed the constraints of what we do know about sentience and complexity, and their lack in some organisms.

We have little enough to go from Scripture, and most of what we have seems to speak of the system – the young lions seeking their prey from God in Ps. 104, the divine economy as depicted in Job 38–41. But the motif of creaturely praise, which I mentioned earlier, can I think help us here. Praise, like suffering, is essentially an individual experience. Of course we can know little of the character of other creatures' praise, though we do get hints in the Psalms (especially at Ps. 19.1–4, Ps. 148). We are also told, at least in the better

[47] Attfield, *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*, chapters 6–7.
[48] Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, p. 52.
[49] J. Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (trans. A. Wainhouse; London: Collins, 1972), p. 172.

translations of Ps. 19.3–4, that this is a music we can never properly hear. In a remarkable passage in his *Church Dogmatics* Karl Barth suggests that perhaps creation praises God most intensely in what he called its 'shadowy side'. He writes:

> . . . creation and creature are good even in the fact that all that is exists in this contrast and antithesis. In all this, far from being null, it praises its Creator even on its shadowy side, even in the negative aspect in which it is so near to nothingness . . . For all we can tell, may not His creatures praise Him more mightily in humiliation than in exaltation, in need than in plenty, in fear than in joy, on the frontier of nothingness than when wholly orientated on God.[50]

To praise, in whatever sense, must be to be aware, in whatever sense, of divine presence, and Barth's suggestion is intriguing, implying as it does that that awareness, in whatever sense, may be at its most intense in times of fear and suffering. It is in harmony with my sense that the creature is not alone at these moments, and, in whatever sense, knows this, and that the awareness makes a difference. This picture is also a way of restating the conviction that divine immanence, which is as it were a property of general divine action, God's will to be present to every creature, nearer, as the Muslims would say, than our own jugular vein, is a particularly willed immanence in respect of every creature, and therefore a manifestation also of special divine action.

I do not suppose that God routinely saves creatures from predation or disease – we see so much of both to make such a suggestion bizarre. I do think it conceivable that God has acted to protect possibilities within the system as a whole[51] – perhaps it is the case that God would not have allowed any of the great extinction events to prevent the possibility of complex life continuing. That, in turn, poses the fascinating question as to whether God will allow us indefinitely to go on as we are, precipitating in the sixth great extinction event, or whether God would rather start again from a world without us.

[50] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Volume Three, Part Three: The Doctrine of Creation* (trans. G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich; eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), p. 297.

[51] C. Southgate, 'A Test Case – Divine Action', in C. Southgate (ed.), *God, Humanity and the Cosmos: A Textbook in Science and Religion* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), pp. 274–312.

God's longing

I noted above the Clayton-Knapp view of God's action in the world, namely, that it must be restricted to the communication of values, rather than information. Surely that divine communication, self-limited as to power and control, must be accompanied by a profound longing for humans to respond. Where process thinking offers something towards my present question is in emphasizing that God's lure, and I would argue God's longing, is present to all creatures.

Where, presumably, longing is absent from the life of God is in the relationships of the divine persons, perfectly self-giving, perfectly cooperative, love lacking all unrequitement, all unconsummation. In recent writing I have postulated that:

> There is no selfishness in God, but only the perfect transcendence of self in the loving relation of the divine persons. And if the image and likeness of God is understood as being the *imago Trinitatis*, then it can be understood not as the capacity for such perfect self-giving, for that is uniquely the character of the life of God in Godself, but as the capacity to respond with self-giving to an initiative of self-giving love. Each of the persons of the Trinity responds to the self-giving love of the others, and each human is called to respond to, and be transformed by, the self-giving love of God as Trinity. The response may also be to another creature's self-giving, though in turn that creature's transcendence of self-interest will be a response to the loving call of God.[52]

If I am right that God longs for creatures to participate more fully in the *imago Trinitatis* by giving up their narrow self-interest in favour of enhanced cooperation, then we may add another strand to that understanding of the *imago Dei*. Part of our response to the perfect self-giving love of God as Trinity should be to grow into the image of the divine longing for a peaceful, holy and loving creation. As creatures made in the image and likeness of God, we too should evince and cultivate that longing. That is a way of framing both the Christian longing that human worldly powers break out of their obsessive preservation of their own power and attend to God's own care for the poor, the weak and those especially threatened by the thoughtless exercise of power, and a Christian valuing of and delight in those systems that most manifest

[52] Southgate, 'Re-reading', p. 375.

cooperation and self-transcendence, whether it be tropical moist forests, or intricate symbioses in the oceans or the lives of social animals. If it is our delight to see God's longing for creaturely cooperation such as is manifest in such systems, we shall exert ourselves the more powerfully to make sure we damage them only with the greatest reluctance and allow them space to flourish wherever possible.[53]

In such an ethic, a second layer of creation care is superimposed on the basic scheme of theocentric valuing to which all Christians must be drawn, that we value other creatures because they are God's and God made them. We value also relationships of cooperation and mutuality, relationships of willing sacrifice for the good of the other, because they are in the image of the God of relationship we know as Trinity. God's care needs to make a difference not only directly to the creature, but to ourselves as created in the image of the caring, longing, loving God, to our vocation as co-redeemers with the God who is drawing all things to Godself.[54]

In that extraordinary passage in Romans 8.19–23, Paul has a sense that creation waits with eager expectation for humans to discover our true freedom, our right longing, our perfect service to the crucified and risen Lord.[55] Finally, God's care needs to make a difference in making human beings care, in costly and sacrificial ways, for the freedom of the created order, for that will be the freedom of our glory.

[53] On this motif of space for creaturely flourishing see D. G. Horrell, C. Hunt and C. Southgate, *Greening Paul: Re-reading the Apostle in an Age of Ecological Crisis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), chapter 8.

[54] Southgate, *Groaning of Creation*, pp. 104–8.

[55] For some detailed hermeneutical work on this passage in an ecotheological context, see Horrell, Hunt and Southgate, *Greening Paul*, especially chapter 4.

7

The Re-homing of the Human? A Theological Enquiry into whether Human Beings Are at Home on Earth[1]

Peter Manley Scott

'Home' is the answer but what is the question?

I begin this theological enquiry into being-at-home by considering the Earthrise image. Paradoxically, an image taken thousands of miles from 'the earth' is credited with revealing to us the fragility of our planet and funding an appreciation of the earth as home. To be at home, we need to have some awareness of distance from home. To be at home is to be in a relation to home. Moreover, with the Earthrise image, this relation is technologically mediated and founded in a race by two superpowers to 'conquer' space. This relation is complex, mediated.

Yet the image is also troubling because it is a totalizing image: it offers us 'an ideal totality of the world'.[2] Not only relation, then, but we also have the presentation of a totality by way of a synchronic image. That being-at-home is totality and relation, we may also learn from the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on 'home'. 'Home', noun, sense 4, has: 'a place or region to which one naturally belongs or where one feels at ease', and sense 8 has: 'a place where something originates, flourishes, or is most typically found'. By contrast, phrase 1(b) 'from home', which means not at home or abroad, although

[1] I thank John Rodwell for a helpful critique of an early draft of this chapter, Sigurd Bergmann for encouragement in pursuing the theme of 'home', and Ernst Conradie for insisting that I clarify my critique of stewardship.

[2] D. Adams, *Colonial Odysseys: Empire and Epic in the Modernist Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 78.

now archaic, has the metaphorical sense of being 'ill at ease' or 'out of one's element'. To be not at home, we learn also, requires the concept of relation: to be out of one's element is to be in a strained or interrupted relation to home. To be at home, then, is a lived relation – perhaps better, lived relations – in a totality. Above all, it suggests others. Who are these others, on this earth, to make a home with?

The relationship of theology to home understood as totality and relation is a complex one. To answer the question 'Are human beings at home on earth?' in a theological thought requires us to explore two separate but related themes. The first is the theme of being-at-home in a metaphysical sense. As David Adams argues: 'In a metaphysical usage, home is a place where the meaning of experience is fully immanent, where the totality of a world is fully accessible to the subject.'[3] This is the theme of settlement, of being-at-home, of being-at-ease. Such an account of home trades upon the Christian schema, indicating as it does a home before the Fall: an Eden, a paradise. This, then, is the original home.[4] In *God in Creation*, Jürgen Moltmann bravely argues this case when he contrasts an interest of work with an interest in habitation. Not only does the human creature 'work on nature' but humans also 'dwell in nature'.[5] Interestingly, Moltmann uses the concept of recognition: 'I am "at home" where people know me, and where I find recognition without having to struggle for it. . . . The home of the natural environment is just such a network of tranquillized social relationships. Human society must be adapted to the natural environment.'[6] Similarly, 'When the structures made by man are really adequate to man, they are his necessary and native home', writes Gyorgy Lukács.[7] Nonetheless, even this may be too activist an account: in a metaphysical account of home, perhaps the totality of home simply *is*.

The second theme also has a strong theological pedigree and concerns the ways in which Christian faith and practice may support an alienated

[3] Adams, *Colonial Odysseys*, p. 47.
[4] The closest theological consideration of this theme is in the doctrine of creation, most particularly with natural (moral) law, and its cognates. Yet, we must note immediately that these are post-lapsarian developments in the consideration of creation as our home.
[5] J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p. 46.
[6] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 46.
[7] Cited in Adams, *Colonial Odysseys*, p. 64.

view of the earth as our home: the earth as only temporary home or as a home with humans as the only redemptively considerable creatures. This is the theme of restless journey. In a more benign form, it indicates that the totality of the fallen world is somehow incomplete – and a large question is then raised about which agent is charged with rectifying the incompletion. Are we now in exile and do we seek to return? Moreover, return to where: to the task of renewing the face of the earth or to some other world, some other reality?

We may now return to the Earthrise image and consider it theologically. First, we may note that it is a synchronic image. Thereby it does not invite the question 'Has the meaning of being-at-home changed?' Is the question secreted by the image, and answered by the image, different from the way that theology poses questions about home? Second, what response on our part does the image invite? Should we interpret it in prelapsarian fashion and understand this floating disc as our metaphysical home? If this is our metaphysical home, with whom are we sharing it? Alternatively, should we regard this earth as a flawed *oikia* that needs to be made into a home? Should we see this home as incomplete and not fixable and thereby not our ultimate home? Are humans on a journey that is premised upon 'the desertion of home'?[8]

A series of binaries now emerge that it will be my purpose in this chapter to unpack and reconstruct. At first glance, it looks as if settlement and journey are to be contrasted; I shall be arguing that this is not the case. Second, it looks as if the relation with human beings secured by the transcendence of God de-natures human beings and imperils the significance of earth-as-home; again, I shall be arguing that this is not the case. Standard responses in ecotheology stress placed settlement over restless journey. It will be evident in the argument that follows that this is inadequate as analysis and insufficient as constructive proposal. Thus, the question to which 'home' is the answer cannot be posed by way of the contrast between settlement and journey – with an emphasis on the former over the latter. Nor is the question to which home is the answer adequately posed by reference to an amendment to the transcendence of God as if the contrast settlement–journey can be buttressed

[8] Adams, *Colonial Odysseys*, p. 47.

by the contrast immanence–transcendence. Instead, issues fundamental to the theological consideration of being-at-home are better approached through the concept of totality and relation.

The terms of the subtitle of this chapter, 'home' and 'earth', are not obvious therefore, and a theological way of addressing them is not obvious either. It is clear that they are what Bruno Latour calls 'matters of concern', but in what way?[9] Nor, given the bleak experiments with 'home' in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century and the developing mentality of a fortress Europe in the second half, is it obvious how theology should approach them.[10]

In the next section, I argue that theology approaches this matter of being-at-home on the earth through a process of defeat. In other words, the ways theology thinks about home have been called into question and replaced by other questions. We have to do with new totalities and new accounts of relation. This process has consequences for how theology approaches this issue, and theology does in large measure misunderstand the task that the process of defeat sets for it. I will then note three approaches in theology to being-at-home and show how each is conditioned by this process of defeat. Put plainly, theology overinvests in the constancy of theological questions, the ascent of the human to mastery and home-as-plenitude. In response, I note that only the postcolonial critique in theology has some measure of this plenitude. Nonetheless, although the postcolonial critique is powerful, its theological repair work is weak. I subsequently offer a theological account of the material logic of 'homewith', and homemaking, drawing on earlier work in the doctrine of creation. This, I contend, has continuities with theological tradition but permits the re-asking of questions about home. I then set out in more detail the meanings of the matters of homeless, homewith and homemaking and show how these provide a theological response to the question as to whether human beings are at home on the earth. The essay concludes with a brief elaboration of the concept of re-homing.

[9] Bruno Latour suggested 'matters of concern' during the lecture 'Is There a Cosmopolitically Correct Design?' (Fifth Manchester Lecture on Environment and Development; delivered at the University of Manchester, 5 October 2007).

[10] For an interesting discussion of the history of *Heimat* in Germany, see S. Körner, '*Heimat* and Individuality', in J. Rodwell and P. M. Scott (eds.), *At Home in the Future* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, forthcoming).

The defeat of theology?

To explore theologically the theme of being-at-home requires, first, a sense of historical context. The historical context is one in which theology has gradually given way in the task of providing persuasive explanations. As Langdon Gilkey has put the matter, can there be '. . . a justification of the meaning and validity of the concept of God in relation to other, apparently less questionable forms of experience – scientific, philosophical, socio-political, artistic, psychological or existentialist?'[11] How far does the historical issue of the proliferation of academic disciplines and the steady demotion of theology go back? In *The Theology of Karl Barth*, Hans Urs von Balthasar identifies the theology of Thomas Aquinas as transitional in the sense of being located in a period in which new disciplines were emerging.[12] If that is true, seven hundred years have passed in which disciplines have emerged that, in Louis Dupré's phrase, have usurped theology's task of 'defining the fundamentals of the worldview'.[13] A range of disciplines offers powerful descriptions of cosmology and anthropology and has usurped theology's explanatory power.

Going back 50 years to the beginnings of English language ecotheology, as this volume is doing, is not going back far enough. Going back 50 years is at the end of a long period of *defeat* for Christian theology, and that defeat has been written on theology's body. We can appreciate how serious that defeat has been when a theological protocol as constitutive of theology as *creatio ex nihilo* can be amended. As if the revision of theology's refusal of creation as emanationism and opening the door to the universe as infinite are attractive theological moves.[14] It really is somewhat bewildering that theology's self-awareness should be so muted as to consider these as viable options.[15]

[11] L. Gilkey, 'God', in P. Hodgson and R. King (eds.), *Christian Theology: An Introduction to its Traditions and Tasks* (London: SPCK, 3rd edn, 1985), pp. 62–87 (63).

[12] H. Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), pp. 267–70.

[13] L. Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 69.

[14] An interesting statement of this position may be found in C. Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003). Cf. G. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

[15] There is now evidence of a recent effort to recover and develop *creatio ex nihilo*; see D. Burrell et al. (eds.), *Creation and the God of Abraham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); J. M. Soskice (ed.), *Creation 'Ex Nihilo' and Modern Theology*, *Modern Theology* 27/2 (special issue, 2013).

Through this experience of defeat, there may be important gains, of course. Theology may have its own 'dialectic of enlightenment'. Yet arguably – this is the standard critique made by ecotheology – the response to defeat led to the deepening of defeat through the narrowing of theology. This has left theology in a very curious position. It is accused of being anthropocentric. Lynn White's criticism is exemplary: 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.'[16] However, its present position is arguably the result of a defeat, so it is hard to see how theology is directly culpable as well. White's charge is then somewhat ironic.

If Christianity is today judged to be anthropocentric, then that judgement is the conclusion of a *process of defeat*. Such a defeat may not necessarily be entirely negative, but theological anthropocentrism may not be a free choice made because of theological considerations. Central to this defeat has been the entryism performed on theology by the concept of nature – even when theology has denied the reality of the entryism. Nature is not theology's Trojan horse but nature is the problem of modernity – and its implications for theology are profound.[17] By this, I mean that in the emergence of the concept of nature in the modern sense we have the separation of humanity from nature – and the partially successful effort by humanity to give the non-human a new *telos* – and the displacement of God, in theory and practice. These implications are still being digested and condition how ecotheology responds now.

This theological narrowing has been interpreted in a variety of ways. If to be at home is a lived relation with creatures, then theology contributes to either denying that relation or thinning that relation or hoping for the overcoming of that relation. Here are Ernst Conradie's four charges regarding Christianity's contribution to humanity's alienation from earth community:

- a *theo*logical emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God;
- an anthropological emphasis on humans as sojourners here on earth;
- a soteriology that focuses on human salvation from the earth instead of the salvation of the whole earth;
- an escapist eschatological fascination with a heavenly hereafter where disembodied souls will live in the presence of God.[18]

[16] L. White, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155 (1967), pp. 1203–7 (1205).
[17] P. M. Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 13–16.
[18] E. M. Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 26.

We have here, then, a stress on the primacy of the human, understood as soul rather than embodied spirit, both in relation to other creatures and salvation – reinforced by reference to the blank otherness of God. To follow Rosemary Radford Ruether at this point, we might argue that these four points coalesce around the claim that alienation from nature and salvation are in some way synonymous.[19] Here the lived relation to home is overcome by theology. These four points by Conradie may be placed in a larger narrative that elsewhere I have called the 'disgracing of nature'.[20] In this larger narrative, the meaning of nature as other to humanity emerges at the beginning of the modern period. Additionally, and steadily, both humanity and nature (in its modern meaning) are disassociated from God – the disgracing of nature. This spells the defeat of theology.

Rival responses to defeat

In response to this defeat, theology has offered different ways that may each be explored by reference to totality and relation. It suffices for my argument merely to indicate that these earlier approaches are caught up in the contrast between settlement and journey and, in their different ways, end by affirming the ascent of the human to mastery, the plenitude of home, and the constancy of theological questions.[21] Specific and unconvincing accounts of totality and relation are in play here. Let me briefly characterize these options.

(1) The first response is stewardship. Christopher Southgate maintains, 'That human beings are called to be stewards of creation tends to be the default position within ordinary Christian groups. The concept of stewardship is affirmed in recent major documents in both the evangelical and Catholic traditions.'[22] In an otherwise strong rejection of stewardship, Clare Palmer similarly notes its citing by John Paul II in 1985 and in an official report by

[19] R. R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1983), pp. 79–82.
[20] Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, pp. 8–13.
[21] I am once more indebted here to Adams, *Colonial Odysseys*, pp. 45–87.
[22] C. Southgate, 'Stewardship and its Competitors: A Spectrum of Relationships between Humans and the Non-human Creation', in R. J. Berry (ed.), *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 185–95 (185).

the Church of England in 1990.[23] In addition, we can note its more recent deployment in a 2005 Church of England report, *Sharing God's Planet*, from its Council of Mission and Public Affairs.[24] Richard Bauckham makes a comparable comment: 'The understanding of the human dominion over nature that has become popular among Christians, in the context of a new consciousness of ecological responsibilities, is the idea of stewardship.'[25] Moreover, the model of stewardship interprets humanity less as over creation than is evident in dominion and rather more as within it. Nonetheless, the performance of stewardship is part of the human vocation, so to speak, and the steward is regarded as active in terms of management or administration. We may readily appreciate that stewardship relates all too easily to the theme of the ascent of the human to mastery. The totality that human beings face is incomplete and needs to be fixed.

(2) A second response to defeat offers a move away from transcendence towards immanence in the context of the affirmation that, as Elizabeth Johnson avers, 'The symbol of God functions. It is never neutral in its effects, but expresses and molds a community's bedrock convictions and actions.'[26] If the symbol of God functions, theological development is required to ensure that it functions in the correct way. Thus if human beings are to understand themselves as being-at-home, theology needs to develop its perspectives on a God of the economy that might commend such home-making.

The tendency of this analysis is clear enough: if the world or nature may be understood as God's presence, the value of creation is increased or enhanced. So it is claimed. In other words, the otherness of God to the world is considered a withdrawal of God from the world that is considered synonymous with a reduction in the sacredness (read: value) of the world. To speak, for example, of the world as God's body – as Sallie McFague does – is to argue that God is present by way of non-human nature. It is to claim furthermore that God is present to nature in ways that ought to mean that we respect nature more.

[23] C. Palmer, 'Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics', in R. J. Berry (ed.), *Environmental Stewardship*, pp. 63–75 (64).
[24] Council of Mission and Public Affairs, *Sharing God's Creation* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), esp. 16–28.
[25] R. Bauckham, 'Modern Domination of Nature', in Berry (ed.), *Environmental Stewardship*, pp. 32–50 (42).
[26] E. A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 98.

Nature is one of the forms of God's presence to us and this form cannot be altered or degraded without in some way dishonouring God. Such a presentation is often called panentheism.[27] In the affirmation of this pan(en)theism, the world is rendered habitable by reference to the presence of God. The totality is one in which human beings find themselves and which is in turn founded upon the immanence of God.

(3) A third response, which, for the sake of good conversation, I should add is where I locate my own work, develops the resources of Christian theology in reconstructive rather than constructive ways. For this position, it is the resources of theological tradition that shape some of the questions and set some of the terms of the debate. As Ernst Conradie recommends, what is required is 'a *theological* anthropology in which the relationship between human beings and God is regarded as decisive for being human'.[28] This response may conclude with a cautious affirmation of stewardship. This response also wishes to engage with developments in anthropology and cosmology and because of this engagement may refuse stewardship.[29]

The most substantial and sustained effort to explore being-at-home on the earth is Ernst Conradie's *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*. One aspect of his argument that is distinctive is the eschatological interpretation of being-at-home: '. . . a sense of *belonging* should be understood as the very content of an eschatological *longing*' – '. . . it is only through the Christian longing for the new earth that we can discover our belonging, in body and soul, to this earth'.[30] In this fashion, Conradie faces directly the charge that Christian faith offers a personalist and escapist eschatology. As is already clear, the totality appealed to refers us to a theologic that has not thrived in the modern period – and insists that this totality is only fully understood by reference to the transcendence of God. This response thereby builds from the defeat of theology.

What shall we say in response to these responses? First, stewardship enacts the modern tendency that affirms the ascent to mastery of the human. The totality

[27] Part of this paragraph is from P. M. Scott, 'Which Nature? Whose Justice? Shifting Meanings of Nature in Recent Ecotheology', in P. Clarke and T. Claydon (eds.), *God's Bounty? The Churches and the Natural World* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), pp. 445–46.
[28] Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, p. 11 (emphasis his).
[29] Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, pp. 213–18.
[30] Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, p. 13 (emphasis his).

that nature presents to the human is somehow incomplete and needs to be completed. Further, the relations between human creatures and non-human creatures are one of hierarchy and management. For the second position, the totality of nature now includes the human and thereby offers a new context of intelligibility with which theology must work. Relations between human and other creatures are affirmed. For the third response, the totality of humanity with nature needs development: it is given, to be amended, and opens out into the transcendence of God. The relations between humans and non-humans are given but not set in a series of asymmetries.

Yet these three different responses should not be allowed to obscure a common feature: the strong dynamic of exile and return sources an account of totality that is deficient and needs to be corrected. There are different accounts of *relations* through these three responses but a persistent problem with *totality*. The same desire runs through all three: salvation is reinterpreted as the plenitude of home, of human beings establishing themselves everywhere as at home. Maybe the issue is not the false relation forged between salvation and the alienation of nature, as our three options like to present the matter. The issue is the projected notion of home secured by salvation that operates with an account of deficient totality that is to be overcome. The totalities on which these responses rely are not identical. We move from a totality that needs to be fixed, to one in which the human should immerse itself, to one that may be developed. In response to defeat, theology aims for the plenitude of home, for humans to be at home everywhere. What is sought by all three responses are the expansion of home and the overcoming of the loss of access to home. Theology offers compensation for a loss of plenitude. All three responses are therefore 'metaphysical'. Only in affirming an eschatological element does the third response partly escape this critique. Eden–exile–return is corrected by suggesting that return be replaced by completion or fulfilment. It is this third response based on the schema of Eden–exile–new Jerusalem that I will explore further below, not least by exploring the politics suggested by reference to the *city* of Jerusalem.

On balance, it seems to me that a detailed exploration of totality and creaturely relations in which the human participates is required. Only in this way will the theological concept of home come into view. It is not an exploration that theology is used to – and in this perhaps, it shares a

caution and a difficulty with political philosophy. As Bruno Latour notes, 'Political philosophy did not anticipate that it would end up administering the sky, the climate, the sea, viruses or wild animals. It had thought it could limit itself to subjects and their right to property; Science would take care of the rest.'[31] Perhaps political theology oriented on ecological crisis considers that business as usual is still possible.

Yet, drawing on totality and relation, we may appreciate that stewardship is reactive and defensive: it projects salvation as the work of the human in administering the completion of the incomplete totality. Reference to the new cosmology in the second response is overly concerned with a cosmological narrative to the detriment of system and relations of domination and thereby it over-stresses totality and fails to see how the totality it proffers does not engage structures of power. The third option sets aside the defeat of theology by claiming (assuming?) that the questions posed by theology are constants and are still in play. What follows in the next two sections works from within the third option but does not regard theological questions as constants and recommends the reformulation of these questions under the conditions of late modernity.

The postcolonial critique

After this discussion of rivals, I turn now to the postcolonial critique.[32] We may note two important considerations here: first, it is deeply concerned with the functioning of the symbol of God and, in Whitney Bauman's analysis, focuses on *creatio ex nihilo*. The symbol of God does not limp after reality, so to speak, but instead contributes to its construction. Second, it accepts that received theology is the source of dualisms between history and nature, between culture and nature.[33] Yet instead of arguing that a revised eco-anthropology and cosmology provide a fresh interpretation of our context, it argues from a postcolonial perspective that relations of domination (to which theology

[31] B. Latour, *The Politics of Nature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 204.
[32] W. Bauman, *Theology, Creation and Environmental Ethics: From Creatio Ex Nihilo to Terra Nullius* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[33] Bauman, *Theology*, p. 13.

contributes) are the context. What is required in order to overcome dualisms is the sustained criticism of *creatio ex nihilo* that has sustained both a colonial mindset and order.

In an approach similar to other critical political theologies, Bauman argues that theology is a discourse that organizes bodies in time and space; it is a discourse of the ligaments of power. As such, Bauman offers a recognizably postcolonial theology. What is remarkable about this postcolonial theology is the concentration on *creatio ex nihilo* and the exploration of the relationship between postcolonial critique and ecological issues. Most of the analysis is critical in the sense of demonstrating how *creatio ex nihilo* contributes to colonial thought and practice. Additionally, the conclusion offers a constructive turn in the sense of stressing how moving to *creatio continua* might de-fund dualisms and further strengthen postcolonial thought and practice in theological thinking.

In this argument, much depends on the evaluation of *creatio ex nihilo*. The genesis of this theological protocol is set out by Bauman in Chapter 1, and in his narration there is a metaphorical relation between the transcendent God and the transcendent human self.[34] Indeed, the word 'metaphorical' appears frequently. The beginning of the argument seems to be that to posit a transcendent source leads to the placing of social and ecological contexts on the periphery as a human group claims a corresponding 'centre'. Yet as the argument develops, more is claimed for *ex nihilo*, and what is claimed is negative. Although at the beginning of the analysis, Bauman accepts that *ex nihilo* does not have to function in the way he analyses, he argues that in successfully rebutting the eternity of matter and the duality of matter and spirit, *creatio ex nihilo* concludes an argument about origin that it is also an argument about foundation.[35] Why this is so is not clear from the text. For Bauman, however, *ex nihilo* becomes a thought system whose foundation is the transcendent Creator against whom no argument is possible. What we are presented with is a conversation stopper that is also the source of foundationalist thinking: '. . . I argue that *ex nihilo* provides a foundation for the myth of the logic of domination of foundationalist thinking.'[36] Moreover, for Bauman,

[34] Ibid., p. 19.
[35] Ibid., p. 29.
[36] Ibid., p. 30.

there is no questioning beyond the foundation – this is the claim that *ex nihilo* makes on its own behalf, so to speak.

Finally, Bauman asserts '*ex nihilo* secures life as a movement from God to God and thereby one ultimately avoids the chaos of death'. There is no detailed discussion of this point and no references. Additionally, this point is connected to a second: the reality of life is somehow obscured by the imposition of what is now a system of thought. Bauman then introduces us to his preferred theme of continuing creation that he further develops.

I want to defer a discussion as to how persuasive a reading of *creatio ex nihilo* this is because the subsequent postcolonial analysis that Bauman offers is fascinating. The same move is made in a variety of contexts: *creatio ex nihilo* funds a universal perspective or norm that obliterates localities and contexts and which supports, permits or encourages the recreation of the chaotic periphery through conquest or subjugation. In this sense, Bauman detects the logic of empire. The logic is one of erasure and assimilation; the conquest may be military but may also be economic.

Yet, for at least some of the examples that Bauman offers, the analysis seems closer to what I shall call *creatio de novo*. In other words, Bauman does not present us with colonial activities that are best understood as somehow related to creating out of nothing. Rather, these activities are creating out of the new, out of the pristine, or out of the assumed to be empty. Here are two examples. In Chapter 4, Bauman reprises his argument that *ex nihilo* means the erasure or obliteration of natural, social and historical contexts. That is, creating out of nothing is like colonizing or possessing something so emphatically that no other claims are permitted or acknowledged. 'Pharmaceutical companies [today] locate medicines in the rainforests, often with the help of indigenous peoples, re-create the chemically active substance found in the particular plant in the laboratory, and then claim that it is their property. . . . Through erasure of bio-historical/natural-cultural contexts, then, the constructivist and the pharmaceutical industry create the world as if *ex nihilo*.'[37] This seems a very odd reading of 'out of nothing': I do not claim to have invented the substance; I only claim to have an uninterruptible right to it. Yet that has nothing to do with *ex nihilo*.

[37] Ibid., p. 87.

Indeed, for a comprehensive, singular right to be effective, I need to affirm creation out of some*thing* – *creatio ex re*.

It seems more accurate to call this *creatio de novo*: the setting aside of other claims. Likewise, in the following chapter's discussion of *terra nullius* (or vacant land) Bauman argues that '. . . power-over mimics the God who creates *ex nihilo*: as if no other prior or extant relationships matter'.[38] Yet again, this seems an odd comparison: for *creatio ex nihilo*, it is *not* as if extant relationships do not matter; it is that there are no such relationships. *Ex nihilo* is the theological protocol that denies such mimicry. For, as Ernan McMullin points out, 'nothing' does not refer to 'a sort of ghostly raw material' but instead means 'from no prior materials'.[39] Once more, it seems to me more apposite to characterize Bauman's position as *creatio de novo*: the attempt to set aside extant relationships.

Bauman interprets *creatio ex nihilo* expansively, consistently arguing that it offers what I can only call a positive account of transcendence – that is, transcendence with content, as a source of a system of thought – and then as a foundation to which no questions can be posed, a foundation to which there can be no answering back. Historically, this seems an unpersuasive interpretation. At least, it seems possible to interpret *creatio ex nihilo* in a more low-key fashion, as a protocol or grammatical rule. As such, it guards against a tendency in Bauman's analysis to treat the development of *ex nihilo* as a way of widening the gap between Creator and creation. Instead, I think it is possible to interpret *ex nihilo* as seeing the relation between Creator and creation as being qualitatively different; there can be no widening of the gap. In one sense, then, the issue of foundation is called into question. Moreover, *ex nihilo* does explicitly raise the question 'Who is the agent who creates?'[40] Bauman's analysis avoids this question altogether.[41] The following questioning is invited by *ex nihilo*: 'Who creates out of nothing?' Additionally, if this 'Who' is not a

[38] Ibid., p. 90.

[39] E. McMullin, 'Creation *Ex Nihilo*: Early History', in D. Burrell et al. (eds.), *Creation and the God of Abraham*, pp. 11–23 (11).

[40] Recently, Kelsey has placed *ex nihilo* in a larger context of the development of Trinitarian thought in which – whether the context is the significance of Jesus Christ or the ecumenical creeds or the immanent Trinity – the vital issue is the identity of God. See D. H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology, Volume One* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp. 46–79.

[41] When he does approach it, he arrives at conclusions that theological tradition does not: 'In an ex nihilic understanding of creation, just as God creates the world through sheer will and the world becomes God's property . . .', Bauman, *Theology*, p. 155.

foundation but the Source of life, how is the relationship between Creator and creation to be characterized thereafter?

Bauman finishes his analysis with a constructive turn that builds upon *creatio continua*, presenting vital issues regarding newness, the openness of creation, the response-ability of the human and the overcoming of human exceptionalism. The constructive intent is clear: 'If the theological enterprise is one, primarily, of imaginative construction toward better ways of living in and with the world . . . then a theological understanding of creation should begin from within the context of that creation.'[42] Indeed, Bauman opines that a truly postcolonial *creatio continua* is pregnant with the possibilities of change, 'Even to the point of Christianity changing beyond Christianity'.[43] I think this must mean that *creatio continua* is not in the service of explicating the creative activity of God based on the self-disclosure of the identity of God.

The dualisms identified by Conradie above are responded to by appeals to new anthropological and cosmological contexts to which theology responds. Indeed, theology may itself be 'trans-ed' beyond its 'form' in the process. In theological interpretation, practical priority is given to the flourishing of human- and otherkind. With this practical emphasis, nature is present a second time: the overall presentation seems to be of pantheism. For all of its modernism, we have here, then, a version of *natura naturans*: the created order rests on an organizing principle. Being-at-home on the earth thereby becomes a work that is guided by theological construction. Yet this theology is one that is relaxed about departing from theological traditions if practice warrants such a departure. With the stress on immanence, it becomes easier to identify which actions are to be understood as God's actions in the world, if harder to understand how these are *God*'s actions in the world.

How does this enable us to think theologically about being-at-home? What is very helpful about this position in the consideration of home is that we are offered by postcolonial critique a persistent refusal of totality, especially a totality founded on the transcendence of God. I wish to affirm this critical aspect: the desire to be at home everywhere easily degenerates into a colonial logic of domination. Moreover, by implication at least, the critique raises the question 'Is there a desire for totality deeply embedded within the ways that

[42] Bauman, *Theology*, p. 155.
[43] Ibid., p. 180.

theology traditionally poses the question about home – not least by reference to the schema of Eden–exile–return – that needs careful and sustained criticism?'

A material logic

Formidable difficulties remain in the construal of being-at-home: human beings are not creatures squatting outside the world, as Marx once noted dismissively, but active, practical agents.[44] The questions posed by Christianity cannot be simply put aside – but these are not necessarily quite the questions that the modern period sets for itself. In this section, and in the light of the postcolonial critique, I want to explore the matter of a material logic as one way of developing theological resources that move beyond the Eden–exile–return motif of Christianity.

Conradie argues that 'traditional Christian anthropologies have been susceptible to the dangers of alienation, anthropocentrism, and domination and exploitation in the name of difference',[45] and maintains that theological attention to natural suffering and death, the distinctiveness of the human and the human vocation address these issues. In this fashion, he argues, it is possible not to confuse theologically the concepts of household and home. We are presently in the household of God. This is not the same, however, as home – the latter is for Conradie an eschatological concept. The homeliness of home cannot be asserted. Suffering, finitude and sin deny the easy affirmation of home. A theological exploration of home must perforce be a theological account of suffering, finitude and sin – in short, a theological anthropology.

Moreover, this is a theological anthropology for an ecological age. Eschatology is construed in non-escapist ways. As Conradie points out, the relationship between realized and non-realized eschatology must be explored; hence, later in the argument he must discuss the vocation of the human and the matter of stewardship. Moreover, Conradie avers that the true home of creatures cannot be either in some utopian future or in some heavenly elsewhere but instead in

[44] K. Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', in *Early Writings* (edited by L. Colletti; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 244.
[45] Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, p. 13.

some consummated future. This means in turn he must explore the matter of limits, and how these are transformed eschatologically.

This eschatological orientation does enable Conradie to address suffering, finitude and sin in a distinctive way. However, it does lead his overall position into difficulties. First, his doctrine of creation is construed in a restrictive fashion. We see this in phrases such as: human beings are 'bound to the ecosystems in which we live' and 'A simple affirmation that we are at home on earth expresses a form of nature romanticism'.[46] We may appreciate that this sets up eschatology to free us from such 'boundness' but this seems a restrictive way of presenting creaturely relations and brings to mind the duality of human freedom–natural necessity that has been important in European discussions of nature.[47] One consequence of this discussion has been the alienation of human beings from a wider nature, primarily through the identification of will and freedom as constitutive of the human that in turns places the human outwith the non-human. Indeed, in that non-human nature has neither will nor freedom in the required sense, non-human nature may be regarded as deficient.[48] Moreover, when Conradie argues that 'We have to take up our specifically *human* responsibilities in God's household', the question is already begged.[49]

Second, are not these creaturely relations themselves networks of habitation in which creatures seek to be at home rather than try to escape? Theological traditions have developed a variety of ways of understanding these ways of being-at-home, from natural law to orders of creation to common grace. None of these is satisfactory and if Conradie wishes to reject them all, I would have no difficulty with that. However, these affirmations of the habitability of creation – even if unsatisfactory – are pointing to an important truth: the affirmation of that which is to be consummated. Moreover, creation has its own power, so to speak: by their life, creaturely structures delay the end as well as being structures that will be transformed eschatologically.[50] Creaturely

[46] Ibid., p. 44.
[47] See, for example, A. Stone, *Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), pp. xi–xvi; G. D. Kaufman, 'A Problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature', *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972), pp. 337–66.
[48] Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, p. 37.
[49] Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, p. 183 (emphasis in original).
[50] P. M. Scott, 'The Future of Creation: Ecology and Eschatology', in D. Fergusson and M. Sarot (eds.), *The Future as God's Gift* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 89–115 (105).

relations are therefore supportive, and resistant, of the end. Herein lies the theological basis of the affirmation of home.

Although Conradie helpfully insists upon the theological significance of creaturely relations, this emphasis is somewhat undermined by the totality with which he works. By insisting that home is an eschatological concept but without exploring the relationship of human freedom to other creatures, the analysis separates the human from the non-human because the non-human is regarded as somehow restricting of the human. In turn, this position resources an epistemological de-restriction: a range of metaphors is offered to indicate the place and vocation of the human. Thus: 'We are rulers. We are stewards. We are servants. We are inhabitants. We are sojourners. We are pilgrims.'[51] This leads to a position that is both supportive of, and critical of, the notion of stewardship:

> The Greek term for "steward", *oikonomos*, does help us to maintain the conceptual link with the household (*oikos*) of God. Perhaps this term may be translated and recontextualised in other ways which can build on the strengths of the metaphor of stewardship to emphasise human responsibility within God's household. If home is an eschatological concept, one may well ask whether the metaphor of acting as "stewards" in God's household is not too domesticated a concept to describe the responsibilities of the inhabitants of God's household?[52]

Such ambivalence is, I think, to be traced to Conradie's insistence that in the consideration of stewardship (and other metaphors), the heart of the matter is responsibility in the household of God, in which 'household' is an eschatological concept. Consideration of various metaphors as regards the place and vocation of the human must be governed by the exercise of penultimate responsibility. So Conradie concludes: '[I]n a time of environmental degradation, preparation clearly also requires reparation and, in a context of economic injustice, also restitution and a transformation of the structures of society.'[53] What is less clear is how this exercise of responsibility is an *ecological* responsibility: that is, the exercise of a human freedom from within human–nature relations.

[51] Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, p. 229.
[52] Ibid., pp. 217, 228.
[53] Ibid., p. 229.

The final vision offered – that of a feast – seems inattentive to these human – nature relations.

This provides me with an opening. In the remainder of this section, I want to take up the standard theological motif with which Conradie is operating and rework it to see if an account of home may be developed based on a robust doctrine of creation. In *A Political Theology of Nature*, I argued for a material logic based upon four transcendentals: becoming, unity, sociality and openness.[54] This is a material logic in which nature is to be understood as *extra nos*, *in nobis* and *pro nobis*. This refers us to a sense that nature is beyond us, in the midst of us and for us – all three senses at once.

We may understand the sense that nature is 'beyond us' in three ways: (1) nature is indifferent to humans; (2) one part of the condition of the human is suffering and death; and (3) there is a tragic aspect to our relations with nature. Understood critically, this sense is the basis of the homelessness of the human: human beings crave for mastery over nature, for immortality and a non-tragic relationship with nature in which the human does not have to sacrifice itself in support of the wider creation.[55] This sense of homelessness is not to be repressed but must instead be seen as part of a dialectic of otherness and sameness, difference and non-difference, in which non-difference is fundamental and interpretatively has the last word.

We may also understand the sense that nature is 'in the midst of us' in three ways: (1) body, (2) institution and (3) place. In other words, in human life, nature manifests itself in the embodiment of the human, that human life carries on only in institutions and that all human living takes place. These may all be gathered under the term 'homewith'. Understood critically, this sense is the basis of the 'homewith' of the human. There are difficulties here for a critical enquiry in that there remain the temptations of naturalness (body), structure and order (institutions) and immobility (place). Once more, in the operation of this material logic, the dialectical primacy of non-difference over difference must be affirmed: a body relates to other bodies, institutions to other institutions and one place to another place.

[54] Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature*, pp. 43–52.

[55] P. M. Scott, *Anti-Human Theology: Nature, Technology and the Postnatural* (London: SCM Press, 2010), pp. 52–3.

Finally, there are three ways of understanding how nature is 'for the human': (1) production, (2) reproduction and (3) creativity. These may all be gathered under the term 'homemaking'.[56] In other words, the task of the human is to make a home, to render a place habitable. That is secured by making, remaking and other acts of creativity. It is important to note here the importance of procreation and child rearing. A critical inquiry at this point must explore the deployment of technology in homemaking, that sex and procreation take place in intimate kinship groups in which abuses of power are always likely, and that meaning making is central to the work of the human. Production, reproduction and the making of meaning are intertwined activities; one does not have priority over the other. The dialectical primacy of non-difference over difference is operative here also in order to resist the practice of one-sided technology engaging nature only as 'standing reserve' (Heidegger), as sex being treated as a commodified practice, and meaning making being practised only as consumerism.

In making this presentation, I adhere to some of the traditional commitments of Christianity by developing an account of a social realm of creatures in which there are dependencies and distortions. The totality offered here is not totalizing but is instead open. The relations proposed engage all creatures. The task of being-at-home lies in an uncomfortable mixture – never a balance – of receiving and making, and of finally not being able to secure a totality. Important modern emphases on human freedom and agency are affirmed, yet within a wider context that cannot be mastered (or even surveyed). The task of the human emerges not as trying to be at home everywhere but instead as an effort to be at home *somewhere*, with others. This is neither plenitude nor the denial of plenitude. What, more precisely, is it then?

Towards a theology of re-homing

In English, there is no straightforward antonym for homeless. Here, I am proposing 'homewith', with a home, in the company of others. Yet this antonym

[56] For an extended reflection on 'religion as the skill of *Beheimatung*, or the process of "making oneself at home"', see S. Bergmann, *Religion, Space and the Environment* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2014).

is also accompanied by a synonym: 'homemaking', to render a place habitable with others. To be at home on the earth requires the re-homing of the human by reference to homewith and homemaking – and homelessness.

What does re-homing mean? I suggest the following: (1) As some humans literally are forced to move because of a changing climate, account will need to be taken of others in the process of moving, and the cost of moving apportioned fairly. (2) We inhabit our home, that is, make our home differently. Re-homing is always an activity. (3) Re-*homing*, as in the sense of a homing pigeon, recommends that we need to think differently about the re-turn to home; to seek home is the critique of the appeal to origins, of an original paradise. (4) Our ideas of 'home' and 'the human' need re-homing – that is, they need renewal – and a theology of Eden–exile–new Jerusalem helps with this. Always included is the understanding that we are in the company of many others.

The re-homing of the human is what salvation means in the theological development of the concept of 'home'. It presents creaturely relations and operates a form of totality critique. Re-homing does not require the standard way of posing questions in theology but instead develops an alternative material logic that is not premised upon the motif of Eden–exile–return. Moreover, it refuses to invest in the desire to be at home everywhere: home-as-plenitude posits a false and unattainable totality. Re-homing rejects this totality and in the rejection of said totality, it rejects any consequent effort to 'master' our home. Working from the Eden–exile–new Jerusalem theological dynamic offers a practical yet cautious and limited account of the activity of making a home with others. The re-homing of the human is also the re-homing of salvation.

8

Where on Earth Is the Church? Theological Reflection on the Nature, Mission, Governance and Ministry of the Church amidst the Global Environmental Crisis

Clive W. Ayre

Introduction

The planet's ecosystems have not been on the radar of either the church or local communities, in general, but that has been changing over recent decades. There is now a large body of literature on most aspects of the global environmental crisis and also on ecotheology. My aim in this essay is to offer theological reflection on the nature, mission, governance and ministry of the church.

As part of a broader discussion on 'Christian Faith and the Earth', the question we face is 'Where on Earth is the church?' or, as one may also put it, 'Where in the church is the Earth?' Is the role of the church determined by its response to a particular crisis, or does it rise out of its theology? Or is it perhaps both? How do the issues of the nature, mission, governance and ministry of the church interact in relation to the Earth? However we answer these questions, it is certain that the church in the ecocrisis is in a very public place and must exercise its mission in the public square.

The multiple dialogues taking place concerning these issues represent a complicating factor. In addition to perspectives such as ecojustice, ecofeminism, process theology and indigenous spirituality, the church itself clearly does not speak with one voice. They may be minority views, but perceptions of the crisis differ from denial to Armageddon, aided and abetted at times by political bias

and community mythology. At the same time, I would not want to exaggerate the degree of polarization in the church.

A word of caution is therefore appropriate, namely, that as Christians we are to be neither too defensive of the church nor too dismissive of what is taking place. It is clear that many churches in various parts of the world are actively involved both in the debate and in practical eco-mission, and are encouraging Christians to tackle the impacts of environmental issues such as climate change.

It is important that we do not allow ourselves to be sidetracked by negativity, especially on the part of those who will not be convinced by any information or argument. Rather, I believe our primary task is to focus on a positive agenda based on who we are as the people of God and how we are called to respond to the issues of our time. In other words, the central premise here is that environmental care is not merely a pragmatic response to an increasingly obvious problem and does not rise or fall with perceptions of a crisis. Rather, it is theologically driven.

My approach here is based on the paradigm of practical theology in particular. As Ogletree puts it, 'Theology is practical in the sense that it concerns, in all of its expressions, the most basic issues of human existence.'[1] It is also deeply contextual in a way that involves the twin poles of the hermeneutical spiral; in this case, the critical environmental crisis and theological reflection. What that means is that we need to consider not only a theology of the church but also the concrete realities of the church's life and history. Such an approach calls for an understanding of a multifaceted and complex environmental crisis and what that might be saying to us.

As one example of the need to understand the issues, we might note Migliore's observation that 'The gravity and scope of the ecological crisis give unprecedented urgency to the task of rethinking the Christian doctrine of creation.'[2] Another way of looking at it is to see that, as Earth beings, we are called to listen to the voice of the Earth. Forrester's observation is compelling, namely, that we cannot talk about God or to God while setting

[1] T. W. Ogletree, 'Dimensions of Practical Theology: Meaning, Action, Self', in D. S. Browning (ed.), *Practical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), pp. 83–101 (85).

[2] D. L. Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2004), p. 93.

aside, even temporarily, the ethical or normative question 'What is God calling us to do?'[3]

The nature of the church

Where on Earth, then, is the church in the light of the global environmental crisis? A prior question may be: when does the story of the church begin? It may be argued that the beginning point for the story of the church is in the creation event itself. Walbert Bühlmann,[4] for example, refers to God's act of creation in covenantal terms and proposes that 'the creation covenant . . . proves to be the presupposition and anticipation of all covenants to come'.[5] This is a reminder that the church is a covenantal people and therefore, by definition, a worshipping people. In similar terms, John Macquarrie holds that the church in the very broad sense of the people of God was inherent in the act of creation itself.[6]

At the same time, it is essential to recognize that however it may be described theologically, the church consists of fallible, sinful if forgiven human beings; regardless of what we may become through the grace of God, the fact that we are Earth beings with physical bodies is a reality. Further, it is important to acknowledge that both as humans and as church we are part of God's creation and that the divine concern is for the *whole* of creation.

In a more immediate sense, any theology of the church must be grounded in the acts of God as expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The church may therefore be viewed in terms of the biblical perception of a new creation in Christ; this is expressed in various ways in Scripture, but certainly the 'newness' refers to a qualitative rather than a temporal difference. It is here that we are able to see the foundational elements of the resurrection of Christ and the triune nature of God. The church may be described as an expression of or witness to the reign of God inaugurated by Jesus, and is thus situated in the tension between the already and the not-yet of God's coming reign.

[3] D. B. Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 53.
[4] W. Bühlmann, *The Chosen Peoples* (Middlegreen: St Paul Publications, 1982), pp. 11–17.
[5] Bühlmann, *The Chosen Peoples*, p. 17.
[6] J. Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1977), p. 386.

However else it is described, the church is unquestionably a community, and as such it overlaps with the wider human community. As Bosch argues, 'The church exists only as an organic and integral part of the human community.'[7] On this basis one would be justified in asking if there is any real difference between the church and an NGO. Here it is essential to acknowledge the church's share of responsibility for the failure of humanity to care for the Earth adequately. While that case ought not to be overstated, it nevertheless applies at the level of both theology and praxis. An early appreciation of Earth as God's creation was largely lost as Christians shared the anthropocentrism of the wider human community.

The church is clearly on a journey; it has not yet arrived at the destination or become fully what God intends it to be. As Bosch argues, while the church is part of the human community, it nevertheless 'has to remain identifiably different from the world, else it will cease to be able to minister to it'.[8] The various images and metaphors of the church point towards that distinctive identity. In a similar way, Macquarrie considers the church as an association and suggests that while at one level it is a social entity, there are several ways in which it breaks the mould. First, the church has an all-inclusive purpose which has traditionally included the aim not only of taking all people into itself but also of 'comprehending the whole of life, in all aspects', or in short, of 'finally losing itself in the kingdom'.[9] Second, Macquarrie suggests that while there is a sense in which the church shares the ambiguity of other social and religious activities, to those who belong to the church, 'this social phenomenon is seen "in depth" as the extension of the incarnation, the anticipation of the kingdom, the spearhead of God's presence and acting in the world'.[10]

There is always a possible tension between ecclesiology and ethics, both in that there is a disconnection between the theology and practice of the church and in that in some respects an environmentally aware church will act in very similar ways to most other secular groups. The difference between the church and a secular organization is therefore less in what it actually does and more in the area of its own self-perception and motivation. What is unique about

[7] D. J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 388.
[8] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 388.
[9] Macquarrie, *Principles*, p. 391.
[10] Ibid.

the nature of the church is its awareness of a divine calling and identity in the spirit of Christ as servant.

In Eph. 2.19 the Apostle Paul describes Christians as being members of 'the household of God', but I am indebted to Ernst Conradie for the way in which he has developed that image of the church.[11] It raises a wider identity issue in which the hermeneutical assumptions we make come into play. We may assume that 'the household of God' refers to a unique people called out from the wider community – a position not without biblical support, but which is subject to possible distortion. But when we acknowledge that the whole of creation and all life belongs to God, a different understanding is suggested.

As a people of God the church is understood to be made up of human beings who exist within a complex network of relationships – a gossamer web of communication among humans, between humans and God, and between humans and non-human nature. Understood in this way, the church is seen as dynamic and alive, filled with God's Spirit and able to have a powerful influence over all areas of creation. This suggests an emphasis on the church as part of the whole human family, yet with a particular role to play. That raises some questions concerning boundaries and suggests a tension here that we need to live with almost inevitably. What then is the place of the church in the household of God?

Both theologically and sociologically the church is a discreet entity, yet its life is lived within the wider environs of the Earth itself. The various biblical metaphors of the church when taken together suggest the transformation of the church as part of the world. In the conclusion of his significant article on this theme, Conradie reflects on the church as part of the wider household of God and suggests, following Bonhoeffer, that the church may perhaps be viewed as a room within the house. But it is more than just one room; as Conradie continues, 'the church offers a particular vision of the very architecture, building and ownership of the house' and is 'that place within the house where one can find traces that bear witness to the presence of the owner and keeper of the house'.[12] At the same time it would be unwise to ignore the contributions of those who occupy other rooms in the house.

[11] E. M. Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping: In Search of an Inspiring Vision* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2011), pp. 115–22.
[12] Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping*, p. 120.

One thing is clear: no one image or metaphor of the church will be adequate on its own to express the nature of the church. Rather, it is when the various images are placed side by side that a picture begins to emerge of a body that is more than a ghetto. Far from being insular and exclusive, the church is situated within that larger whole for the sake of the whole. Against such an understanding and the recognition that 'The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it' (Ps. 24.1), the ecological mission of the church takes on greater significance.

Theology and mission

The mission of the church clearly flows from the nature and theology of the church. In other words, the mission of God, the reconciliation and renewal of creation, involves the church as an instrument of God's purposes. This has significant implications for the care of creation and, indeed, for theological reflection on the praxis of eco-mission. Langmead expresses the link quite succinctly: 'Ecotheology implicitly contains an ecomissiology, just as all theologies give direction for understandings of mission that flow from them.'[13] What is critical is to see that there is an ecological dimension to both theology and mission, so that there is a link between ecotheology, eco-mission and eco-praxis.

Ecotheology is expressed in a number of different themes and emphases, and while a valid eco-mission may emerge from almost any one of those different emphases, ecotheology requires an approach that is at once life- and God-centred. I suggest that biocentrism alone is inadequate, especially in the context of trying to encourage ecological mission in and through the Christian community, and that a theocentric approach built on a biocentric base offers the best hope for a balanced understanding of a global ecosystem and our place in it. What is required is a 'creation-encompassing theocentrism'[14]; what one might call a 'theistic biocentrism' in order to portray God's and our relationship with creation.

[13] R. Langmead, 'Ecomissiology', *Missiology* 30/4 (2002), pp. 505–18 (508).
[14] See S. Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 103.

The image we have of God is also important. Borg, for example, perceives God as '*the encompassing Spirit* in whom everything that is, is. The universe is not separate from God, but *in* God.'[15] McFague projects a similar image of the 'body of God', which she believes 'makes sense' in terms of an incarnational understanding of Christianity and an organic interpretation of modern science.[16]

Indeed, ecotheology and eco-mission refer back to the most basic Christian doctrines. For example, the Bible begins with the grand affirmation that 'In the beginning God created . . .' Creation represents an affirmation about the world and us. In all its finitude and limitation, creation is good, even though Duchrow and Liedke have a point when they argue that the initial reference now should rather be the suffering of creation.[17] Every aspect of our theology, from incarnation to eschatology, has something to say about the Earth.

Thus, it is clear that the grace of God is bound to emerge as a crucial insight if we are to understand God, ourselves and our place on Earth. Jenkins's phrase 'ecologies of grace'[18] demonstrates how grace is an undergirding element in the discussion of the way faith relates to the Earth. Nash adds that 'The logic of the doctrine of creation does not permit a nature-grace dichotomy.'[19] He shows himself as a disciple of Sittler as he asserts: 'Grace is not only the forgiveness of sins but the "givenness" of life, both redemption and creation – "a double gratuity". The whole of nature – the biophysical universe – is not the antithesis of grace, but rather an expression of grace . . .' Perhaps more than anyone else in his time, Sittler viewed the whole of creation as an expression of grace. He asks, 'Is it again possible to fashion a theology catholic enough to affirm redemption's force enfolding nature, as we have affirmed redemption's force enfolding history?'[20] The wonder of the natural world and our sense of God are closely linked. Norman Habel develops that relationship in a personal spiritual

[15] M. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 66.
[16] S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 150.
[17] U. Duchrow and G. Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989), p. 47.
[18] W. Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[19] J. A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 95.
[20] J. Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics* (eds. S. Bouma-Prediger and P. W. Bakken, Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2000), p. 44.

sense around a theme of mystery.[21] In this way, he moves academic theology to the next level of engagement.

Eco-mission

It would be helpful if at the outset it were possible to establish an adequate definition of mission, but, as David Bosch cautioned, mission is ultimately undefinable and we should never take it upon ourselves to 'delineate mission too sharply and too self-confidently'.[22]

In his public lecture entitled 'The Third Mission of the Church',[23] Norman Habel suggested that there have been three phases in the history of Christian mission. The first approach to mission, he suggests, is largely confined to evangelism, and in particular a mission that is perceived as little more than 'the saving of souls' regardless of the circumstances in which people are living. The 'second mission' is also human-centred, but extends the personal 'spiritual' focus 'to include rescuing the whole human being as part of a community',[24] in which the spiritual implications are extended to the total human situation in all its physical, social and even political aspects. Yet it is here that we find the seeds of the 'third mission', or eco-mission. As the second mission includes the concerns of the first mission, so the third mission of the church, for Habel, moves beyond the earlier approaches to encompass the Earth itself: 'The task of this mission may be variously understood as saving, redeeming, restoring, liberating, or healing the earth.'[25]

For Wilbert Shenk, 'God's redemptive mission'[26] is a mystery that we do not fully grasp. The good news of the gospel is the good news of the reign of God and 'the animating centre of mission and of theology'.[27] Thus, 'mission is the means by which God's reign is being realized in the world'.[28] He points to five ways in which the Bible understands 'world' and one of those is as the object

[21] N. Habel, *Rainbow of Mysteries: Meeting the Sacred in Nature* (Kelowna: Cooper House, 2012).
[22] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 9.
[23] N. Habel, 'The Third Mission of the Church', *Trinity Occasional Papers* 17/1 (Brisbane: Trinity Theological College, 1998), pp. 31–43.
[24] Habel, 'The Third Mission of the Church', p. 32.
[25] Ibid., p. 33.
[26] W. R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 9.
[27] Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*, p. 10.
[28] Ibid., p. 15.

of God's mission. It is at this point that eco-mission becomes not only possible but indeed also inevitable.

Kirk also picks up the theme of the reign of God and suggests that it is only in such a context that the *missio Dei* can be understood. Thus, for Kirk, mission becomes the defining reality of the church; 'the Church . . . intentionally bears witness to the meaning and relevance of the kingdom, while not itself being identical with that kingdom'.[29] The ecological implications of such a position are not lost on Kirk.

A wider and deeper vision of mission becomes apparent in the affirmation that the church is called to announce the reign of God, aiming for wholeness, inclusion and service rather than domination. The personal and social dimensions of mission are still important, but eco-mission becomes part of a broader mission perspective. In looking forward to Christian mission in the twenty-first century, Bosch was prepared to be quite specific: 'A missiology of Western culture must include an ecological dimension. The time is long past that we can afford to exclude the environment from our missionary agenda.'[30]

It may be helpful to recall that in recent decades the church has been encouraged to understand 'salvation' as extending beyond the human level to include creation. An issue of *Worldviews* in 2010 is wholly devoted to this theme, and more has been done since then. As Bevans and Schroeder put it, spiritual wholeness through the gospel 'reflects the love of a God who expresses the divine identity in total solidarity with creation'.[31]

As a practical expression of such an approach, one of the more significant mission statements of recent times has been the formulation of the 'Five Marks of Mission' by the Anglican Consultative Council between 1984 and 1990; a review that began in 1996 is reflected in the MISSIO report of 2000.[32] It is the fifth mark that is of interest here: 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.[33] What was previously implicit was now made quite explicit. A significant new mission statement entitled

[29] J. A. Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), p. 36.
[30] D. J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Towards a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1995), p. 55.
[31] S. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), p. 377.
[32] MISSIO, *Anglicans in Mission: A Transforming Journey* (eds. E. Johnson and J. Clark; London: SPCK, 2000), pp. 19–20. MISSIO is the Mission Commission of the Anglican Union.
[33] Johnson and Clark (eds.), *Anglicans in Mission*, pp. 19–20.

'Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes' has been prepared ahead of the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in November 2013. Among other things, it declares that we are 'called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life'. It goes on to acknowledge that 'Mission with creation at its heart is already a positive movement in our churches', and to state that 'our participation in mission, our being in creation and our practice of the life of the Spirit need to be woven together for they are mutually transformative. We ought not to seek the one without the others.'[34] The linking of mission with the work of the Holy Spirit is especially pertinent here.

Thus, the various facets of the mission of the church, which is the mission of Christ and includes eco-mission, may be seen as an expression of the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. More than that, it is expressed as celebration and thanksgiving, and as God-in-action since this mission proceeds from God. While the church does not necessarily need to establish its own parallel structures to replicate what secular organizations are already doing effectively, it is nevertheless essential that a specifically Christian voice is heard within that wider forum. It is important for the church itself, for the integrity of the gospel it proclaims and for the environmental contribution it is able to make alongside other people of goodwill.

There are various ways in which the contextual practice of Christian mission may be illustrated. The change in behaviour patterns we are seeking is not for the sake of the church, but for the world. That has local and immediate implications since there is no local situation that is devoid of global implications. As David Bosch argues, 'missiology means globalisation and, in order to achieve globalisation, it needs specificity, concretisation'.[35]

Governance and ministry

In my view, governance and ministry rightly follow from a consideration of the 'nature' and 'mission' of the church. Problems may occur when we approach

[34] See http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/new-mission-statement (accessed 13 August 2013).
[35] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 496.

the life of the church on the basis of assumptions that have not been troubled by deeper thought about its true nature and mission. Certainly the manner in which it takes place has the capacity either to enhance or to detract from the church's mission, and to contribute either to the health or the detriment of the Earth and all life.

One issue deserving attention is the difference it makes whether we regard the church primarily as a movement or as an institution. This point is illustrated in 2 Samuel 7 where King David has a mind to build a house for God but, through the prophet Nathan, this plan is rejected. He has God say, 'I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle' (2 Sam. 7.6). That is not the final word of course, and elsewhere God does choose to dwell in the temple. Yet we may ask whether God is primarily a settled, temple-dwelling, institutional God or a tent-dwelling, mobile God, whom we may follow in and out among the major issues of our time.

In the context of the claims the church may make for itself, a possible gap may emerge between theory and practice. Thus it is right and proper for a church to play a prophetic role in challenging governments on issues relating to climate change, economic policy and so on. But our moral capacity to challenge the econocentric position of governments is severely limited if in real terms, and in spite of our finely tuned official statements about the way in which our church is governed, we essentially operate in the same way.

An obvious point is that different confessional families have over long centuries developed deeply entrenched governance practices. For example, ancient churches such as those in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, and others within an Episcopal tradition, may seem far removed from those within a Reformed, Evangelical or Pentecostal tradition. The way forward will need to be marked by respect for traditions other than one's own.

There have been some significant ecumenical discussions about the nature of ministry in the church, and not least those conducted by the World Council of Churches, which culminated in the document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (*BEM*, 1982) and, more recently, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013). In a section on 'the calling of the whole people of God', the *BEM* document declares that 'the Church lives through the liberating and renewing

power of the Holy Spirit'.[36] It is something that most of us would affirm, but what does it mean in practice? Many might find the weight of traditional governance practices to be too entrenched to change. There can be no swift answer to what is a complex question, but it might be the subject of honest reflection before God.

Nevertheless, differing traditions and systems of governance can be shaped to serve or hinder the work of eco-mission. For example, the Anglican Church in Britain has sought to have an environmental advisor in each diocese, and in 2007 claimed to have fulfilled that goal. Of course that does not necessarily lead to effective action, but it is a start that other jurisdictions would do well to consider carefully. Structures, and therefore boundaries, are both important and inevitable, but it is equally important that structures do not unnecessarily impede the possibilities of eco-mission. The support of the priest or minister is often crucial for the success, or otherwise, of eco-mission.[37] If the clergy support the mission, it stands a much greater chance of success, while clergy opposition or apathy is clearly an inhibiting factor, although not necessarily curbing earth-keeping initiatives entirely. In governance terms, a person with drive and passion for eco-mission is always going to increase the possibility of positive action, providing that the structures allow that to happen.

The key point here is that in spite of positions taken at a theological or confessional level, in practical terms, the clergy and other lay leaders can have a significant influence because of the position they hold. That, in turn, raises questions about the process of ministry formation and theological education; if we are serious about our role in creation care, we need to ensure that leaders and potential leaders, whether ordained or lay, are adequately exposed to and educated about the important ecological and theological issues involved.

Practical eco-mission

Where, then, is 'Earth' in the practical outworking of the mission of the church? The ambiguous ecological promise of Christian Theology about which Santmire

[36] Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper 111; Geneva: World Council of Churches), p. 16.

[37] This is supported by empirical evidence; see C. W. Ayre, 'An Approach to Ecological Mission in and through the Christian Community' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 2009), pp. 158–59.

wrote is still a factor, and while dissenting voices may be in a minority, they continue to be heard.[38] Nevertheless, the church is certainly present in public debates on the environment. In recent decades, official ecclesial statements have projected a near unanimity of viewpoints across a broad confessional spectrum. This aspect of strong agreement now extends to the interfaith area; one example may suffice. 'An Open Letter from Australian Religious Leaders', dated 25 June 2013, begins: 'As people of faith, we draw attention to one of the most urgent moral issues facing us in the upcoming election.' It then goes on to talk about issues impacting on the climate and states that 'we are despoiling the world given to us as a sacred trust for future generations'. It was signed by eight Christian leaders from four denominations, in addition to leaders from the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist faiths.

Official statements are an important start, but the question remains: to what extent is theory matched with practice? At that level it must be admitted that the outcome is less convincing! Nevertheless, while acknowledging the shortcomings of the church in this regard and the obvious fact that eco-congregations are in a minority, practical eco-mission is being embraced by an increasing number of congregations and Christian groups. It should be acknowledged that much of this activity has not been troubled by deeper theological reflection on the nature, mission, governance and ministry of the church but, rather, is motivated by a concern for the suffering of creation and a perception that we all need to be involved in the healing process. It is a question of whether the glass is half full or half empty!

It is clearly not possible to provide a detailed analysis of practical eco-mission here. Moreover, data of this kind is very difficult to quantify. However, it is hoped that by taking a snapshot of what is happening in four different parts of the world, namely the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States of America and Australia, it may be possible to glean some understanding of the global situation.

The availability of resources and resource personnel is an important factor in the development of effective eco-mission. The United Kingdom, for example, has taken advantage of its relatively small size compared with its population to develop a significant network of what might be termed 'peak groups', such as

[38] H. P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985).

Eco Congregation, A Rocha, Christian Ecology Link, the John Ray Initiative, the Conservation Foundation and others, that are able to provide resources and expertise to guide local groups and congregations. Through its system of eco-awards and the provision of resources, Eco Congregation is especially effective in that regard. A country like Australia, with its large size but relatively small population, struggles to provide resources of that kind, even though it is hard to overestimate their importance.

Some fine British examples of eco-mission may be cited. In 2007, I visited a dozen eco-congregations and was able to report on significant work being done both in the congregation and in the community. This included participation in an eco-worship experience in an Anglican Church in Leeds in which the whole congregation, children and adults alike, was involved. Examples could be cited across a range of categories, but one prominent example of a church graveyard project is at Sts Mary and John Church at Oxford. The driving force behind this project, which was even featured on the BBC, is Ruth Conway. The grounds are approximately one hectare in size, and as Ruth Conway explained in an interview that I recorded, had become not just a jungle but 'a jungle that was being used for people to hide away, and take drugs and so on'. The goal was to transform a forbidding place of criminal activity into 'a welcoming, open, quiet green place'. Its easily accessible location is also an advantage. Such a major undertaking gained the cooperation of local community residents, the council and police. More than that, Conway's motivation was not merely to clean up a dangerous area, but it was primarily 'to be a way of alerting the congregation to their whole relationship with nature, and with God's good intentions'. This was therefore one of the beginning points for eco-mission in the congregation, and it had implications for worship, spirituality and outreach to the community.

The Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) is very active in promoting Earthcare. Its eco-congregations programme provides a handbook with a guiding framework, links a congregation into a network and provides resources and ultimately a certificate award. The SAFCEI website reports on an event held in May 2013:

> We had a celebratory feast of inspiring eco-congregation stories—confirming that people of faith are on the move! There have been creation care services, new liturgies and eco-spirituality retreats and pilgrimages. We heard about a mosque that is re-using ablution water to irrigate a community food garden

and a Baha'i Eco-study group that has developed a faith-based environmental learning tool (PIES: People Inspired by the Environment and Spirituality).

There are a growing number of water-wise and indigenous garden and recycling projects at faith centres. Congregations are undertaking energy and water audits. Faith communities have initiated community clean-ups and alien vegetation clearing campaigns, conservation projects, permaculture workshops and started community food gardens. People have attended earth-keeper workshops and congregations have hosted eco-film festivals, eco-breakfasts and sustainable suppers. Faith leaders are being encouraged to speak out about South Africa's energy choices and development path which is leading to the widening disparity between rich and poor. We heard too, of the storehouse of indigenous knowledge and deep respect traditional healers hold for nature.[39]

There are several noteworthy points about SAFCEI's approach. First, there is a significant interfaith aspect. Second, by networking congregations, they are not only encouraging sharing but also adopting a strengthening mechanism. Third, it is difficult to underestimate the importance of sharing stories of earthkeeping practices.

Anecdotal evidence from the United States suggests that the environment is not prominent on the church's agenda, and there is some opposition to eco-mission from the religious and political right. In a 2004 paper, Glenn Scherer asserted that 'Christian-right views are swaying politicians and threatening the environment'.[40] Christian fundamentalism and views of the 'end times' are clearly significant in the United States, so that the environmental crisis may actually be welcomed as a sign of the coming apocalypse. The extent of those beliefs and the legislative implications are considerable.

Nevertheless, Christian groups are engaged in earthkeeping initiatives. One notable example is Interfaith Power and Light, founded by Canon Sally Bingham. From a faith base reflecting multiple faith traditions, the group seeks to encourage responses to global warming. Other groups also have developed frameworks for action, including the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Against that background, Dr John Wood of the evangelically oriented Au Sable Institute notes that he is aware

[39] See http://www.safcei.org/our-programmes/eco-congregations (accessed 1 August 2013).
[40] See http://www.grist.org/article/scherer-christian (accessed 1 August 2013).

of a 'wide number of emerging groups' in many different denominations, alongside several peak groups. He offers the following observation:

> The practical eco-missions work is often hidden from view. By its nature this pioneering work is being done by individuals and passionate professionals within the churches and missions organizations. There is an emerging movement here, but it has not been given much profile yet. The refrain I hear most often is the sense of isolation and the desire for networking and encouragement from others.[41]

Even though eco-mission is adopted only by a minority in Australia, it is becoming increasingly significant. In 2010, the Uniting Church in Australia combined with the Five Leaf Eco-awards Church Project to publish the inspiring stories of 28 congregations or regional groups.[42]

The inclusion of ecology in worship is appropriately one of the common themes. Congregations are turning to the 'Season of Creation' material, or resources produced for World Environment Day. In addition, there is clearly an educational component in informed preaching that picks up the perspective of Earth.

Creation spirituality is a related area that is still at an early developmental stage. St Clement's Anglican Church in Brisbane has converted a grassy slope into a native vegetation area in order to make a statement about the God of creation. Nearby is a community garden, complete with poultry. Another congregation has created a green space where people can wander and meditate; Biblical and spiritual prompts are strategically located at various points of the garden. Initiatives such as these are a powerful reminder of the way in which people may be encouraged to relate life and faith to the natural world.

The planting of trees and gardens or the creation of natural vegetation areas represents a third significant but related aspect; in many instances this involves interaction with the wider community. Bush regeneration of a public space was one of the significant dimensions of Northmead's eco-programme in cooperation with local government. A similar example is the rejuvenation of the Obi Obi Creek in Queensland. The Water Lines project in Sydney several

[41] Private email correspondence.

[42] J. Morthorpe, *Greening the Church: Australian Churches Tell their Inspirational Stories* (Melbourne: The Justice and International Mission Unit, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, Uniting Church in Australia, 2010).

years ago encouraged congregations in its area to 'adopt a creek', and that approach came with ecotheological educational material.

Education programmes, workshops and courses are not yet common or widespread, but they are operational and can be influential; even though there is considerable scope for expansion. Church media are also starting to play a significant role.

The framing of eco-mission policy is also important. An environmental audit features strongly here and always has the potential to improve the church's environmental footprint. One outstanding example that has attracted considerable interest even at a global level is the Caloundra Uniting Church in Queensland. Its large and prominent solar cross, generating 4.2 kilowatts of power, is a strong statement to the community as a whole. Other congregations have also taken or are exploring initiatives relating to water use and collection.

One question that must be asked is to what extent the emerging eco-mission initiatives find a balance between local and global issues. It is both appropriate and inevitable that meaningful engagement in Earth care will begin with local issues in a particular community amidst the overwhelming global scale of environmental problems such as climate change. My contention is that eco-mission invariably reflects several contexts simultaneously; if it begins locally, it must also take account of regional, national and also global contexts.

Issues requiring attention

In spite of substantial progress over the past several decades, there are a number of areas that require further attention.

The first area relates to public theology, given the place of the church in the public square. One criticism is that the various disciplines dealing with environmental issues tend to operate very much in their own space. It is imperative that all related fields of social, scientific, agricultural and theological perspectives should engage with each other in a constructive manner. That implies that the multiple dialogues referred to earlier need more attention.

The second area involves the ongoing process of theological reflection. Books in the field of ecotheology continue to appear; but the field as such is not always well integrated with theology generally and does not always appear to filter through to teaching. The theology of mission is a particular area of

concern. In many cases, mission is still based unashamedly on anthropocentric assumptions.

Third, in redefining mission for the twenty-first century, it is vital that eco-mission is recognized as an integral part of the *missio Dei* and not as some kind of 'optional extra'. Our understanding of the reign of God and God's mission needs to go beyond human well-being to include the whole of creation. The theological base for Christian mission that includes Earth demands the mainstreaming of eco-mission. There is much to be done before that is achieved. In real terms, and in spite of fine statements, eco-mission remains largely at the margin.

Fourth, the earlier reference to the church as the people of God that includes Israel raises the whole matter of our relationship with land. As Field puts it, in the light of God's call to Israel to be the people of God in a particular land, what does it mean for a church called by God to be 'the transnational people of God scattered throughout the world constituted by communities of people who live in dynamic inter-dependence with the earth'.[43]

Fifth, an important implication is that as church we need to understand our context as fully as possible. While it is true that ecological mission does not emerge directly from the theme of crisis in a pragmatic sense, it is nevertheless essential that such a mission is informed by an adequate analysis of the forces that are destroying the Earth, so that the people of God can identify with those who are marginalized by environmental degradation. In practical terms, people are increasingly concerned about how they can have a smaller ecological footprint while, at another level, there is a greater awareness of the effects that rising sea levels will have not only on small Pacific nations but also in low-lying areas with large populations. Climate change will have a disproportionate impact on the poorest and most vulnerable.

A sixth area relates to governance and ministry. This has not received much attention in recent times, but our time-honoured assumptions, traditions and practices need to be looked at again in the context of caring for creation. In view of the move away from 'top-down' models of governing institutions inherent in contemporary global environmental governance, greater emphasis needs to

[43] D. Field, 'I Believe in the Holy Earthy Church: Toward an Ecological Reinterpretation of the Holiness of the Church', *Scriptura* 111, pp. 333–47 (333–34).

be placed on the participation of *all* church members as the *oikoumene* works collectively and collaboratively to protect the integrity of creation.

Seventh, the possibilities of ecumenical action on behalf of the Earth are very real. Official church statements reflect substantial agreement across the range of confessional traditions. What is now required is engagement at the local and regional level. Such engagement may go far in helping to break down unnecessary barriers and to open up fresh opportunities in the wider community. At some point, we are bound to pause and consider the implications of our relations with people of other faiths. Given the magnitude of the global environmental threat, the possibilities of significant engagement alongside people of other faiths and secular organizations need to be taken seriously. In 2000, the United Nations Environment Programme demonstrated the extent of common ground in Earth care and made a plea for religion and science to work together for the sake of the planet.[44] As a paper prepared ahead of the Edinburgh 2010 Conference rightly affirmed, 'Care for creation is no doubt a promising theme for inter-religious dialogue.'[45]

Finally, there is a need to close the gap between rhetoric and action. It is not enough for churches to make pronouncements about environmental issues or to state what they believe governments should be doing. The Christian community also has an obligation, even a divine calling, to set its own house in order and to engage in practical eco-mission along with other groups with a related vision. One expression of that commitment will be its inclusion in the mission budget of ecclesial bodies! The widespread recognition of an ecocrisis presents a significant opportunity for a practical public theology, or for what might be termed 'mission in the public square'. A significant programme of education for eco-mission should be part of that.

Conclusion

We may ask again: where on Earth is the church? There is no simple answer to that question. In this essay, I have shown that Earth and church are invariably

[44] L. Bassett (ed.), *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action* (New York: UNEP, 2000). See also the contributions by Heather Eaton and Kim Yong-Bock in this volume.

[45] John Knox International Reformed Centre, *Witnessing in the Midst of a Suffering Creation – a Challenge for the Mission of the Church: A Letter to Churches, Mission Agencies and all Christians Concerned with the Church's Mission* (Geneva: John Knox Centre, 2007), p. 21.

linked. I have argued that the nature of the church as the community or body of Christ and as the household of God carries significant implications for the orientation of the church as a movement of God that is not turned in upon itself. The church participates in the mission of God that extends to the whole Earth. Practices regarding the governance and ministry of the church vary significantly and can either help or hinder the work of God. Nevertheless, as I have suggested, one key element is whether God is a temple-dwelling, institutional God or a tent-dwelling, mobile God whom we are called to follow amidst the issues of our time. While there is a long way to go, some of us at least are able to hear the call of God in the cries of an embattled Earth.

9

What Are the Resources for Building a Christian Ethos in a Time of Ecological Devastation?

Celia Deane-Drummond

Introduction

Attempting to assess the full breadth of ethical resources on environmental studies over the last 40 years would be virtually impossible, given the sheer volume of literature available. This growth is remarkable, given that the domain of environmental ethics was barely recognized in the 1970s. What I intend to do in this first section is to offer a map of what I perceive as very broad trends in Christian theological reception, trends arising from different ecclesial backgrounds to the more secular literature of environmental philosophy. It would also be appropriate to see such trends as coexisting rather than linearly replacing one another. Hence, what was dominant early on in the discussion is still present in some quarters, but the situation becomes even more complex as other priorities start to surface in the changing and volatile social contexts in which secular and religious discourse takes place. Of course, as a contemporary movement, environmental ethics is in itself highly topical in that, for some theologians at least, even considering broader scopes outside what might be termed narrowly human concerns, is a significant, and for some, an unwelcome step. I am less concerned about arguing for the worth of environmental consideration as such in this chapter, but more concerned to review how ethical discussion has enlarged in scope, and what theologians might make of such developments.

The collection of essays in this edited volume reflects the agenda of both the Christian Faith and the Earth project and the culminating conference of the same title held in South Africa in August 2012. These essays deliberately focus attention on Christian theology, but it is still a theology that is attuned to practices, so it represents, broadly, praxis, or practice informed by theory. The field of environmental ethics, when approached from a theological point of view, is difficult to conceive without some reference to how humans are to act—that is, their practice. At the end of this chapter, I lay out an example of how a specific Christian tradition, namely, the Roman Catholic tradition, one that has habitually been reprimanded for being far too anthropocentric, has begun to enlarge its focus to include ecological concerns and has also raised the profile of ecojustice. Indeed, negative labels such as 'anthropocentric' towards alternative viewpoints may have been helpful at one stage in the discussion, but they are not necessarily constructive, given the complexities associated with shifting global practices as well as the need to re-envision what it means to be human as crucial to building an alternative ethos.

Trends in the theological reception of environmental ethics

In this section, I will identify a number of important developments in discourse in environmental ethics that have been of most concern to ecotheologians over the last 40 years. I am therefore deliberately setting out what I see as important styles of Christian theological reflection that coincide with environmental ethics. For all the trends mapped out below, the trajectory named as being 'from' one perspective 'to' another should not be taken to imply that the earlier starting point no longer exists, but rather that the *focus* of attention begins to be more prominent in other areas. The possibility that too much is lost with respect to earlier insights may mean that there is a dynamic revisiting of the earlier models in the light of subsequent discussion, suggesting a cyclical focus rather than a linear trajectory.

(1) *From anthropocentrism to biocentrism to ecocentrism and theocentrism*: Environmental ethicists began in the early years with naming environmental responsibility in terms of human action: how should humans use environmental

resources responsibly?[1] Over time, this seemed less than adequate to the challenge of valuing creatures other than humans, and treating them simply as resources failed to take sufficient account of their intrinsic value. The shift to the valuation of biological organisms in biocentrism and other variants of deep ecology, which sought to weave in a specific political platform for action on behalf of other creatures, was perfectly understandable in this context.[2] Important voices in this early period included James Gustafson, who argued for theocentrism as an alternative to the anthropocentric–biocentric dialectic.[3] Ecocentrism is arguably a secular alternative to theocentrism in that it is wider in its brief than biocentrism and not only includes biological species but also implies a focus on the earth as such, while lacking a theological reference point.

(2) *From androcentrism to ecofeminism*: Ecofeminist writers, led by Rosemary Radford Ruether, joined the chorus in criticizing not just anthropocentrism, but androcentrism, which was perceived as contributing to doubly oppressive structures in relation to both the natural world *and* women.[4] But the association of women and nature was a double-edged sword since, on the one hand, some feminists wanted to claim and celebrate their differences from men, while, on the other hand, the association of women and nature smacked of essentialism, a tying in of women to particular roles that were constructed by nature rather than by nurture. Given such a dilemma, it is not surprising that ecofeminist writers have begun to be drawn to alternative ways of perceiving the natural world that avoid the anthropocentric–biocentric–theocentric triangulation by looking to cosmic models that seem capable of including all

[1] John Passmore is perhaps the best representative of this view. J. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (London: Duckworth, 1974). For an excellent reader that compiles representatives from different philosophical options, see A. Light and H. Rolston III (eds.), *Environmental Ethics: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

[2] Warwick Fox and Arne Naess are representatives of this approach, and their views are summarized in W. Fox, 'Deep Ecology, A New Philosophy of Our Time', in Light and Rolston (eds.), *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 252–61; A. Naess, 'The Deep Ecology Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in Light and Rolston (eds.), *Environmental Ethics*, pp. 262–74.

[3] J. M. Gustafson, *Theology and Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981); J. M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); J. M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994); For a critical overview, see H. R. Beckley and C. M. Swezey, *James M. Gustafson's Theocentric Ethics: Interpretations and Assessments* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002).

[4] For a review of ecofeminist approaches to creation, see C. Deane-Drummond, 'Creation', in S. Parsons (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 190–207.

three elements. One powerful model is the world as a body of God favoured by Sallie McFague, Grace Jantzen and others.[5] Another is the Gaia hypothesis, pioneered by maverick scientist James Lovelock, which is used to good effect by Anne Primavesi.[6] Both McFague and Primavesi are prolific authors who try at least to take into account environmental science in their deliberations, but also work in a constructive way to build new and original ways of thinking about God in the light of environmental concern. Lisa Sideris has criticized McFague for her idealistic interpretation of science, and much the same could be said of Primavesi's incorporation of Gaia.[7]

A third strand that is particularly influential in the North American context could be named the 'new creation story', following from the influence of prolific writer Thomas Berry and preferred by some of the authors sympathetic to ecofeminism, such as Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, John Haught, Heather Eaton, and Anne Marie Dalton. Here the cosmic evolution of the planet provides the framework for thinking about God, humanity and the cosmos. Not all ecofeminists agree that the use of a scientific story in order to give credence to a particular worldview is appropriate. This shift to a new creation story has tended to be adopted as if it were self-evident, rather than criticized. But the myth-making around this particular story is powerfully resonant across a range of religious traditions. One of the problems with it, however, is that it seems to reinforce a view of cosmic scientific understanding as the 'ultimate' myth of the universe. In this respect, it is worth asking how far religious awe is being transferred to science as such, even within these new creation myths. In other words, while those who adopt the new creation story are criticized by other ecofeminists wishing to part company with scientific worldviews, it is doubtful how far such a view is genuinely 'scientific' rather

[5] See S. McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), which informs her subsequent approach to environmental issues, also S. McFague, *Super, Natural Christians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); S. McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); S. McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, The World and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

[6] Anne Primavesi is another ecofeminist writer who has been prolific in the field. Her earlier book, *From Apocalypse to Genesis; Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) has given way to books more self-consciously informed by Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis as in *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth Systems Science* (London: Routledge, 2000); *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (London: Routledge, 2003); and *Gaia and Climate Change* (London: Routledge, 2008) and *Exploring Earthiness* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013).

[7] L. H. Sideris, *Environmental Ethics, Ecological Theology and Natural Selection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 45–90.

than a myth that has succeeded in transforming any scientific claims to a form of scientism. This is significant for the present discussion, since the ethos that is being generated by the new creation stories is one that its proponents purport to foster environmental responsibility. But, as Lisa Sideris claims, does it *also* elevate a scientific mindset and scientism that equates 'reality' with science as such?[8] Of course, it would be difficult to judge such a shift without interviewing those who have been influenced by the new creation stories, but the affiliation of such stories with such a range of authors, including atheists such as E. O. Wilson, suggests an uneven interpretation. While I am sympathetic to aspects of Sideris's critique of the new creation story, I am inclined to think that the so-called new creation story is used by different proponents in different ways, and that ironical slippage towards scientism is unlikely when it is adopted by those with a strongly based Christian faith. The real danger may be a loss of religious distinctiveness in this process, that is, a mergence of science and theology, or even a replacement by scientific awe that, perhaps surprisingly, may or may not be environmentally conscious, or even gender conscious. There are added ironies as well, in that most ecofeminist proponents of the new creation story also combine their account with a critique of modernity, out of which contemporary science emerges, hence proposing a transformation of religious beliefs in the course of such mergence. The grand narrative is new in as much as it picks up elements found both in scientific and in religious accounts, but it goes beyond both. The variety of new creation stories, however, should alert us against too-blanket assertions about what ethos is or is not being attempted in this process. In addition, I suggest that there are important ethical problems associated with *any* grand narrative, in as much as they tend to weaken the role of the individual and lead to a sense of powerlessness rather than empowerment. Note, I am not suggesting by naming this shift, as in the first case, that all authors are now writing from an ecofeminist or new-creation-story perspective. Far from it! The situation is also more complicated than this implies in that there are heated debates *within* feminist scholarship as to the priority that needs to be given to social scientific, scientific and political analysis of the particular environmental contexts.

[8] This criticism is levelled by Lisa Sideris in 'Writing the Poetry of Reality: Science, Religion and Wonder in the Environmental Discourse' (keynote lecture, Fourth Biennial Conference of the European Forum for the Study of Religion and Environment; delivered at the Sigtuna Foundation, Sweden, 23 May 2013).

Within each trend there are therefore ongoing discussions and analyses, but broadly speaking all ecofeminists argue for a greater priority being given to issues of concern for women.

(3) *From ecological equilibrium to flux*: In addition to what might be termed new ways of framing the debates, some scholars, including myself among them, have wanted to be even more keenly aware of shifts in the basic philosophy of ecology and of how we perceive and portray the way we think about the natural world in its study as science. Up until about 90 years ago, ecology was thought of as a stable equilibrium state, with humans understood as in some sense apart from that ecosystem. But over time the idea of flux and unstable equilibrium became more prominent, along with the idea that humans are just as much a part of the ecosystem as any other creature, except that there is an important difference: humans are at least potentially more self-aware of their impacts on the planet and other creatures. An early focus on preserving biodiversity has given way to more complex forms of environmental studies that include human ecology as well. Perhaps this has reached a crescendo in recent years with discourse of climate change becoming ever more dominant, bringing with it profound challenges as to how we should live, along with even sharper denials from those who resist such changes. Climate change is also useful in that it illustrates the need for some stability, but it is the stability of the system as a whole held in fragile equilibrium rather than in a fixed or static equilibrium state. The uncertainty in the models used by climate scientists has sometimes been misinterpreted by policy makers as uncertainty over the impacts of human activity on climate change, but given the number of variables that are used in climate science, it is almost impossible to provide absolutely accurate predictions. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has published estimates that are in the right ballpark in a predictive sense for temperature rise but that underestimate global sea level rise.[9]

(4) *From creation theology to a new hermeneutics to new constructive theologies*: A fourth trend is the way the discussion has shifted from early concentration

[9] European Environmental Agency (EEA), *Climate Change, Impacts and Vulnerability in Europe 2012: An Indicator-based Report*, (report no. 12/2012; Copenhagen: European Environmental Agency, 2012).

on developing new theologies of creation to a much wider brief on interpreting scriptural material and systematic theology. The new theologies of creation of course had their place, and Jürgen Moltmann was perhaps one of the most successful and influential advocates of creation theologies that took into account ecological issues.[10] Following this shift, however, more radical ways of approaching biblical studies began to surface; readings that deliberately sought to view biblical texts through a different lens, namely, the lens of ecological concern. Norman Habel pioneered this shift with the Earth Bible series, but other important advocates include David Horrell and Ernst Conradie.[11] Finding new and important hermeneutical approaches to all aspects of systematic theology is integral. Important voices in this respect include authors such as Denis Edwards's pneumatology and Ernst Conradie's anthropology. But the new systematic approach is 'chastened', as it were, by a more deliberate attempt to engage the practical issues of concern in a way that, arguably, the earlier attempts at ecotheology did not, or at least only did so in a relatively naive way, both from the perspective of the environmental issues that were under discussion and in the way the social Trinity or indeed other aspects of constructive theology seemed to be able to absorb ecological relationships without question. Such associations between ecology and God raise problematic questions about ontology. This association of ecology with God was only successful from the point of view of building an adequate ethos in as much as it allowed ecological issues to be taken with greater seriousness. However, questions arise as to how far simply reading God through an ecological hermeneutic is really going to be effective in providing a practical basis for dealing with the ecological problems at hand. To put this more bluntly: just because God incorporates ecological dimensions does not necessarily help us solve problems associated with environmental devastation. It might perhaps increase a sense of human guilt, but not much else. I have

[10] J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985); J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1965). Of note also is Moltmann's most recent work, *Ethics of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), a third of which is dedicated to a discussion of creation themes alongside ecological ethics. See also Ernst Conradie's chapter in this volume.

[11] N. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (The Earth Bible, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press/Cleveland: PilgrimPress, 2000); E. M. Conradie, 'Towards an Ecological Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project', *Scriptura* 85 (2004), pp. 123–35; D. G. Horrell et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); E. M. Conradie, 'What on Earth is An Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters', in Horrell et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics*, pp. 295–313.

argued recently that an alternative might be, paradoxically perhaps for some, to return to the original classical doctrines of creation, such as *creatio ex nihilo*, in order to show up the deep meaning of creation as the origin of being as such, with secondary causation distinguished clearly from primary causation.[12]

(5) *From environmental ethics to creaturely ethics*: Pioneers of environmental ethics were most concerned about protecting the natural world from the point of view of systems, especially ecosystems, and maintaining species diversity. But alongside this, another broadly social movement focused on the specific needs of animals and their treatment by humans. While the former focused on holistic interpretations of how to treat the natural world, the latter extended concern for individual humans out to other creatures. Tensions in these perspectives are obvious, but more recently there has been something of a coalition alongside a shift to considering human responsibilities towards creatures.[13] The latter brings with it an important literature, that of animal studies, which I suggest can serve to invigorate environmental ethics in new and interesting ways. It may also be rather easier to press those who are anthropocentric to consider other animals, and those that are profoundly ecocentric to recognize the worth of individual creatures, hence mediating between anthropocentric and ecocentric starting points.[14]

(6) *From political advocacy to public theology*: This trend is worth naming, as it represents the tendency for social and political discussion about the environment to exclude religious beliefs and for theologians to ignore political and social concerns. Theologians who have faithfully represented a theological position in the midst of secular and political debate in the United Kingdom include

[12] C. Deane-Drummond, 'Creation', in P. Scott and M. Northcott (eds.), *A Systematic Theology for a Changing Climate* (London: Routledge, forthcoming). An argument against such a perspective, by feminists such as Catherine Keller, presupposes that the material, watery chaos was present before the beginning of creation. Yet imagining that this chaos is present has ethical consequences, for it presupposes a menacing force at work in the world alongside God who lures creation into existence. In spite of protestations to the contrary, it therefore has dualistic undertones. C. Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003). For further discussion, see the essay by Conradie in this volume.

[13] C. Deane-Drummond and D. Clough (eds.), *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals* (London: SCM Press, 2009); and C. Deane-Drummond, R. Artinian-Kaiser, and D. Clough (eds.), *Animals as Religious Subjects: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2013).

[14] I am using the term 'ecocentric' here in preference to 'biocentric', since 'ecocentric' implies ecological systems as a whole, including nutrient flows, and therefore implies more than is suggested by the Greek *bios*.

influential authors such as Peter Scott and Michael Northcott.[15] But there are other trends afoot in this area as well, not least the broadening out of concerns for those who are poor, to include ecological issues. Liberation theologians are known for their concentrated critique on economic and structural issues. Leonardo Boff is perhaps a pioneer in this area from a Southern context, though his particular incorporation of Gaia as a framework for discussion will only be attractive to those who are convinced by this approach.[16] Sigurd Bergmann's work has not, perhaps, achieved the recognition it deserves, in that his was arguably one of the first books that combined a liberation approach with due attention to Orthodox theology.[17] In making such a shift, Boff also seems to have left behind what is arguably one of the strengths of liberation theology, namely, a radical critique of economic and political structures. There is, in other words, much more scope for further reflection on what might be termed 'theology from below', that is, liberation theology, in the light of particular global environmental challenges. Further, in as much as public theology seeks to make a difference in the public sphere, it will deliberately set out to engage with actors on a political stage.[18] The interrogation of global development is also important to mention in this context, for theologies that engage so-called development questions have tended to be those that are concerned with social praxis and economic analysis. Once development questions are no longer shorn from ecological discussion, the interest in the latter topic reaches potentially an even broader audience, for, as Steve de Gruchy recognized, it becomes more obvious that social justice issues are common to both.[19] Liberation and reconstruction theologians object to the use of the term 'development' altogether, as it is perceived as being tainted with Western assumptions about progress, hence preferring the term 'liberation' or 'reconstruction' alongside

[15] M. Northcott, *Christianity and Environmental Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and P. M. Scott, *A Political Theology of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Beyond the UK dozens of authors engaged in public debate could be named, including Larry Rasmussen, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, James Martin-Schram, Heinrich Bedford Strohm, Sigurd Bergmann, Dieter Hessel and Bill Everett, to give just a few examples.

[16] L. Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995).

[17] S. Bergmann, *Creation Set Free: The Spirit as Liberator of Nature* (Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans, 2005). The German edition was published in 1995.

[18] C. Deane-Drummond and H. Bedford Strohm (eds.), *Religion and Ecology in the Public Sphere* (London: T&T Clark, 2011).

[19] This was also characteristic of the late South African theologian Steve de Gruchy's significant contribution through the olive agenda. See S. de Gruchy, 'An Olive Agenda: First Thoughts on a Metaphorical Theology of Development', http://www.acen.anglicancommunion.org/resources/docs/DeGruchy_An_Olive_Agenda.pdf (accessed 15 August 2013).

an option for those that are the most impoverished members of the human community.[20] I will return to this topic again below.

What are appropriate ethical concepts?

If the above question is raised, then this implies that there are a range of different possible approaches to ethical decision-making and, further, that some are more convincing than others theologically. Secular philosophy fairly readily categorizes itself according to deontological, consequentialist or virtue ethics, but which might be preferred and why? Given the sheer range of possible issues that different authors might choose to concentrate on, are some fundamental philosophies more amenable than others to environmental discourse from a theological point of view? My suggestion is that the specific issue in hand and the particular theological tradition in which each of us stands will, to some extent at least, shape the way ethical discussion takes place from a theological viewpoint. There may be more room, for example, in using consequentialist approaches when discussing broad issues of sustainability compared with the specific ethical consideration of whether or not to preserve a particular endangered species. Rather more complicated ethical analysis comes once we start to consider difficult cases, such as the restoration of an ecosystem after environmental degradation. Here local history of the site is important, but so is the consensus of the community. Possible tensions immediately arise when local and global issues are concerned, a point that I will return to again below.

However, it is important to stress that when considering appropriateness, it is not simply about the particular relevance of ethical concepts for a given range of environmental concerns, but it is also about how far and to what extent theological reflection might be able to contribute to these debates by offering distinctive insight or encouragement for a specific ethical practice. Where, in other words, might specifically Christian theological approaches

[20] As in the work of Gustavo Gutiérrez, for example his *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 15th Anniversary edn, 1998). See also J. Mugambi and M. Vähäkangas (eds.), *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility* (Nairobi: Acton Press, 2001).

serve to illuminate practices in a way that is hard to conceive from purely secular viewpoints? I will name here four examples, though there are certainly others. The first stems from the Roman Catholic tradition in which I stand and can be named broadly as the contemplative tradition.

The specific tradition I have in mind is the Franciscan tradition of contemplation on the Creator's gift of the created world. Acknowledging all creatures as gifts to one another, rather than as instrumental objects for human use, shifts ethical discourse away from management towards appreciation and care. The art of paying attention to the natural world is not, of course, restricted to Christianity or to any one tradition within it, but finding ways within one's own tradition to make that attention specific is, I suggest, vitally important as a first step in an adequate ethical response. Contemplation arising out of the Franciscan tradition is inclusive rather than exclusive, in that it seeks to include other creatures in prayerful communion with human beings. It was not the specific ethical concern for creatures that moved Francis, but rather the power of considering Christ's wider significance for the earth in light of the incarnation and, following that, an appreciation of the praise of all creatures.[21] It is much harder to harm those we pray for, and the natural world and its creatures are no exception to this. It is through that contemplation, too, that the seeds of genuine love grow stronger. We may also experience the emotion of wonder, well beloved of the earliest environmentalists such as Rachel Carson.[22] But the ability to wonder from a theological perspective takes us on a journey that is transformative in a religious sense, for it is wonder disciplined through a particular lens, namely, the lens of the passion narrative of Jesus Christ. This is also attuned to the way Franciscan spirituality approaches the issue. I am rather less convinced, therefore, that Franciscan thought can readily be married to deep ecology in the way that some authors have indicated.[23]

A second aspect of specifically theological environmental ethics now comes into view, namely one that is inspired by Christ as an example of righteousness and links closely with justice. What might that justice look like through a

[21] Discussion of the ecological significance of Franciscan thought is documented well in texts such as D. M. Nothwehr (ed.), *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader* (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 2002).

[22] R. Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

[23] Ilia Delio suggests as much in I. Delio, K. D. Warner and P. Wood (eds.), *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2007).

Christian lens? Certainly it needs to include concern for the most impoverished members of the human community. While local needs are important, the global interconnection of environmental problems points to the necessity of a global framework for justice-making alongside local democratic decision-making. Prominent secular social theorists on justice include authors such as John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen.[24] Of these, only Martha Nussbaum is prepared to name what the good might look like in terms of global decision-making, but she has yet to develop these ideas fully for environmental ethics.[25] Sen is becoming very influential in development ethics, but, again, his sensitivity to environmental problems is somewhat limited. His focus is on *first* removing the gross injustices that plague modern societies, as something about which most people can agree, rather than attempting to create a vision of what that justice requires. Of course, even if we take this relatively modest route, this still requires cooperation on a global scale. Furthermore, for environmental ethicists, the underlying issue in at least some instances of human injustice is the lack of access to basic ecological goods and a fundamental disjunction between human beings and the natural world.

The link between ecology and development in terms of a more positive shape for justice-making is set forth in Roman Catholic Social Teaching through the development of the idea of human ecology. This may be explored for illustrative purposes, and despite some obvious caveats, alongside work done in many other traditions and in the context of the World Council of Churches in their ecumenical conversations on environmental topics. Where and why did ecological issues come onto the agenda in Roman Catholic social thought? Many ecotheologians have ignored such social teaching entirely and have assumed that it is problematically tainted by a supposedly anthropocentric bias. I believe that it is far, far more complicated than this, in that the retrieval of Catholic Social Teaching lends itself to high impact, even if idealistically speaking some elements may be more anthropocentric than desirable from a strictly ecological hermeneutic. In a recent survey, Donald Dorr lays out

[24] J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[25] I have attempted to explore the significance of her work for environmental ethics in C. Deane-Drummond, 'Deep Incarnation and Eco-justice as Theodrama', in S. Bergmann and H. Eaton (eds.), *Ecological Awareness: Exploring Religion, Ethics and Aesthetics* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011), pp. 193–206.

some of the complexities associated with this issue, though, it seems to me, he opts rather too readily for an interpretation of official Roman Catholic church teaching as anthropocentric, with more radical versions left to liberation theologians such as Leonardo Boff.[26]

I suggest that there are particular reasons why Pope John Paul II became concerned with ecological issues, and an important one was the link between ecology and development that he perceived perhaps rather sooner than many others.[27] This allowed him to develop his particular interpretation of human ecology. In commenting on the value of preserving the natural habitat of other species, he comments that 'too little effort is made to safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology'.[28] He draws on this term, which was originally developed by social scientists,[29] in order to stress the importance of considering what he believes are the ontological conditions needed for human flourishing. In this way he can claim that 'man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed.'[30] He is therefore reinforcing one of the traditional aspects of Catholic social teaching, namely, that there is an ontological basis for moral law that is rooted in the doctrine of creation. Further, he suggests that it is the violation of this law that is the most fundamental cause of the ecological crisis.

The ideas that he developed in earlier encyclicals, such as *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus*, in relation to ecology are summarized in a useful way in *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), so I am citing it more fully here:

> As one called to till and look after the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), man has a specific responsibility towards the environment in which he

[26] D. Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2nd edn, 2012). For a more detailed engagement with this book, see C. Deane-Drummond, 'Review of Donald Dorr's *Option for the Poor and for the Earth*', *Studies in Christian Ethics* (forthcoming).

[27] I have made a case for this in C. Deane-Drummond, 'Joining in the Dance: Ecology and Roman Catholic Social Teaching', *New Blackfriars* 93 (2012), pp. 193–212.

[28] Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1991), section 38. Italics original. See also http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_ jp-ii_ enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html (accessed 27 March 2013). Further quotations in the text above refer to this text.

[29] See, for example, A. Hawley, *Human Ecology: A Theory of Community Structure* (New York: Ronald Press, 1950); W. R. Catton, 'Foundations of Human Ecology', *Sociological Perspectives* 37 (1994), pp. 75–95. I am grateful to my former doctoral student Peter Conley for drawing particular attention to the term 'human ecology' in the writing of Pope John Paul II.

[30] Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, section 38.

> lives, towards the creation which God has put at the service of his personal dignity, of his life, not only for the present but also for future generations. It is the ecological question – ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of different species of animals and other forms of life to "human ecology" properly speaking – which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life. In fact the dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to use and misuse, or dispose of things as one pleases. The limitation imposed from the beginning by the Creator himself and expressed symbolically by the prohibition not to eat of the fruit of the tree (cf. Gen 2:16-17) shows clearly enough that, when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated without impunity.[31]

It is therefore hardly surprising that in Pope Benedict XVI's World Day of Peace message of 2007, he cites *Centesimus Annus* in affirming an ecology of nature existing alongside 'a "human" ecology, which in turn demands a "social" ecology'.[32] Importantly, there is a close parallel made between ecological flourishing and human flourishing, so setting forth a vision of what justice requires. It implies, then, not just environmental justice, that is, concern with the disproportional negative environmental impacts on the poorest of the poor, but ecological justice as well, that is, concern for the well-being of other creatures.

Hence, when it comes to *Caritas in Veritate*, the most recent encyclical dedicated to a discussion of authentic development, it is not really surprising that ecological issues gain the attention that is very clearly in evidence here. Any suggestion, however, that a discussion of environmental issues in this encyclical marks a break from the past is misguided, such as talk that Benedict XVI was a 'green Pope', for he was faithful to his promise to build on the work of Pope John Paul II. But perhaps the reason he has been given this name is that he allowed the Vatican State to become the first carbon neutral state in

[31] Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (encyclical letter, 25 March 1995), section 42, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html (accessed 27 March 2013); John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1995).

[32] Pope Benedict XVI, 'The Human Person, The Heart of Peace' (World Day of Peace message, 1 January 2007), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace_en.html (accessed 27 March 2013).

the world by installing solar panels on the roof of the Vatican.[33] It is ethical practice, in other words, that has caught the world's attention, even though Pope John Paul II laid the theological foundation for ecological responsibility. And it is attention to practices that the most recent Pope Francis emphasizes in a way that is uniting across religious traditions in a way that creedal statements are not.

Pope Benedict XVI was known for his sharply critical approach towards philosophical and ethical relativism in the Western world, including, for example, forms of scientific naturalism that promote ideas in which 'nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism'.[34] Rather, 'it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a "grammar" which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation'.[35] Understanding the natural world as the work of the Creator then promotes its proper treatment, though he still put an emphasis on the 'use' of the created world, rather than on its co-celebration in a way that still, it seems to me, falls short of the more open approach adopted by Pope John Paul II, who was known to draw on the natural world for his meditative experience of God.[36] Yet, like John Paul II, Benedict XVI understood the natural world as an expression of God's 'design of love and truth' and the natural basis on which human life depends, given as a gift of God to humanity. Benedict XVI was, however, much more explicit in spelling out the specific ethical dangers in a turn to nature expressed as a new pantheism, as well as arguing against the technological domination already noted by Pope John Paul II. For Benedict XVI, both these notions lead to distorted forms of development.

At this point, it is worth mentioning another feature of theological discussion of environmental ethics that is distinctive, and follows from further reflection on the theme of justice, namely, the idea of environmental

[33] See 'Vatican Solar Panels Installed', *Cath News* (30 September 2008), http://www.cathnews.com/article.aspx?aeid=9227 (accessed 27 March 2013).

[34] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (encyclical letter, 29 June 2009), section 48, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html (accessed 27 March 2013); also Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2009).

[35] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, section 48.

[36] His own reflective approach to the natural world comes through in some of his messages to general audiences, such as the one delivered on 26 January 2000. John Paul II, 'General Audience', http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20000126_en.html (accessed 27 March 2013).

degradation as a sin against God. The ecumenical patriarchate His Holiness Bartholomew I insists on *metanoia*, a turning away from practices that harm the natural environment and a turning to Christ, as in the joint statement with Pope John Paul II.[37]

It is the moral imperative to act that is perhaps one of the most distinctive aspects of Christian theological approaches to environmental ethics. It may be one reason why this aspect has been the imperative of the Pope elected in March 2013. Pope Francis, in coming from a Latin American context, is familiar with the degradation associated with extreme poverty and the environmental pressures that reinforce disparities between the richest and poorest members of human societies. He has deliberately laid out his intention to work for peace, to be in solidarity with those that are poor and to work for care for creation. His homily at the beginning of his Petrine ministry, at his inaugural Mass on 19 March 2013, identified the protecting presence of Joseph with the need to protect each other and to protect creation.[38] But, like Pope John Paul II, and Francis of Assisi who inspires his vision, the root of this call is his commitment to Christ. For Pope Francis, this call to be protectors of creation is an opening to hope, a faith that presents a hope against hope, so:

> To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope!

He then invites all to share in this ministry of hope to which he himself is called, 'so that the star of hope will shine brightly' and we may 'protect with love all that God has given us'.

So, while it is impossible to predict with any accuracy how the current pontiff will direct his energies, the trajectory of Catholic Social Teaching points in the same direction that Pope Francis has indicated will inform his ministry. Further, the message of valuing the earth as God's gift—the foundation of

[37] 'Common Declaration of John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew I: Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics' (10 June 2002), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration_en.html (accessed 27 March 2013).

[38] Pope Francis, 'Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, Homily of Pope Francis' (Saint Peter's Square, 19 March 2013), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato_en.html (accessed 3 April 2013).

the common good of all and of each—and a call for repentance, alongside a message of hope, counter the tendency for despair and anxiety that threaten meaningful responses to climate change. In the year dedicated to faith, the challenge for the Church relates as much to faith in God's providential and continued care over creation as to individual human relationships with one another. But if Catholic Social Teaching is followed, then God's providential care comes to be expressed through human agency that is in alignment with treating the earth as precious and as a universal gift for each other, both now and for future generations.

Of course in naming environmental degradation as sin, we first have to recognize our guilt. Ernst Conradie, for example, writing from a Reformed perspective, speaks eloquently about the specific need to recognize our guilt in relation to climate impacts.[39] Recognition is not always easy, since how we act day by day leads to imperceptible changes that then impact on our climate. I have therefore suggested the need for a new term called 'anthropogenic evil', or more explicitly, sin, which recognizes the anthropogenic element in climate impacts, following the scientific terminology of anthropogenic impacts used by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change.[40]

But here we need to ask whether contemplation and appreciation of the natural world as gift, and recognition of the importance of just practices and injustices through human sin are sufficiently comprehensive. Climate change is a good example of the kind of ethical dilemma that is extremely complex and requires, I suggest, an even wider range of perspectives if we are to have any hope of arriving at an adequate response. A Christian approach to virtue ethics lays the ground for a flexible approach to the difficult dilemmas faced in complex environmental issues such as climate change and it elaborates a distinctive Christian ethos. Christian reflection on hope, along with other important virtues such as faith, charity, humility, temperance and prudence, marks a distinctive approach to developing environmental virtues compared with secular alternatives. Behind such a hope is faith in God's providential care, but such care is not to be divorced from taking human responsibility for

[39] E. M. Conradie, 'Confessing Guilt in the Context of Climate Change', in Bergmann and Eaton (eds.), *Ecological Awareness*, pp. 77–96.

[40] C. Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), pp. 116–18. The topic of sin is also addressed in other places in this volume; see in particular in Ernst Conradie's contribution.

how we act. My own preference is to use practical wisdom, or prudence, as a way of discerning how we might decide what it means to act justly, to love sincerely, or to express temperance while allowing for generosity.[41] But courage in the face of adversity, or fortitude, is also going to become increasingly relevant as we face the need not just for attempting to stave off climate change but also for adapting to its accelerating impacts. All such accounts of virtues imply that underlying the Christian approach to moral issues is a distinctive moral vision that is also reflected in a deontology that is perhaps peculiar to Christian communities. A Christian constructive theology, or, perhaps more accurately, reconstructive theology, lays out the framework or borders within which such distinctive virtues and visions are developed. However, it would be a mistake to see the building of a Christian ethos as a form of rule-book ethics; rather, it is more like a reflexive response that is also shaped by experiences in and encounters with the natural world in the setting of particular human communities as much as a rediscovery of resonant traditions.

Towards a new ethos: Developing theologically informed ecological ethics

I will suggest here just a few approaches that might be helpful to develop in order to elaborate a new ethos for our time:

(1) *Liturgical transformation*: It is here that I think that a Christian approach to environmental ethics can shine forth even stronger by witnessing to alternative communities in their liturgy and practical ethics. Those ancient liturgies that insisted on creaturely participation in the praise and joy in God need to be reclaimed and celebrated, along with new ones designed for a contemporary context.[42] Alongside this, we need to find appropriate means to confess our guilt to one another and to God, not as a way of removing responsibility but in order to acknowledge our share in the failure of human societies to live up to environmental ideals.

[41] I have developed the idea of prudence or practical wisdom in a range of ethical contexts in C. Deane-Drummond, *The Ethics of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

[42] See also the contribution of Crina Gschwandtner in this volume.

(2) *Global and local ecclesial responsibility*: Once environmental consciousness seeps into our religious experience on a regular basis, we can expect the kind of changes in attitudes that are desirable on a local and global scale. Those churches that have a universal reach have a particular responsibility to represent a Christian theological view in the *global* public sphere. But the ecumenical mandate of all Christian communities is to work together at a *local* level to build ecologically responsible forms of flourishing.

(3) *Practical steps in individual responsibility*: A first simple step is through being more self-conscious about the kind of food that we eat and its ecological footprint.[43] There are, of course, other decisions where we can make a difference, including being more aware of the overall energy we consume. Some may feel a sense of responsibility to work at ameliorating structural sin by working with non-government organizations or other forms of political advocacy.[44]

(4) *Reforming university policy making*: Many of us work in educational contexts, and here we may find scope to make a difference in practice, perhaps through building or recycling schemes. Of course, such practices are not enough. The point is that they flag up in a significant way the need to pay attention to these issues more seriously. If such shifts in local practice are used rather like environmental indulgences to relieve guilt without proper attention to structural sin, then they may do more harm than good.

(5) *Building a collective conscience*: By this I mean an awareness of what the communities in which we are placed assume as the norm for moral action. Once we are aware of these, there will be some that need to be challenged. It might include, for example, as in the Western world collectively, the dominant assumption of the validity of an unbridled market economy in the name of freedom. Collective conscience is more than just collective consciousness, as it is about moral norms that are shared at different community levels. I believe that building a collective conscience that is self-consciously more environmentally aware is essential if complex problems such as climate change are going to be addressed. As Christians we have something important

[43] As, for example, in N. Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[44] For some examples of this practice see Deane-Drummond and Bedford Strohm (eds.), *Religion and Ecology*.

to contribute to what conscience means and how to foster sensitivity to it at individual and collective levels.[45]

(6) *Building global and multi-religious perspectives*: While the focus of this collection of essays is on a more explicit Christian perspective, many authors have, correctly, in my view, entered into the territory of inter-religious dialogue in order to point the way for a global ethic that aims to be more universal in scope across different religious boundaries. Larry Rasmussen has managed to achieve this goal in his most recent work.[46] In this he takes an imaginative leap into the world of the Hebrew Bible, taking up the narrative of the Song of Songs in order to situate what he believes is a more hospitable type of Christian theology. His scope is also vast, taking in economic and political issues as well as different religious traditions. At times, though, the distinctive voice of the Christian approach seems somewhat muted, its particularity and historical character dwarfed by the grand new creation stories emerging from particular readings of cosmic evolutionary theory as different religious traditions. Yet, in as far as he has stressed the need for hospitality with other religious traditions, and welcomed their insights in a way that generates a global religious ethos for environmental ethics, he shows the way forward for further discussion and comment.

But it is the environmentally sensitive practices of Christians and their witness to a different kind of lifestyle that will, perhaps, speak louder than words or visionary dreams, in building a Christian ethos in a way that is faithful to Christian creeds yet at the same time communicates to those with other religious faiths, or none, the central importance of ecological responsibility.

[45] I have discussed this idea further in C. Deane-Drummond, 'A Case for Collective Conscience: Climategate, COP-15 and Climate Justice', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 24 (2011), pp. 5–22.

[46] See L. Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

10

Where May the Praise of God's Creatures Still Be Heard? Liturgy, Life and Land

Crina Gschwandtner

'All things sing God's praise, and give him glory with wordless voices. For God receives my thanks for all these things: so each of their songs becomes our hymn, for I make their hymnody my own!'

—Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 44

Does the land worship God? If yes, what might its worship mean for us? How does our own worship inform our attitude to the land and its creatures? In short, why might liturgy be an important concern for ecological theology? So far, liturgy has not really been a topic much considered by the theological literature reflecting on environmental issues. Most early ecological theology was primarily ethical in focus. More recently, ecofeminism and social or political ecology have contributed to the conversation. Slowly, more systematic theological considerations of ecological questions have also emerged, as the other contributions to this volume show. But worship or liturgy has not really figured prominently in the discussion. And yet liturgy is important for ecological reflection. After all, it deals with the lived experience of the church and often defines and shapes the practice of believers much more immediately than theological speculation does. Even those Christians who have little knowledge of theological doctrines or disputes generally participate on some level in Christian liturgical practices, whether sacramental rites, such as baptism or Eucharist, or attendance at worship services. Liturgical practice gives patterns to Christian life and endows it with meaning through symbol and ritual. Etymologically speaking, liturgy is the 'work of the people' and in

the ancient world designated public service and charity.[1] Liturgy describes and defines what the Christian people do as they come together, and therefore shapes their identity in manifold ways. It also has the most immediate impact on the Christian practices in which Christians engage outside of formal church attendance but which are generally connected in some form to their more deliberate liturgical practices (either because they are organized by the church, enjoined upon them by priest or pastor through homily or other injunction, or understood by the individual believer as a consequence or outflow of the worship experience). Liturgy shapes who we are as the people of God who gather in community. It hence has tremendous potential also for ecological reflection. If our everyday practices as Christians are shaped at least to some extent by our more deliberate liturgical practices of prayerful gathering, then even ecological practices can and should be rooted in liturgy.

This chapter will review the reflections on environmental or ecological issues by liturgical scholars or discussions of ecological theologians that make reference to liturgy in some form, focusing in particular on the discussion of the Sabbath as 'feast of creation'. It will then go on to discuss, on the one hand, the more general ways in which Christian liturgy as such can contribute to ecological theology and, on the other hand, how a particular liturgical tradition (Eastern Orthodoxy) might make more concrete suggestions rooted in its liturgical texts and practices. The chapter will conclude by exploring various options for further questions and directions for research in this area.

Liturgical theology and ecological theology

Liturgical theology is a fairly recent sub-discipline of theology. Although theologians occasionally referred to liturgical texts (and reflection on the Eucharist certainly has a long and rich tradition), liturgy has been considered as an important theological topic in its own right only since the pioneering work of liturgical scholars such as Alexander Schmemann in the mid-twentieth

[1] *Leitourgia* means 'common work' or 'work of the people' and in the ancient world designated public service and acts of charity by wealthy citizens on behalf of the state. See K. Irwin, *Context and Text* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), chapter 1, for a full explication of how this term came to be applied to early Christian liturgy.

century and the reconsiderations of liturgical forms and texts leading up to and following upon Vatican II. The discipline of liturgical theology is still divided to some extent between primarily historical research on early liturgical texts and practices and theological reflection upon liturgy and its meaning for Christian life. The former tries to re-establish original texts, to trace the emergence of particular practices and to describe early liturgical forms. The latter focuses more on contemporary liturgical practices and seeks to analyse their meaning and occasionally to criticize various aberrations in an attempt to remedy them. Neither approach has so far focused on the role of non-human creatures in liturgical texts and practices or tried to draw environmental implications from more general liturgical insights, although there has been some emphasis on the importance of sacred space in liturgical performance and occasionally it is pointed out that some liturgical cycles follow agricultural rhythms and that the Eucharistic elements are products of nature.[2] Only two brief studies reflect somewhat more explicitly on the ecological implications of liturgy. Lawrence Mick, a Catholic liturgical scholar, seeks to open a dialogue with ecology and to raise ecological awareness by examining the incarnation as a paradigm for 'embodied worship' and by giving practical suggestions for integrating natural elements into worship on particular occasions.[3] More recently, a very brief study designed for parish use by Benjamin Stewart considers ecological symbolism (water, food, care for the body, death) and its significance in the context of Lutheran worship.[4]

Ecological theology has also not expended much energy on analysing liturgy, although several texts call for a fuller study or point to its importance. Thus, Celia Deane-Drummond devotes one chapter to liturgy in her introductory text on ecological theology, in which she calls for a greater engagement with liturgy and suggests that the Orthodox liturgical tradition, as well as new creation liturgies, might have something to offer.[5] Denis Edwards, in a brief

[2] G. Lathrop most fully explores such themes of sacred space in his *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). See also H. P. Santmire's *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

[3] L. Mick, *Liturgy and Ecology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997). A Festschrift for H. Boone Porter with the promising title *Creation and Liturgy: Studies in Honor of H. Boone Porter*, edited by R. McMichael (Washington: Pastoral Press, 1993) focuses primarily on art and creativity, not on nature or environmental questions, although it does contain an interesting historical article on the Jewish offering of first fruits and their influence on Christian liturgy.

[4] B. Stewart, *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and the Earth's Ecology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2011).

[5] C. Deane-Drummond, *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology* (London: SCM Press, 1996), p. 85.

chapter entitled 'Worship and Practice', focuses primarily on the Eucharist.[6] Elizabeth Theokritoff's treatment of the ecological potential of the Orthodox tradition includes one chapter on liturgy and one on sacraments.[7] Freda Rajotte and Elizabeth Breuilly point to the importance of liturgy for a new theology of liberation in a consideration of the church's role in environmental action.[8] Drawing on tribal experience in the Philippines, Sean McDonagh gives examples of new liturgies of earth and fire.[9] Several other thinkers also call for new liturgical texts that would be more consciously inclusive of the earth and all its creatures.[10] More generally, sacramental language is often used in ecological texts, or a recovery of a sacramental attitude towards nature counselled. John Habgood contends that sacramental significance can be widened to include the rest of creation.[11] Many feminist scholars wish to treat the earth as a sacramental gift.[12] Elizabeth Johnson, for example, stresses that 'we need to appreciate all over again that the whole universe is a sacrament'.[13] Arthur Peacocke also argues for this larger sacramental vision grounded in the 'sacramental use of bread, wine, and water'. He appeals to Byzantine liturgy as particularly useful for recovery of this sense of the world as sacramental.[14] Indeed, several Orthodox thinkers stress this larger sacramental dimension.[15]

[6] D. Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006). There is also a chapter entitled 'Why We Worship' included in S. McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 101–20, but it contains no explicit consideration of liturgy.

[7] E. Theokritoff, *Living in God's Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

[8] Chapter 8 of E. Breuilly and M. Palmer (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology* (London: Cassell, 1992).

[9] S. McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth: A Call to a New Theology* (London: Cassell, 1986), pp. 161–68.

[10] E.g., M. Fox, 'Creation Mysticism and the Return of a Trinitarian Christianity', in M. Barnes (ed.), *An Ecology of the Spirit* (Lanham: Catholic Truth Society, 1994), pp. 61–73 (68). African tree-planting rituals are often cited as an example of such new liturgies. See M. L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers, Volume Two: Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1999), several essays in R. R. Ruether, *Women Healing Earth* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), such as the chapter 'The Gikuyu Theology of Land and Environmental Justice' by T. Hinga, pp. 172–84.

[11] J. Habgood, 'A Sacramental Approach to Environmental Issues', in C. Birch, W. Eakin and J. B. McDaniel (eds.), *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 46–53.

[12] For one example, see A. Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[13] E. A. Johnson, 'Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition', in Hessel and Ruether (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 3–21 (18).

[14] A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science* (Oxford: ClarendonPress, 1979), pp. 290, 298.

[15] E.g., D. Staniloae, 'The World as Gift and Sacrament of God's Love', *Sobornost* 5/9 (1969), pp. 662–73; N. Nissiotis, 'The Church as Sacramental Vision and the Challenge of Christian Witness', in G. Limouris (ed.), *Church, Kingdom, World: The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), p. 110.

Maybe the most significant, albeit fairly brief, discussion of a practice related to worship for its ecological implications is Jürgen Moltmann's consideration of the Sabbath as the feast of creation in his *God in Creation*.[16] This is not an exposition of liturgy as such, although he does briefly suggest at the end of the book that Christians might recover Jewish Sabbath traditions by reducing consumption on Sundays.[17] Moltmann argues that in Genesis the Sabbath is the crown of creation and that hence humans must join in the praise of all of creation. This is a sacramental task, in which humans offer praise on behalf of creation, as a vehicle for other creatures to adore God through them. Humans are those who 'prepare the feast of creation' as they participate in the 'joyful paean of God's creation'.[18] His treatment culminates in a final chapter on the Sabbath as feast of creation, in which he relies heavily on Jewish conceptions and practices, as outlined by Rosenzweig, Heschel and others. Moltmann's suggestion has been taken up by several other theologians and biblical scholars who propose recovering not only Sabbath practices but even such notions as the Jubilee year and point to the ecological and social dimensions of these ancient Jewish traditions. Michael Northcott draws extensively on the practices of the Sabbath and Jubilee years for his proposal of a new 'moral climate'.[19] Christoph Uehlinger affirms that 'the land itself is to keep sabbath for Yahweh' in order to be regenerated. Respect for the land is rooted in the Sabbath tradition.[20] Moltmann himself already points out that 'this "Sabbath year of the land" makes it clear that the Sabbath is not merely a feast for human beings. In the seventh year *the land* celebrates'.[21] Gabriele Dietrich and Sun Ai

[16] J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985). In his *Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World* (London: SCM Press, 1989) he speaks of *shalom* as 'hope of peace for all peoples and all creatures' (p. 40). The Sabbath as 'feast of creation' should be 'divine therapy', a celebration that restores harmony in the community of creation (82).

[17] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 296.

[18] Ibid., pp. 71, 190, 197.

[19] M. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007). Similarly, S. Clark affirms the importance of the Sabbath in his *How to Think about the Earth: Philosophical and Theological Models for Ecology* (London: Mowbray, 1993), p. 112. C. Deane-Drummond calls for living 'from the Sabbath' for transformation and renewal of the covenant at the conclusion of her *Eco-theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), p. 183.

[20] C. Uehlinger, 'The Cry of the Earth? Biblical Perspectives on Ecology and Violence', in L. Boff and E. Virgilio (eds.), *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995), pp. 41–57.

[21] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 289 (emphasis his). Clark also stresses that 'the land belongs to God – which is to say, not us – and is owed its Sabbaths. No more than animals or hired servants or any without human protectors may the land be exploited wholly for our profit. If we forget that iron rule (as, of course, we have forgotten it), we may justly expect expulsion'. See Clark, *How to Think*, p. 140.

Lee-Park call for policies and practices inspired by the Jubilee year in the case of India and Korea, respectively.[22] Often the appeal to Sabbath or Jubilee years has eschatological connotations and becomes linked to the prophetic vision of *shalom*, which is also interpreted to have great ecological potential.[23] Deane-Drummond claims that 'the hope for the future encouraged by an ecological spirituality is one which is rooted in the biblical concept of *shalom*, or right relationships of justice and peace', although she warns that a full instantiation of *shalom* is not possible.[24] In contrast, Northcott calls for such eschatological feasting: 'Perhaps one may imagine the conceptual language of preparation in terms of preparing for a joyous banquet, a wedding feast, or even better, preparing for the festive celebration of the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbath year and the year of Jubilee in anticipation of the wedding banquet of the Lamb that was slain, of the eschatological feast which we do not need to prepare because God has prepared it for us.'[25] Norman Wirzba also explores the meaning of the Sabbath for escaping the treadmill of constant work and consumerism and recovering a healthier, more holistic and more environmentally conscious way of living.[26] In fact, in the Jewish tradition the promise of '*shalom*' in particular has important messianic implications for the redemption and restoration of the land. It is often linked to the observance of the Sabbath in the promise that if one Sabbath is perfectly kept, the Messiah will come, the anticipation of the return of Elijah at the end of the Sabbath (e.g. in Jewish *havdalah* ceremonies), and in various Rabbinic commentaries about Sabbath practice that link it to an anticipation of the Messianic age.[27] In the Jewish tradition, some ecological writing is beginning to be grounded in this liturgical observation of the Sabbath. Unfortunately, Christian appropriations of the Sabbath often lose these liturgical connotations. The Sabbath as a biblical idea (but not a current

[22] See Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*, pp. 95, 113.

[23] See the extensive discussion in U. Duchrow and G. Liedke, *Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice, and Peace* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989).

[24] Deane-Drummond, *Handbook*, 146. See also her 'Living from the Sabbath: Developing an Ecological Theology in the Context of Biodiversity', in D. Edwards and M. Worthing (eds.), *Biodiversity and Ecology as Interdisciplinary Challenge* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2004), pp. 1–13. Gosling also warns that *shalom* is an important vision, which is 'celebrated in worship whereby Christians offer the world to God and pray that it might achieve its destiny', but not ultimately attainable. See D. Gosling, *A New Earth: Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Council of Churches, 1992), p. 9.

[25] Northcott, *Moral Climate*, p. 229.

[26] N. Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

[27] See L. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

practice) is read as having significant ethical implications, but is not explicitly linked to liturgy in any obvious way.[28]

There has been little explicit work, then, on the specific potential of Christian liturgy for ecological theology. David Gosling, summarizing the World Council of Churches process, says: 'Little has been said about worship, but there is a major task for the churches to express liturgically just about all of what has been said in these chapters. . . . the liturgical affirmation of the totality of all creation could have a revolutionary effect on conventional worship in terms of its content.'[29] One of the difficulties with liturgy is that it is hard to make general comments about it, as its practices differ greatly among the various Christian confessions. Eastern Orthodox liturgy has not changed much for several centuries, while many Protestant liturgical practices are relatively fluid although certain liturgical patterns are observable even in very extemporaneous evangelical services. Nevertheless these traditions appear to have little in common apart from celebrations of the Eucharist – and even these celebrations are understood very differently theologically. Talking about liturgy in the abstract or in the most general terms tends to lose much of its theological force and the resulting reflections lack specificity and make concrete applications much more difficult. A further difficulty is presented by the metaphorical language and symbolic dimension of liturgy. When the psalms – eminently liturgical texts – speak of mountains praising God or trees clapping their hands, are we to understand these natural phenomena as real 'characters' literally engaged in worship and what concrete environmental implications are we to draw from such statements?

These questions cannot all be resolved here, so I will merely indicate briefly how I handle them in this particular context. In regard to the diversity of liturgical traditions, I will seek to strike a balance by first making some general observations that apply broadly to all Christian liturgical practice as it is discussed in liturgical theology. I will then focus on one specific liturgical tradition – Eastern Orthodoxy – and explore how concrete ecological insight can be gained from this particular tradition and its liturgical texts and practices

[28] See my extensive critique of this appropriation of Sabbath language and attempt to rethink the relationship between Jewish and Christian traditions more carefully in 'Sabbath and Eighth Day: On the Messianic Dimensions of Ecological Practices', *Sobornost* 33/2 (2011), pp. 56–94.

[29] Gosling, *New Earth*, p. 102.

in the hope that this concrete example will provide inspiration for other scholars exploring the ecological potential of their own traditions. In regard to the second difficulty, I will here assume, following various theological and philosophical treatments of the issue, that metaphorical and symbolic language and action conveys meaning (often even a surplus of meaning).[30] While they need not and probably should not be taken literally, liturgical words and actions convey truth and open a poetic space, which we are invited to enter and to inhabit. This liturgical space is created through the words and actions of the liturgical practices and seeks to guide and even transform us as we enter into and participate within it. While its language may not be a factual statement in a scientific sense, it creates a universe of meaning where its words and actions signify and convey truthful insight. Just like the biblical texts, which, after all, are read within liturgical settings and have arisen out of them, liturgical texts and actions require careful interpretation and such interpretation occurs against the contemporary horizon of meaning of our lives and the world in which we live.[31] This world is one marked by ecological devastation and consequently environmental considerations are part and parcel of the universe of meaning that we bring to our interpretation of liturgy.

The ecological potential of liturgy: General insights

In the most general terms, Christian liturgy has ecological potential in terms of its uses of time, space and matter. Although their uses are not identical in all Christian traditions, some common patterns can be detected. The importance of material elements has already been mentioned above and is the aspect that has so far received the most attention. Sacramental actions involve material elements derived from nature: water, bread, wine, oil. The very physicality of sacramental practices connects us to the material world. This becomes even more vivid (and can certainly deliberately be made more evident) by performing baptisms outside in natural springs or rivers, celebrating harvest festivals, blessing fruits, flowers, grains and even animals,

[30] See especially G. Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[31] I explore and justify such a treatment of liturgical language more fully in my 'Toward a Ricoeurian Hermeneutics of Liturgy', *Worship* 86/6 (2012), pp. 482–505.

as is common at least in some traditions and has a rich history in the blessing of first fruits. Some early catechetical lectures also explicitly exhort the newly baptized to experience the Eucharist with all of their senses.[32] Liturgy involves the physicality and materiality of creation, both in our own bodies and in the many ways in which material objects become bearers of meaning within it. The materiality of liturgy is particularly obvious in its use of sacred space. Liturgy takes place within sacred space and hallows such space. At the same time its sanctifying movements go beyond the church or temple and affect all of space. Space is defined not only by the physical surroundings, such as the temple or church building, but by the movements the people undertake within it and the various aspects that define and demarcate this space (such as icons, pulpits, crosses).[33] Liturgical space functions as a microcosm of the larger universe. It is an intensified space, a holy piece of land, where matter and meaning are particularly dense.[34]

Similarly, time is an essential aspect of liturgy in several respects. On the one hand, liturgy has historically organized the times of the day, week and year in meaningful ways that depended to a large extent upon natural phenomena, such as sunset and sunrise or the seasons. This is most obvious for Easter/Pascha, the greatest feast of the Christian year, which early on was linked with spring and the renewal of life.[35] While the annual liturgical cycle of feasts and fasts is much more prominent in some liturgical approaches, they might profitably be recovered also in other traditions. In such recovery, much more explicit emphasis could be placed on the connection with nature, both on all the ways

[32] Cyril of Jerusalem tells them to wet their lips and anoint themselves on the forehead and the sense organs, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments* (ed. F. L. Cross; Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 23.21, p. 79.

[33] Several thinkers point to the ecological significance of icons and link it to a sacramental attitude toward all of material space. See E. Reed, 'Animals in Orthodox Iconography', in C. Deane-Drummond and D. Clough (eds.), *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals* (London: SCM Press, 2009), pp. 61–77 (62). C. Keller briefly appeals to icons and claims that they 'show the transfiguration of God's creation and material world and our place in this world relative to our salvation' in *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 93. The most extensive discussion of the 'ecological' potential of icons is J. Chryssavgis, *Beyond the Shattered Image* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 1999). Already John of Damascus clearly affirms the holiness of matter in his defence of icons: *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), especially pp. 29–30.

[34] This was a central insight of phenomenology and anthropology of religion (e.g. the work of M. Eliade), which identifies such 'thick' meaning of sacred space and time in many religious traditions.

[35] This is evident already in the earliest Easter homilies and is repeated by many subsequent homilies, festal letters, and by texts dealing with the controversies over the dating of Easter.

in which we are dependent upon it for sustenance and on the ways in which we are affecting and indeed destroying it. Fasts may serve as an occasion for us to hesitate in our unbridled participation in consumer culture and to become more conscious in our eating.[36] On the other hand, liturgy also treats time as a whole in a peculiar manner that is not strictly chronological. Schmemann was one of the first liturgical scholars to point to the eschatological dimension of the liturgy, which had often been read primarily as anamnetic (memorial) in character.[37] Although these two dimensions are particularly obvious in Eastern Orthodox liturgy, Western scholars increasingly affirm them of their own traditions. Liturgy hence has a peculiar relationship to time. On the one hand, it remembers events that happened chronologically long before the present celebration, such as Christ's suffering, death and resurrection or his institution of the Eucharist. On the other hand, liturgy anticipates events that are yet to come, such as the final consummation of all things and our participation in the angelic worship before the throne of God. These 'events' are not merely prior or posterior to the liturgical celebration in some strict chronological fashion. Rather they become present and real within the liturgical event. It is *now* that Christ is sacrificed for us, that we die with him and that we become one with him as he offers himself to God. The memorial is not merely remembered as a historical event within the liturgy but becomes present within the celebration. Similarly the eschaton is not merely anticipated as an event far in the future, but it is affirmed to break in and become real within the liturgy. Liturgical time hence overflows its temporal limitations and has the potential progressively to transform all of time.

If indeed the very time and space of liturgy are an anticipation and instantiation of the eschaton, then the eschatological hope of *shalom*, where all of life flourishes in the land and there is peace between creatures, is not a faint promise for a far-away future, but the very reality of liturgy. If within the liturgy we enter into the kingdom and make the kingdom real among us,

[36] Several Orthodox thinkers have pointed to the ecological potential of fasting (which refrains from eating animal products for almost half of the year). See I. Khalis, 'The Ecological Crisis: An Eastern Christian Perspective', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 22/4 (1978), pp. 193–211; K. Ware, 'Lent and the Consumer Society', in A. Walker and C. Carras (eds.), *Living Orthodoxy in the Modern World* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 64–84.

[37] A. Schmemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986); *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987); *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973).

then liturgy has profoundly ecological implications, because in it the heavenly paradise, the earth as God meant it and desires it, is to become the very reality of our lives and actions.

A final broader insight that applies to most Christian traditions concerns the use of Scripture, which is generally read in the context of worship and informs its language. What Scripture has to say about the human being and all of creation is not a separate theological insight but is heard within and shapes the liturgical occasion. The environmental insights biblical scholars have uncovered in the biblical texts, such as the centrality of the land for the Hebrew people or the prophetic concern about ecological and not solely social injustice, hence have their proper place also in liturgical proclamation and not merely in personal or scholarly study.[38] In fact, biblical scholars have focused explicitly on the role of the land, relying on various texts that speak of the importance of the land, affirm the land as a gift of God, show how the land is corrupted by sin and a significant locus of God's care, and point to the promise of the restored land in prophetic literature. Preaching and catechetical teaching can further elaborate on such insights within the liturgical setting, of which homiletics and catechesis are a natural and important part. To give one example: the prophet Joel speaks of a locust plague, an environmental event that has devastated his community, and draws from it theological lessons for concrete behaviour. Homilists have frequently employed this biblical text to describe devastation of the land and exhort people to greater charity and care for the poor. For example, Gregory of Nazianzus laments: 'Wretched indeed is the sight of the ground devastated, cleared and shorn of its ornaments, over which the blessed Joel wails, as he contrasts with its former beauty its final disorder, and thus discourses on the anger of the Lord when he smites the land: before him is the garden of Eden, behind him a desolate wilderness'. He applies this throughout to the situation of his listeners: 'Alas! What a spectacle! Our prolific crops reduced to stubble, the seed we sowed is recognized by scanty remains, and our harvest, the approach of which we reckon from the number of the months, instead of from the ripening of the corn, scarcely bears the first fruits for the Lord'.[39] These homilies are important

[38] See N. Habel and P. Trudinger (eds.), *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2008) for studies of such biblical texts.

[39] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily* 16.6, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume Seven* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), pp. 249, 253.

examples that Patristic literature is not oblivious to environmental issues, even if they did not face global climate change. When more local environmental disasters affected their communities, they did not remain silent. And while their primary concern certainly is the impact on people, these people were far more closely connected to the land, and their description of the devastated land shows familiarity with and concern for the natural environment. Indeed, it is fairly obvious that humans are seen as part of creation in the biblical and Patristic literature and not as over and against the rest of creation as in much contemporary thinking.[40]

The ecological potential of liturgy: Specific contributions from Orthodox liturgy

The Orthodox tradition is often regarded as being particularly ecologically minded, especially in regard to its liturgy.[41] Some Orthodox scholars have more explicitly appealed to this notion of cosmic liturgy to argue for an environmental ethic in the Orthodox tradition. Chryssavgis, for example, says: 'The world in its entirety forms part of the liturgy of heaven . . . the world constitutes a cosmic liturgy' and this has explicit ecological implications for him.[42] Most prominently, His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has organized many environmental symposia and spoken on behalf of greater environmental action.[43] He and other Orthodox thinkers, such as Zizioulas, Chryssavgis and Ware, often appeal to a line in the liturgy that speaks of 'lifting

[40] One particularly beautiful example is Gregory of Nazianzus's homily 'New Sunday' (the first Sunday after Pascha), which describes the beginning of spring and moves smoothly back and forth between plant, animal and human activities that characterize this season. Another example is the great creation Psalm 104, which depicts God's care for all creatures of the earth without making qualitative differences between humans and other creatures. This psalm is chanted as the opening of Orthodox vespers (the evening service).

[41] Several Western scholars point to the ecological potential of Orthodox theology and liturgy. See, Moltmann's works, also Northcott, *Moral Climate*, pp. 78–9, 193, 210–11; Gosling, *New Earth*, pp. 61–6; and W. Granberg-Michaelson, *Redeeming the Creation: The Rio Earth Summit* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1992), pp. 53–5. Deane-Drummond devotes an entire chapter to Eastern Orthodox approaches in *Eco-theology*, pp. 56–68. For the most recent sources, see J. Chryssavgis and B. V. Foltz (eds.), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[42] J. Chryssavgis, 'The World of the Icon and Creation: An Orthodox Perspective on Ecology and Pneumatology', in Hessel and Ruether (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 83–96 (87).

[43] Many of these addresses are collected in *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (ed. J. Chryssavgis; New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

up all things' to God as a liturgical justification for an Orthodox ecological task that humans are to exercise on behalf of all of creation.[44] This notion of humans as priests who work on behalf of creation and 'humanize' it or 'lift it up' to the divine has become the primary Orthodox 'contribution' to the ecological debate.[45] Efthimiou claims that 'these words from the liturgy capture the heart of the Orthodox vision and understanding of our relationship to both creation and the creator'.[46] Humans are taken to have a liturgical function in regard to the entire cosmos. At the same time, this implies that all of creation is centred on the human who stands on the dividing line between spiritual and physical, infinite and finite, as the microcosm in which everything is summed up.[47] It is not at all clear, however, what concrete environmental tasks are to flow from this role and how concretely such 'lifting up' or 'humanizing' of creation is to occur (or even what it means). Nor is it self-evident that 'humanizing creation' is necessarily a benign or helpful activity.[48] As Theokritoff has also pointed out, this stress on the human priestly activity is fairly recent and not without its difficulties.[49] Instead of exploiting this notion further, I will sketch briefly some other ways in which liturgical texts and practices already make space for all of life and explore some of their potential.

The most significant role all earthly and heavenly creatures, including the land, play in liturgy is in their praise of God. This is obvious not only in the

[44] See K. Ware, 'The Value of Material Creation', *Sobornost* 6/3 (1971), pp. 154–65; 'Ecological Crisis, Ecological Hope: Our Orthodox Vision of Creation' (Annual Orthodoxy in America Lecture; delivered at Fordham University, 2005); *Through the Creation to the Creator* (London: Friends of the Centre Papers, 1997).

[45] John Zizioulas is probably the strongest proponent of this interpretation and has written on it most extensively. See his 'Preserving God's Creation', in Breuilly and Palmer (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 47–64; 'Priest of Creation', in R. Berry (ed.), *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), pp. 273–90.

[46] M. B. Efthimiou, 'Orthodoxy and the Ecological Crisis', in D. G. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from North and South* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 92–5.

[47] This is deeply rooted in Maximus' articulation of the human as microcosm, an ancient idea (already present in Plato), which reaches its most elaborate form in Maximus. For a useful summary of this notion and its impact on Orthodox reflection on ecology, see Theokritoff, *God's Creation*, pp. 51–70 and A. Louth, 'Between Creation and Transfiguration: The Environment in the Eastern Orthodox Perspective', in D. G. Horrell et al. (eds.), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), pp. 211–22.

[48] R. Page is fairly critical of the notion but also affirms that the fulfilment of creation is reached in praise, in *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1996), pp. 162, 172. Moltmann employs the idea positively, but attempts to eliminate its heavy anthropocentric connotations in *God in Creation*, 197. E. M. Conradie is particularly critical of the idea of humans as microcosm or priests of creation in *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 53, 210. T. Hiebert also rejects the idea of priestly vocation in favour of a more agrarian model. See his essay 'The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in Christian Tradition', in Hessel and Ruether (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology*, pp. 135–54 (144).

[49] Theokritoff, *God's Creation*, p. 216.

psalms but frequently reiterated within Orthodox liturgical texts. At most important liturgical occasions, the heavens and earth, stars and planets, animals and plants, oceans and plains, mountains and hills, are affirmed to praise God for whatever theological event is being celebrated. During the paschal season, the liturgy says repeatedly: 'For meet it is that the Heavens should rejoice, and that the earth should be glad, and that the whole world, both visible and invisible should keep the feast'; 'Let all creation, therefore, celebrate the arising of Christ' or 'Let the heavens be glad, let all creation celebrate; the Lord is risen'.[50] The feast of Nativity (Christmas) similarly exhorts: 'Let all creation rejoice exceedingly: for the Creator now makes Himself to be created' and affirms that 'the whole creation leaps with joy . . . let all creation sing and dance for joy, for Christ has come to restore it'. Various creatures (seas, mountains, hills, rivers, sun, etc.) celebrate in active ways: by singing, leaping, clapping hands, keeping feast, blessing, dancing or being amazed. Patristic homilies also often stress this in colourful language. Proclus of Constantinople, for example, consistently points to this praise of creation: 'And the earth celebrates for having been washed in his divine blood. And the sea celebrates for having been honoured by the feet of Christ himself. And let every person celebrate for being born anew through water and the Holy Spirit.'[51] John of Thessalonica, in a very early homily for the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, claims that 'a fitting hymn of honour, praise and glory is always due, from every creature under heaven'.[52] Jacob of Serug describes this in great detail in a poetic homily for the same feast:

> They saw heaven discharging multitudes of hosts
> and the air was utterly sanctified with sweet fragrance.
> New sounds were heard from all the birds;
> which were chanting in ranks according to their natures.
> All living creatures made a joyful sound of praise in their places;
> all the earth was stirred by their shouts of joy.
> The heavens and the mountains and all the plains which were adorned,
> broke forth in praise when the virginal body was being laid in the grave.
> All living creatures made a joyful sound of praise in their places;

[50] From the liturgical texts for Pascha, Bright Week, and the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman.
[51] Proclus, *Homilies*, 175.
[52] Quoted in B. Daley (ed.), *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), p. 47.

all the earth was stirred by their shouts of joy.
All trees with their fruits and produce
were sprinkled with dew, the sweet fragrance of their gladness.
All the flowers which were beautiful in their variety,
sent forth perfume like sweet spices sending forth fragrance.
The waters and the fish and all creeping things within the sea,
were aware of this day and were moved to praise.
All creatures silent or eloquent,
according to their natures rendered the praise which was due.[53]

Humans join in this universal praise that is voiced by all creatures. On occasion it is even implied that non-human creatures serve as an example for humans or 'cue' them for appropriate response to God, especially when humans have obviously missed the point. This is particularly prevalent in the liturgical texts for Good Friday and Holy Saturday, where various aspects of creation are repeatedly affirmed to react in trembling, fear and awe, while humans do not grasp the weight of the event: 'The creation was in anguish, seeing Thee crucified. Mountains and rocks were split from fear, the earth quaked, and hell was despoiled; the light grew dark in daytime, beholding Thee, O Jesus, nailed in the flesh' (Great Canon). Many Patristic homilies similarly set this reaction of creation before their hearers:

Therefore, just as in the case of a royal death all the joyous radiance of the cities is banished,
thus also today the whole creation denied its own joyous radiance.
Heaven clothed itself in the black garment of darkness.
The sun, like a slave loving his master, fled, having drawn in its rays.
The stars brought their natural order into disarray.
The temple rent its cloak in sorrow.
The earth, wailing, did not strike her arms, but cleft the rocks.[54]

Theokritoff interprets these texts as giving creation an explicitly pedagogical function.[55] It is also implied by many liturgical texts and practices that the liturgical action has a real effect on all of creation and not just on human beings.

[53] Jacob of Serug, *On the Mother of God* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), p. 96.
[54] Proclus, *Homilies*, 160. Proclus actually explicitly addresses the various natural 'characters' in a homily and questions them about why they responded as they did and engages in dialogue with them (see *Hom.* 13).
[55] Theokritoff, *God's Creation*, pp. 166, 175–76.

All of creation is sanctified and redeemed. This is probably clearest in the feast of Theophany, which celebrates Christ's baptism in the Jordan and now includes the 'Great Blessing of Waters', where water is blessed within the liturgy, both large tubs inside the church and running streams or rivers outside. Evil and pollution are expelled as Christ sanctifies the waters through the descent of God's Spirit.[56] All of creation is hallowed through this blessing. The same blessing is invoked at each ceremony of baptism and indeed similar blessings are spoken on many other occasions over flowers (Dormition), fruit (Transfiguration) and fields, houses, and various material items. On some level, then, all of creation is affirmed to be part of the process of salvation. Proclus frequently stresses that the redemptive action celebrated within the liturgy has real effects on the rest of creation: 'Heaven is new, which he who descended, blessed with his ascension. Earth is new, which he who was born in the manger in the flesh, sanctified. The sea is new, that held up feet which flesh did not engender, nor sin weigh down. Life is new, which he delivered from war, and filled with calmness. Mankind is new, which he cleansed through water, and tested with the fire of the Spirit.'[57] Humans, then, are not the sole focus of redemption. The presence of evil (whether caused by human beings or present through some other agency) is cleansed from nature and it becomes the locus of God's revelation. As creation 'groans' on behalf of and with God's children for redemption, so it rejoices in their and its own redemption. Paulos Mar Gregorios affirms that 'humanity is redeemed *with* the created order, not *from* it'.[58]

The redemption of all of creation is phrased in a variety of ways within the liturgical texts. Pascha 're-opens' paradise and 'unites' things on earth with those in heaven. Christ's suffering 'cleanses' the creation. In his ascension, the separation between heaven and earth is overcome, as earth is carried into

[56] There is much controversy in the wider literature over whether sin is a purely human phenomenon, but many scholars contend that human sin does affect the rest of creation.

[57] Proclus, *Homilies*, pp. 171–2.

[58] He grounds this in the incarnation: Christ 'took matter into himself, so matter is not alien to him now. His body is a material body – transformed, of course, but transformed matter. Thus he shares his being with the whole created order: animals and birds, snakes and worms, flowers and seeds. All parts of creation are now reconciled to God. Sun and moon, planets and stars, pulsars and black holes – as well as planet earth – are to participate in that final consumption of the redemption'. See P. M. Gregorios, 'New Testament Foundations for Understanding the Creation', in C. Birch, W. Eakin and J. B. McDaniel (eds.), *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), pp. 37–45 (41, 43); emphases his.

heaven in Christ's ascended flesh. In the Dormition of the Virgin, the heavens 'bend down and touch the earth', leading to a transfiguration of the world and restoration of life via the bridge created between heaven and earth. The whole universe, according to St Andrew of Crete, is 'renewed and restored to itself'.[59] Indeed, several patristic homilies affirm that the Dormition sanctifies and hallows the elements: water, earth, air, fire and ether.[60] Christ's transfiguration 'sanctifies the whole earth' and 'redeems the world from transgression'. This is the reason why all God's creatures rejoice: 'Creation rejoiced when it heard of its transformation from corruption to incorruptibility; the mountain was filled with delight, the fields were joyful, the villages sang songs of praise; the nations came together, the peoples were exalted; the seas chanted hymns, the rivers clapped their hands . . . the hills leapt, the deserts bloomed, the roads helped travelers along; all things were unified, all things were filled with joy.'[61] In the liturgy, all God's creatures celebrate together because all of them are included in God's care and redemptive purposes. Our human worship participates in this larger cosmic liturgy.

Future directions

The most obvious implication for further research is to explore the ecological potential of other liturgical traditions and the various ways in which liturgical traditions can inform and interact with each other. In traditions that are characterized by less liturgical stability and greater fluidity, consciously ecological texts and actions may well be integrated into the liturgical practice. Even in more static traditions new liturgical options can be explored, such as the Orthodox service for the environment instituted and commissioned by Patriarch Dimitrios in 1989 or the various tree-planting ceremonies by Sephardic Jews in conjunction with *Tu B'Sh'vat* (New Year for Trees). More thinking is necessary in regard to liturgy's potential to shape action, including the possible connections between liturgy and ascetic and ethical practices,

[59] In M. Cunningham (ed.), *Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), p. 198.
[60] Daley, *Dormition*, pp. 117, 138–39, 196, 214–15, 256.
[61] Anastasius of Sinai, in B. Daley (ed.), *Light on the Mountain: Greek Patristic and Byzantine Homilies on the Transfiguration of the Lord* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), p. 176.

as well as spirituality more generally. What are concrete ways in which liturgy would propel us to act on behalf of the land? In what ways is liturgy affirmative of all of life and what specific practices flow naturally out of such a conviction? Finally, the theological implications of the liturgies explored above are weighty and must be thought through much more fully. If really all of creation participates in praise of God and is redeemed and sanctified together with humans, what does this mean for our doctrines of anthropology, Christology, hamartology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and eschatology? Are incarnation, redemption, sanctification, deification inclusive of all of life and the land? Several of the other chapters in this volume try to address these questions, but their insights must be brought together with the liturgical realities. We must actually begin to live them – in the hope that the praise of God's creatures may still be heard in our liturgies.

11

Where Do We Go from Here? Methodology, Next Steps, Social Change

Heather Eaton

The field of theology and ecology is expanding in multiple directions in most parts of the world. It forms part of a larger transformation as societies, and their religious traditions, address ecological issues. My task is to discuss some of the methodological differences in this global work on religion, theology and ecology, and suggest future directions.

Religion and Ecology: An overview

Only a few decades ago, not many were convinced there is an ecological crisis, and fewer still could see a link with religion. Yet, from the 1970s to the present, extraordinary efforts have succeeded in establishing an alliance of religion and ecology, and mainly within the last ten years, and predominantly with multi-religious initiatives. The Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), founded by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, is the largest international multi-religious and multidisciplinary project. It has involved countless scholars, educators, and religious leaders and dozens of local, national and international conferences and consultations. They published an exemplary series on religions of the world and ecology. FORE is active with the Parliament of the World's Religions, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Watch Institute, and is involved with the Earth Charter Initiative, the Emerging Earth Community and the award-winning Journey of the

Universe project.[1] The FORE website is an exceptional resource on religion and ecology.

Since 2005 the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment has been active with publications and conferences in the various historical, political, cultural and geographical European contexts. This is also an interdisciplinary and multi-religious organization, with an educational website and a book series entitled Studies in Religion and the Environment, publishing in both English and German with Sigurd Bergmann as the series editor.[2]

The Asian Pacific Centre for the Integral Study of Life is a multicultural, multi-linguistic, multi-religious and multidisciplinary initiative under the guidance of Kim Yong Bock. It involves the Integral Study of Life, from distinct vantage points, cultures and disciplines, benefiting from Korean, Japanese, Chinese and English languages. The optic is to highlight a dynamic understanding of cultural life and identity. The academic aspect involves a study of interactive modes for transformation towards a new identity and a new diversity for integral life on Earth.

With respect to multi-religious organizations, there are also the modest efforts of the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology, which has been involved since 2004 in public events, workshops, publications and a book in progress on a method for religion and ecology that is based in the elements of air, water, fire, Earth and metals.

Since 2006, the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture (ISSRNC) has launched a scholarly effort of critical inquiry into the relationships among humanity and their diverse cultures, environments, religious beliefs and practices. ISSRNC provides a journal, conferences, a newsletter and a network of international and multidisciplinary scholars.[3]

Outside of academia there are countless organizations originating from religious groups. One is the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), with Kate and Geoff Davies, and now a large staff. Another

[1] For the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, see http://www.fore.research.yale.edu; for Emerging Earth Community, see http://www.emergingEarthcommunity.org; for Journey of the Universe, see http://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org; for the Earth Charter Initiative, see http://www.Earthcharterinaction.org.

[2] For the European Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment, see http://www.hf.ntnu.no/relnateur.

[3] For the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, see http://www.religionandnature.com/society/history.htm.

is Interfaith Power and Light (United States), the brainchild of Sally Bingham, active in most states.[4] These and other similar organizations are media savvy, with extensive educational internet resources, documents, and videos, and on Facebook and Twitter. All of these ventures come from individuals with vision, determination, effort and generosity, rather than from formal institutions.

There are multiple robust efforts addressing religion and ecology from diverse organizations: The Earth Charter, the Alliance of Religion and Conservation and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. Within institutions such as the Parliament of Religions of the World, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Wildlife Fund, the Women's Environment and Development Organization, the Global Peace Initiative of Women, the Worldwatch Institute and the World Bank there are sectors that align religion and ecological concerns. These examples indicate formal and multi-religious efforts. Of course, there are thousands more initiatives from particular religious traditions and contexts.

Outside of academia, organizations and specific religions, the links between religion and ecology are emerging in new forms, places and networks. There is spiritually motivated environmentalism, environmentally motivated spirituality and spiritual ecology (with many books bearing such titles). Often these come from industrialized, English speaking contexts. Examples of these include the Global Ecovillage Network, Finhord Spiritual Community, Creation Spirituality Communities, Schumacher College, Genesis Farm, Sacred Forest for Indigenous Spiritual Traditions, An Tairseach Dominican Centre for Ecology and Spirituality, myriad Gaia centres and countless others. Many communities experiment with ecological worldviews, inclusive of many spiritual paths and systems. Some groups are investigating novel forms of community living (barter and local agriculture). Diversity is seen as a source of inspiration. Some Christian retreat centres are being modified, often with an ecological spirituality rather than a specifically Christian focus.

It is clear that something innovative is happening at the intersection of spirituality and ecology. One can glean a growing consensus that the boundaries of religions or spiritualities are porous. New visions are emerging and are untethered from conventional religious forms, beliefs, institutions or

[4] For SAFCEI, see http://www.safcei.org; for Interfaith Power and Light, see http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org.

leadership, emphasizing transformation, equity and inclusion. Most people involved in such movements believe that it is time for new spiritual paradigms. Awakening, consciousness transformation, socially engaged spirituality and reconnecting with nature are common aspirations. Many express an emerging, holistic worldview, with slogans such as 'A new teaching for a new world'.

The alliance of religion and ecology has become a multifaceted and global agenda. It has many forms, carries fresh insights and is coming from new places. It is found in and outside of academia, institutions and religions. It is uneven, with some expressions more eccentric than others. To speak of religion and ecology requires that we include the full spectrum of activities. The remaining discussion is within an academic realm of religion/theology and ecology, which is one facet of these endeavours.

Methodological challenges in religion/theology and ecology

Christianity is in transition. Demographics are altering which Christian traditions have precedence in specific regions, even neighbourhoods. Evangelical religiosity is extending in places, or in popularity, around the world. Financial pressures are affecting some churches, limiting activities outside of parish settings. Religions too are in transition, in all but isolated contexts. As global exchanges increase, so do multi-religious encounters, which implicitly or explicitly raise questions about religious or scriptural authorities, truth claims and the universality of each religion. To discuss methodological differences is to first acknowledge these actualities and the mutability of religion.

Individual religions can be studied in many ways, in addition to addressing the phenomenon of religion(s). A survey of the field of religion and ecology reveals myriad themes, methods and priorities. Specific topics arise from distinct questions and require different tools. Prevalent topics are: religio-ecological worldviews; religious environmentalism and activism; gender, nature and justice; sustainability; religion and environmental sciences; religion as cultural ecology; pluralism and pragmatism; lifestyle and consumerism critiques; and the challenges of globalization.[5]

[5] W. Jenkins and C. K. Key Chapple, 'Religion and Environment' *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36 (2011), pp. 441–63.

Topics and methodological tools are increasing in ecotheology, with a blend of approaches from religious studies and theology. From within Christianity, there are three prevalent methods: retrieval, such as the Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative;[6] reinterpretation, such as the biblical precept of a 'preferential option for the poor' expanded to include the Earth; and reconstruction, such as the renewal of creation theologies. There are deliberations on ecological hermeneutics, ethics, ecojustice and ecofeminism. Rituals, symbols and spiritual practices are being revised. There are reflections on cosmology, science and worldviews, as well as religiously motivated activism against local ecological deterioration. Ecotheology is an independent field, yet crosses into systematics, ethics, history, biblical studies, liturgy and spirituality, and spans the diversity of Christianities. Methodologies are multiple. Ecotheology has signalled a comprehensive reform, as well as a new expression of Christianity.[7]

This expansion and precision of topics and approaches exposes internal methodological challenges. Furthermore, there are situations that the existing methods are unable to address. Several methodological challenges may be mentioned:

(1) Ecotheology is confessional and constructive. Overall, the aim is to orient Christianity towards an ecological transformation of the tradition and the society. It is often a form of advocacy, similar to how feminist theology functions. Feminist theology actively confronts and condemns the oppression of women. Ecotheology opposes ecological ruin. Both originate new visions, ethics and actions.

This advocacy stance is found in religion and ecology efforts too, although not without contention. Religious studies methods are historical, ethnographic, analytic or observational, but not confessional and rarely constructive. It is difficult for scholars to reinterpret or reconstruct, because 'objective' scholarship is requisite, in spite of such objectivity being unattainable. Many are reluctant to make ethical claims, as this seems as being partial. Thus the potency and promise of a religion can be truncated.

[6] For the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative, see http://www.councilofchurches.ca/en/Social_Justice/faith-economy-jubilee.cfm (accessed 7 August 2013).

[7] E. M. Conradie, 'Contemporary Challenges to Christian Ecotheology: Some Reflections on the State of the Debate after Five Decades' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 147 (2013), pp. 105–22.

The confessional approach is nuanced, with strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are found in the capacity for cultural and ethical critique and the possibility of new options and hope. The weaknesses are the presumed, unsubstantiated and at times unexamined assumptions about the world, nature, revelation and truth. When ecotheologians enter the field of religion and ecology, it is apparent that some know little of other religions, including their histories, diversities and complexities. Theologians can be inexperienced with the scholarly tools that probe religions through phenomenology, sociology, cultural studies, psychology, critical theories, imaginative or symbolic processes and cognitive or somatic studies. In short, theologians can be unfamiliar with or oblivious to theories of religion. This limits the methodological scope and results, at times, in a mutually uncomfortable association between ecotheology and academic spheres of religion and ecology.

(2) Epistemological debates and polydoxy (many voices, positions, a plethora of views) present significant challenges. How do we manoeuvre these? The social construction of nature is in tension with ecologically sustainable activities. If a forest can be constructed as a sacred grove, an ecosystem, animal habitat, lumber, real estate or ecotourism, we are disabled in establishing ethical priorities.

These epistemological dynamics influence religion and ecology, and ecotheology differently. Religious studies has by and large embraced postmodern epistemologies and is methodologically wide-ranging, even fragmented. Theology has more freedom to make claims and reinforce ethics. However, in my view, and in general, theology has not embraced postmodern thought sufficiently. Ecotheologians tend not to elucidate the kind of knowledge that doctrine, biblical texts or theological claims represent. Ecotheology is strengthened when the epistemological (not only the theological) approach is evident. Doing theology without acknowledging, and integrating, theories of religion leaves theology vulnerable to myriad epistemic challenges, tautological positions, and indefensible arguments outside of the guild.

Nevertheless, the era of certainty is over and leaves many challenges in its wake. Polydoxy is surely a dominant reality.[8] There is substantial deliberation

[8] See C. Keller and L. Schneider, *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

on the increase of hybrid identities and multiple ways of being and becoming. Critical theories, feminist thought, comparative religions, liberation theologies, queer theories and 'post' thought in general bring more voices to discussions of the ways forward. This multiplicity of voices is the methodological/intellectual norm. At the Religion and Ecology sessions of the American Academy of Religion, polydoxy reigns. For example, a programme could include sequentially unrelated presentations on topics such as an ecological image in St Augustine, the dying oceans, the film Avatar, environmental racism, body piercing as environmental activism, food insecurities and entrenched poverty, Japanese funeral rites for dogs and the relevance of evolution.

The result is a conundrum. We need to embrace radical diversity and plurality at a time when we need an ecological vision with agreed values, ethical principles and cooperative actions. Yet the visions and values differ. Is the natural world a set of resources with instrumental value or a living community with intrinsic value? A great deal depends on the choice. Hegemony is oppressive. We must protect cultural identities, diversity and democracy. However, to embrace polydoxy as an ideology thwarts ethical assessment, prioritizing values, developing unifying visions and collective action. While all voices are important, not all views are equally informed, and there are different priorities. I do not readily see a way through the ethical frailty of some postmodern plurality and the polydoxy impasse.

(3) A third challenge to the arena of religion/theology and ecology involves postcolonial cultures, self-governance, contextual particularities and cultural imperialism. There are ongoing debates and methodological tensions on starting points, cultural specificities, ideological orientations, representation and more. These are important for a genuine understanding and appreciation of diversity. Contextual methods are well developed and esteemed in academia. However, they are not always commensurate with what is occurring.

Many ecological problems cannot be grappled with contextually, as they are global in scope while the players are trans- or multinational. Some pertinent concerns include land grabs, corporate rights on freshwater sources or icebergs, energy (transnational pipelines), mining privileges, intellectual properties, food insecurities and corporate ownership of food, environmental refugees (who surpass political refugees), environmental illnesses (allergies, cancers,

attention deficits, disrupted thought), pervasive, systemic and intractable poverty, and transgenic animals (a global billion-dollar industry).[9] These issues require several disciplines to understand, and cross many contexts. They are global, local and contextual realities. The term 'global issues' is too vague, and 'contextual' is inaccurate, resulting in an additional methodological challenge.

(4) A fourth challenge is ecological and at the level of planetary systems. The most difficult ecological issues are climate instability, ocean salination and stratification, freshwater loss, species extinction, soil erosion, pollution and toxicity (air, water, soil), DNA changes, biomass reduction, and the loss of evolutionary trajectories. Planetary issues are manifested and experienced differently, but they affect the biosphere in interconnected ways. If the magnitude of the ecological predicament is not the foremost horizon, then what is the purpose of the field? Yet, what methods in the fields of religion and theology are adequate to address these difficult ecological realities? What is our perception of these transformations? How will we cope with the instabilities and losses? These are issues of survival, aesthetics and embodiment awareness.[10] They are grave, impending and overwhelming.

(5) A fifth challenge is the subject of worldview, vision or social imaginaries and the relationship to ecological decline. Human societies live according to a social imaginary – a complex tapestry of intertwining ideals, beliefs, practices and influences.[11] Simply defined, our social imaginaries are an amalgam of the visions, ideas and practices that interweave to produce cultural trajectories, types of communities, moral qualities and parameters. It is about governance and social patterns, yet is embedded in our identities, fears, desires and emotional matrix. Worldviews are opaque. We are always within one, and are unaccustomed to thinking about them.

Christianity has been grappling with the ecological crisis for several decades. A correlation between Christian-influenced cultures and ecological exploitation, extractive economies, extreme consumption and climate emissions

[9] H. Eaton (ed.), *Transgenic Animals and Religion*, *Worldviews* 14/1 (special issue, 2010).
[10] For a full discussion, see H. Eaton and S. Bergmann (eds.), *Ecological Awareness: Exploring Religion, Ethics and Aesthetics* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011).
[11] C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (transl. K. Blamey; Malden: Polity Press, 1997); C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

is evident. In tandem, Christian bodies have done little to restrain deforestation, species extinction, water contamination and so on. Some deduce that particular aspects of Christian teachings are problematic. Theologians addressing ecological issues through the lens of worldviews engage in extensive ideological excavation of the ideals and theories embedded in the social imaginary that have led to vast ecological ruin. Analyses of modernity, postmodernity, axial ages, cultural ethos and ideologies are involved in these discussions. In brief, the ecological crisis is rooted in part within ideas and structures of domination, hierarchy, anthropocentrism, fear of the natural world and otherworldly salvation. Christianity is implicated.

Religions conceptualize human–nature relations, shaping our attitudes and actions. Thus religiously informed worldviews are influential. One goal of religion and ecology is to advance more sustainable worldviews. Particular worldviews are perplexing to understand, and even more so to change. This 'worldview' challenge goes beyond the methods of retrieval, reinterpretation and reconstruction, bringing tensions and complications along.

(6) The sixth challenge is that worldview analysis clears debris and exposes concealed influences, but does not by itself lead to a new vision. We need an ecological vision. Surely it is true that 'where there is no vision the people perish' (Prov. 29.18). However, the question of vision is thought-provoking. Which vision? Whose? In whose interests? How can a community decide which vision to embrace? What vision will inspire? There are diverse and competing visions, and the processes of change from one social imaginary to another are not straightforward.[12]

Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and historian of religions, may serve as one example of a scholar who addressed the question of vision. Much of his work was an inquiry into what could be an adequate, ecological and spiritual vision. For Berry, it must comprise a sufficiently broad horizon commensurate with scientific knowledge of time, space and Earth dynamics; incorporate a suitable grasp of the histories and complexities of religions; and be ecologically literate and deeply inspiring. Such a vision must give humanity a way to live

[12] See H. Eaton, 'Forces of Nature: Aesthetics and Ethics', in S. Bergmann, I. Blindow and K. Ott (eds.), *Aesth/Ethics in Environmental Change: Hiking through the Arts, Ecology, Religion and Ethics of the Environment* (Studies in Religion and the Environment, 7; Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013), pp. 109–27.

within the rhythms and limits of the natural world and as a member of this Earth community.

This topic of vision is also difficult, and in particular for academics, although easier in the field of theology than in religious studies. Any in-depth conversation about vision is contentious in a postmodern, fragmented world with intellectual resistance to envisioning reality at an encompassing, comprehensive or meta level. Regardless, this is a critical conversation. What vision inspires change? Analysis is not enough.

Where do we go from here?

There are several ways to imagine next steps. From a theological starting point, retrieval, restoration and reinterpretation orient Christian traditions towards an ecological alignment. Christian motifs of justice, redemption and community, ethics and spirituality, liturgies and rituals, leadership and institutional change are all implicated in and requisites for an ecological future. Germane next steps depend on the tradition, context and the suppleness of the religious imagination. Given that next steps originating from within Christian theology are already en route, I will supplement these (in no notable order) with steps that originate outside of theology, which are also vital for an adequate ecotheology.

(1) We need to be ecologically literate, meaning to know something about Earth sciences, planetary systems, the biosphere and what is happening, in general, to the planet. This entails understanding the systemic issues (climate change, oceans, fresh water, soil, species extinctions, animal habitat, toxins) and bioregional ones. Ecological literacy means knowing the eco- and biodynamics of a few specific ecological problems. Different methods result in distinct analyses; thus we require many diagnostic tools: ecological, economic, systemic injustices, poverty and gender. Theology is not enough for ecotheology. If theology is to be effective, it must move into multidisciplinary discussions.

For example, several ecotheologians are reinterpreting creation, yet few study evolution or Earth sciences in depth. For those considering questions of creation, teleology or 'Earth Ethics', a basic understanding of evolution is

necessary in order to be intelligible and influential. To continue the dissonance between science and theology is intellectually irresponsible, ecologically illiterate and theologically misguided. Creation theologies must grapple with evolutionary and ecological sciences to be relevant. Yet taking evolution seriously dislocates theology.[13] Reconceiving Christianity in the light of evolution calls for substantial re-evaluations of foundational assertions of theology.[14] Earth is no longer irrelevant, and it is not only our context; it is our source.[15]

Ecological literacy requires that we learn some science, as well as how science is used. Many, if not most, ecological decisions consult science. But 'science' is not uniform, and science alone is insufficient. Science needs the humanities to discern bias and to convey values and ethics.

(2) How do we ensure that our work is relevant? What are our priorities? If the ecological crisis is the horizon, then our responses must be germane to ecological sustainability. If Christianity is the ultimate horizon, and thus the priority, it is different. We are entering a period of decline. What are we trying to salvage? Christianity? The Earth? Our beliefs? Our families? The human community? The biosphere? The 'divine milieu'? Ecotheology offers mixed responses in this regard.

Some theologians speak, teach and publish as if there is an independent Christianity 'out there' and they are simply presenting it. Although intellectually erudite, there is a ubiquitous fundamentalism, often subtle, within much of Christian theology. These undercurrents are also in the debates about retrieval, reform or revolution. I fear that the stalwart insistence that Christianity is innately 'green' is borne of fear and a need to safeguard, even save, the tradition.

In determining relevance, I believe that we must be more transparent. I agree with Buechner that all theology is autobiographical.[16] It is important to understand how we relate to our version of the Christian tradition, and why. How much of our identity is embedded in Christianity, in our beliefs, and are

[13] H. Eaton, 'The Revolution of Evolution', *Worldviews* 11/1 (2007), pp. 6–31.
[14] J. F. Haught, *God After Darwin, A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 25–32.
[15] This awareness permeates the work of Thomas Berry, but at a cosmic level. My comment is adapted from John Haught (2003).
[16] Buechner says: 'All Theology, like all Fiction, is at its Heart Autobiography'. See F. Buechner, *The Sacred Journey* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 1.

we able to evaluate our beliefs? Why perform historical retrieval? For whom? How and where will it function? Undoubtedly such work is interesting. But is it relevant or beneficial or a priority in an era of decline? We have a reasonable engagement with hermeneutics to assess interpretation and meaning, but how do we assess relevance? Christianity has ample insights and resources for an ecological era, but we cannot eschew the questions of priorities and relevance.

(3) Anthropocentrism has permeated Euro-Western worldviews, as evidenced in attitudes and actions that continually break with the integrity of the natural world. Christian-informed cultures, with the emphasis that human origins, meaning and destiny lie elsewhere, contain an extreme human-centred ideology. Apart from marginalized traditions, Christianity has belittled Earth as a primary expression of the divine. The natural world is seen at best as offering resources, having little or no inherent sacred presence. Creation and salvation have become disconnected. The excessive concern for the redemptive process has concealed the realization that the disintegration of the natural world is also the destruction of a primordial manifestation of the divine. These are the operating beliefs, even if the tradition has other interpretations. Those influenced by such beliefs become psychically and morally oriented away from the Earth, and spiritually insensitive to its destruction.

Ecotheologians have been compelled to deal with the Christian emphasis on humanity's transcendence over the natural world and the thrust to desacralize it.[17] They re-examine the worldview and basic values ingrained in Euro-Western consciousness and Christian theological presuppositions. This has led to a suspicion of otherworldly interpretations of redemption, salvation and resurrection. For Ivone Gebara and Rosemary Radford Ruether, two Catholic theologians in tension with traditional and Vatican theologies, the operative interpretations of Christology, sin and salvation have created distortions throughout theology. For Gebara, the primal sin is negating the non-negotiable existential circumstances of life: vulnerability, finitude and mortality.[18] The

[17] C. Pearson, 'On Being Public about Ecotheology', *Ecotheology* 6/1&2 (2001), pp. 42–59 (51).
[18] R. R. Ruether, 'Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology', in D. T. Hessel and R. R. Ruether (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 97–112 (105).

consequences are escapist spiritualities, otherworldly ideations and a *fall* into domination – of land, animals and peoples. The Christian tradition constantly tries to 'lift' humanity above the Earth and the limits it represents. This, in turn, has caused distortions at the level of foundational theological precepts.

One distortion throughout Christian history is the belief that the natural world is fallen, corrupt, sinful, imperfect or incomplete. Death is the result. Humans must be saved, redeemed or restored from death, hence from the natural world. Christianity promises eternal life, which is a next and improved life. Although each religious worldview has some perception that life does not end with death, the Christian tradition has a particular resistance to and denial of death. Christianity has erected a fortress here. This fortress of salvation ideology combined with afterlife beliefs is a barricade to a renewed ecologically sensitive religious orientation. This otherworldly longing, and construal of salvation, is operative across all Christian traditions. Furthermore, it can be appealing in periods of decline and cultural powerlessness. A popular form of this problematic salvation ideology is on T-shirts or bumper stickers, with the iconic image of the Earth from space and the slogan 'Jesus – don't leave Earth without him!'

Problematic beliefs need to be addressed. Christologies are already a challenge in multi-religious dialogues and feminist theologies, as are various interpretations of a closed canon and biblical inerrancy. One measure to address this is to ask how these beliefs function. What type of religiosity ensues? Religions must remain fluid, attentive to their presuppositions, values, orientation and impact. Religions should be supple, receptive to new insights and able to abandon outdated or unworkable beliefs, interpretations and dogmas. Next steps require more clarity and courage around problematic beliefs.

(4) Analysis and knowledge are not enough; 'good' theology is not enough. Most ecotheologians desire social change. However, not all are mindful of or strategic about what kind of intervention and where it would be most effective. Religions are social forces. The World Bank, the United Nations and the Worldwatch Institute have recognized this and at times use religions to their advantage. The sheer historical influence on cultures – values, worldviews and transformations – indicates that religions are a decisive dimension of human societies. Of course, religions can be fraught with bias, prejudice, limitations,

and corruption. Their counterpoint is when religions are movements of liberation, moral cohesiveness and life-affirming orientations. But to be transformative, ecotheology must be socially engaged.

Methodologically, this implies more than retrieval, reinterpretation and reconstruction. Liberation theologies are effective when they are within social movements. Feminist theologies are vibrant because there is a global women's agenda. Ecotheology is persuasive when in alliance with a growing ecological awareness. With this in mind, another step forward is the need for an engaged theology involved with social change. What is it that transforms human communities into ecologically living communities? How can ecotheology participate in large-scale social transformation? One step is to dialogue with efforts for social change.

For dynamic and productive interdisciplinary interaction, transversal reasoning is necessary.[19] The engagement between theology and theories of social change requires this transversality, developing 'bridge theories' as disciplines mutually transform.[20] Here are some suggestions for transversal encounters between ecotheology and social transformation. The purpose is only to indicate the potential of taking this path, using several examples.

(a) One way of approaching this topic is to consider the specific transformation anticipated. For example, ecological stewardship, a well-developed ecotheological paradigm, can be understood as an instrumental schema oriented towards practical change and improved resource management. Ecojustice is often a political schema that seeks to redress inequalities and empower marginalized groups or communities. A third form, while also political, seeks to transform conventions made by the governing social order. This cultural dimension is oriented towards beliefs, values and worldview changes. These three can be interrelated, yet they are distinct in important ways. Ecotheology is active in all three, and it may be efficacious to concentrate efforts on distinct schemas.

[19] The notion of transverse dynamic dialogues is inspired by W. van Huyssteen, 'From Empathy to Embodied Faith? Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Evolution of Religion' (paper read at the American Academy of Religion, 2011).

[20] R. Botha, 'On the Soundness of Inferring Modern Language from Symbolic Behaviour', *Cambridge Archeological Journal* 20 (2010), pp. 345–56.

(b) An emerging mode of ecological intervention is to evoke the language of rights and to draw from its global endorsement and traction.[21] The major Euro-Western social justice revolutions of the past century employed the language of rights because, in general, it is powerful. Sixty countries now have constitutionally embedded environmental rights within various legal frameworks. The interpretation is that humans have environmental rights: clean water, air, land and 'environmental opportunity'.

From a different angle, at the 2010 World People's Conference on Climate Change in Bolivia, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth was drafted, bestowing legal rights on vital Earth processes, such as water and air. Another initiative, the Great Apes Project, suggests that 'non-human hominids' should have the right to life, freedom and not being tortured. Animal studies and activists often use the language of rights for conservation or protection. The World Council of Churches developed a theological and political campaign claiming that water is both a gift and a right and as such cannot be considered a commodity in international negotiations.[22] These represent an expansion of the rendering of 'rights'.

The image of ecological rights is potent, and contested. Rights are constructed on dissimilar platforms. The relationships between rights, justice, responsibilities, worth, dignity and subjectivity are controversial. Anthropocentric and ecocentric rights diverge. Furthermore, there is an ambiguous history between the concept of human rights and Christianity.[23]

Nevertheless, some theologians advocate that rights and justice are inseparable, basing 'rights' on worth and being an image of God.[24] Yet, to translate this ecologically is not straightforward. For example, if the natural world has only instrumental or utilitarian worth, not inherent worth, then it has no dignity, no subjectivity and no rights. Does water have rights, or do humans have rights to water? Ecotheologians are beginning to evoke the language of 'rights'. Although advantageous to summon 'rights' for social

[21] D. Boy, *The Environmental Rights Revolution: A Global Study of Constitutions, Human Rights, and the Environment* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

[22] See 'Water as a Gift and Right', http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/human-rights-and-impunity/water-as-a-gift-and-right (accessed 30 April 2004).

[23] C. Villa-Vicencio, 'Christianity and Human Rights', *Journal of Law and Religion* 14/2 (1999/2000), pp. 579–600.

[24] N. Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

change, it requires theological finesse and an enriched moral imagination on ecological issues.

(c) A third example is to study the leverage points proposed by environmental scientist Donella Meadows.[25] Meadows perceived how systems change and noted that there are distinct levers in any complex system. She discerned ten leverage points to intervene in a system, from the simplest to the most difficult point, or from least to most effective. For example, statistics and measurements are relatively easy to gather but least effective in provoking change. Ecological disaster data does not change people. The most challenging is a paradigm change, which is the mindset out of which the system – its goals, structure, rules, cultural story – arises; in other words, the social imaginary or worldview. For Meadows, paradigms are the sources of systems, and the worldview is the engine. Individuals and societies resist paradigm changes because that requires a new way of seeing. It is the most challenging yet most influential and effective leverage point.

Meadows studied how to effect change using the paradigm lever. She suggested pointing out the anomalies and failures of the old paradigm. One inserts the new paradigm in places of public visibility and power. She suggests that one need not waste time with reactionaries but must work with active change agents and open-minded people. To transcend paradigms requires disciplined thinking, rigorous analysis and radical openness. There is much theologians can learn from studying Meadows's leverage points.

(d) There are new theories of social change gaining traction. From religious studies considerable work is done in cognitive sciences, embodied knowing, empathy and attachment theories, and emotion and affectivity studies.[26] These, as well as somatic learning and embodied intelligibility schemas, are active fields of research concerning religious motivations and experiences. Studies indicate that human knowing is differentiated, multifaceted and intertwined, shifting the emphasis from rationality to embodied affectivity and relationality.[27]

[25] For Donella Meadows's Institute, see http://www.donellameadows.org.
[26] For example, see the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology. The theme of the conference for 2014 is 'Do Emotions Shape the World?'.
[27] C. Boesel and C. Keller, *Apophatic Bodies: Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

Attachment and embodiment theories are further developing explanations of how humans acquire a communally intelligible world, or worldview.[28]

Social theories draw extensively from Judith Butler's notions of power, identity and her 'matrix of intelligibility' to underscore the cultural constructions of identity as well as their mutability. Identity theorists also suggest that people encompass fluid, hybrid embodied identities, interwoven with somatic memories and affect, within an interflow of tactility, movement and emotions. Identities are steadied in embodied narratives providing coherence and intelligibility. New ideas or narratives often feel foreign, unfamiliar and wrong. When there is no sensory experience with them, they are rejected. These findings are important, as ecotheology tries to bend ideas and values in new directions. If we construct identities, meaning and worldviews through senses and affectivity more so than thought, this is a valuable insight into personal and communal transformation.

It is also increasingly evident that the land, the climate and ecosystem shape our identities. We are inseparably involved with the world in countless ways, as life is primarily relational. Change can come by many paths. These insights are necessary for an engaged theology seeking social change.

(e) This leads to the next aspect of transversal dialogues: the importance of narratives, symbols, symbolic consciousness, imagination and aesthetics. This is fertile terrain for ecotheologians. The formation of a consciousness that could function symbolically and sustain the capacity to manoeuvre and coordinate images, thoughts, emotions, intuitions and insights was acquired over millennia. Experiences are intricate, being layered with emotions, images, somatic sensations and memories. They are interpreted, symbolized and re-experienced within an enlarged horizon of meaning. These 'symbolized' experiences are self-amplifying loops that increase the experiential intensity that, in turn, strengthens the symbol. Symbols participate with other symbols, and we interconnect symbols to make a systematic and cohesive representation of the world (a worldview), providing a system of coordinates to navigate life.

[28] M. Sheets-Johnstone, *The Roots of Morality* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2008), p. 184.

To be evocative, symbols must be invested with emotion and cognition, and they vary in complexity and purpose. This elasticity of consciousness – that we experience more than we are, and our consciousness can transcend its own boundaries – is a critical component of divine imagery. We 'become more' within the intensity of divine symbols. The symbol and its psychic power are undecipherable outside of the context, are not readily translatable or transferable and are enigmatic to outsiders.

This symbolic, metaphoric and imaginative mode of being is the *modus operandi* of humans. A symbolic consciousness is the way humans process and navigate the world. It is not through or with symbols or images, but within symbols, including religious symbols, that we think and comprehend. Humans are incapable of existing outside of symbolic renderings of the world. Thus, humans are best understood as a symbolic species.

Religions use symbolic language and thus evoke potent psychic energy. This realm of investigation is extremely important to consider for social change. Certainly one avenue of ecotheology is reconsidering symbols and their meaning. To comprehend how symbols function within human communities and actions can only strengthen these efforts.

(f) There is a wealth of insights from postmodern thinkers and activists. The Arab Spring and Occupy activities are indicative of new forms and media of social change. Deleuze and Guattari introduced the concept of the rhizome: a root system that thrives within networks of connection and heterogeneity.[29] Social movements use the image of rhizomes to promote equality, asymmetry and unstructured cohesion, rather than a calculated model of change or hierarchical leadership. Many use the internet to advance social change and often adopt a non-violence orientation.

(g) There is no future without peace, which requires education in non-violent praxis. Ecological ruin is entwined with social violence. This will increase with ecological stress. Religious voices must take the stance of peace and non-violent resistance. If we trained for peace as much as we do for war, the world would be different. Conflict is inevitable, but violence is a choice.

[29] G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (trans. B. Massumi; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

There is increasing theoretical and practical interest in non-violence. One organization, Ekta Parishad (India, since 1991), is a non-violent people's movement based on Gandhian spirituality, training and activism. Unlike a protest movement (the customary form of civil resistance in Euro-Western countries), it is a disciplined, activist, non-violent movement working towards social and land reform.[30] Gandhian approaches to peace, non-violence and social change inspired Martin Luther King, Abraham Heschel, Gene Sharp, Johan Galtung, John Paul Lederach, Joan Chittister, Starhawk and those who associate religion with peace and social change, as well as deep ecologist Arne Naess.[31] Ecotheology could align itself with peace and the study and practice of non-violence.

General reflections

Work in the field of religion, theology and ecology is increasing around the world, in many forms and with some results. There are methodological challenges within these efforts that are cause for thought. The previous section on next steps focused on how ecotheology could be reinforced by greater interdisciplinary exchanges and alliances with movements focused on ecological literacy and social transformation. There are numerous other options as to where we go from here that could be explored by others.

I have two personal remarks to bring to the discussion. While theological categories can be expanded, and noting a multiplicity of approaches, there is a particular distinction, or tension, that I find significant. It could be termed as a methodological divergence where the starting points differ as do the questions, overall orientation, theological foundations and perhaps the purpose. The differences may be articulated in this way: is the natural world to be valued spiritually and ethically because Christianity affirms this, or is the spiritual dimension of the natural world primary so that Christianity is ecologically relevant in so far as it supports this? Both 'approaches' draw on rich themes within the Christian tradition. The difference rests on what is primary, foundational and indispensable. It has to do with fundamental

[30] See http://www.ektaparishad.com (accessed 25 July 2013).

[31] J. Galtung, 'Arne Naess, Peace and Gandhi', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 54/1 (2011), pp. 31–41.

sources and can result in divergent priorities. Although too inane to suggest that the one is about upholding Christianity and the other about saving the planet, presenting it as such reveals the essential difference.

Questions about which framework and orientation are perhaps inconsequential for facing escalating ecological degradation. However, they are relevant for a reflective pause on methodologies within the fields of religion/theology and ecology. They are also relevant as to what we understand religions to be – sensibility, knowledge, content, insights.

If one accepts that the spiritual dimension of the natural world is primary, there are more ramifications for ecotheology than if Christianity is ultimate. One is that we need to understand the natural world as a starting point for comprehending spiritual sensibilities. We have to accept the edict that the Earth is primary and that humans are derivative, as comments Thomas Berry. This means we must understand something about evolution to understand anything about this spirit-infused world. We must have theories about religions that consider their emergence in the planetary history and within hominid development. Religious sensibilities would be understood as part of the evolution of symbolic consciousness. Religions are embedded in complex cultural processes.

In this vein, religions can be appreciated as diverse, profound expressions, or languages, about the depth, breadth, complexity and boundaries of existence. They are experiential in essence, and revelatory about intense encounters with the exigencies and myriad dimensions of life, experienced and expressed in highly symbolic language. Religions connect humans with a divine presence or numinous force. They bond human communities and assist in forging intimate relations with the broader Earth community. In summary, religions link humans to the larger matrix of indeterminacy and mystery from which life arises, unfolds and flourishes. In this view, what we would call spirituality, divine presence, ineffable source or sacred reality is embedded, active in the within of things, intimate and transcendent.

The specific religious idiom, contextually bound, could be less relevant today than the experiential referent, which is often difficult to ascertain. This zone of interpretation is unwieldy in countless manners: how we source and construct our images of God; the interplay between the social norms, prejudices, desires and tensions; and the depth and breadth of the

particular construal. The difference between an image of God who condones apartheid, who equates consumerism and wealth with spiritual success, who supports armed conflict or who ignores ecological ruin is far from one concerned with justice and a preferential option for the poor, and one who desires peace and life abundant. Who and how the sacred is named changes the world. Who and how this is contested is equally important. The manner in which a religion 'functions' and what world it produces is of critical importance. The emphasis here is slightly different, and is more on the impermanent nature of any interpretation or entire religious tradition. Given that most religions have come and gone, the formulations should be approached as fluid and provisional rather than static or definitive. It is the ultimacy, in any form, that is examined here, not the impact. Last, given that each religion developed under particular circumstances, they are distinct, with specific perceptions. Thus any unqualified 'universality' is also challenged.

For example, Christianity developed in an urban context, amidst political and religious tensions and competing ethics. There were not the ecological woes of today. Thus it has considerable content about social ethics and authentic religious living. Other religious or spiritual traditions, such as the First Nations of North America, were refined and nuanced in communities immersed in the natural world, thus are more oriented towards the rhythms and limits of the larger Earth community. The religious experiences differ.

Although these are overly simplistic portrayals, the point is that religions are distinct, and none are superior to another.[32] Exclusivist stances are only valid when religion, not the Earth, is the starting point. The pluralism I am proposing is neither the polydoxy mentioned above nor a result of the epistemological quagmire of competing and definitive religious claims. It is about starting points: if we have spiritual sensibilities, it is because they are embedded in Earth's processes. Religions are like languages, and it is folly to ask which language is true or superior. By extension, any Christian exclusivist, and often inclusivist, positions would be abandoned with this starting point.

[32] The meaning here pertains to an assumed supremacy and imperialism, not ethical, social or spiritual development.

The second comment is that I am persuaded that we are in a new ecological, social and religious moment. Two quotations reflect this well.

> Thomas Berry says: "any effective response to these issues requires a religious context. . . . We cannot do without the traditional religions, but they cannot presently do what needs to be done. We need a new type of religious orientation."[33]

> Albert Einstein says: "Problems cannot be solved at the level of consciousness in which they were created. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humankind is to survive."[34]

Overall, religions in their current historical forms are failing to respond to the demands of the era. They exist, but are rarely a vital source of inspiration, guidance and wisdom. Religions at their best arise from and speak to depth, and kindle the realm of religious experiences. The accent is on perception, intuition, awareness, religious imagination and reverence. Aesthetics and reverence are deep sources of ethics.

My fear is the loss of depth and attentiveness to religious experiences, in spite of our extensive studies of religions. I am not worried if the Christian tradition alters or fades, as religions are malleable within human cultures: an objectionable stance in some Christian contexts. I am anxious that the capacity for religious experience will be dulled and diminished as the biosphere declines. Language for the divine will be impoverished. It may be more difficult to experience reverence, to sense the ineffable presence of the Divine, as the 'divine milieu' deteriorates. I am concerned that we will not know how to articulate and nourish our thirst for and sense of the Divine, because it corresponds to spiritual dimensions embedded in a flourishing Earth community. Our moral imagination and compass depend upon religious experiences, which depend upon a vibrant living and diverse planet.

Christian theology is a significant, even critical, global partner in a viable future, but not in any form. For this we need a renewed vision, a larger horizon for Christian theology. We need to be bold about the importance of vision and developing an ecological vision. The starting point and theological scaffold

[33] T. Berry, *Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 87.
[34] There are many variations on this quotation, with numerous online references. For example see http://www.jpetrie.myweb.uga.edu/einstein.html (accessed April 17 2009).

are vital. The Christian themes of revelation, salvation and liberation are crucial to reinforce. Human experiences of wonder, humility, grace and gratitude are of utmost importance, as are ethical stances of justice, resistance, and sacrifice. In my view, the starting point is and has to be the Earth.

Conclusion

Humanity is but a moment of Earth, maybe even a glorious one, in a drama of four and a half billion years. And Earth is but one planet, in one galaxy, within one solar system, with six million other galaxies. And all this is in a universe dominated by dark matter and dark energy, within an expanding fabric of space and time, of approximately 13 billion years and counting. Is it plausible that Christianity, or any religious tradition, has greater status than this astounding creation?

As Abraham Joshua Heschel has said: 'We can never sneer at the stars, mock the dawn or scoff at the totality of being. Sublime grandeur evokes unhesitating, unflinching awe. Away from the immense, cloistered in our own concepts, we may scorn and revile everything. But standing between earth and sky, we are silenced by the sight.'[35]

[35] S. Dresner (ed.), *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), p. 2.

12

A Christian Theological Discourse on Integral Life in the Context of Asian Civilization

Kim Yong-Bock

In dealing with ecological issues in Christian theology today, we cannot simply begin by revisiting and revising the Christian faith traditions in the continuum of Western Christian traditions. We also need to develop an Asian approach to the issue.

The following are some of my basic assumptions: (1) Faith discourse in the Asian Christian community is situated in the historical context of Asian civilization from its beginning to its end. (2) This means that discourse on Christian faith in Asia arises in conversation with all the Christian traditions of the East as well as the West. (3) It also interacts with contemporary West-dominated globalization in all its dimensions.

At this point in the process of globalization, the discourse of the Christian community in Asia (and Africa) needs to find a new axis for its witness and mission in this new world. There are three reasons why this is necessary: (1) Christianity has more and more of a presence in Africa and Asia, not only in terms of population but also of vitality. (2) The current destructive powers are rooted in modern Western civilization, with its constellation of global market capitalism, imperial hegemony and modern technocracy. Western Christianity has been formed in the context of this West-dominated civilization. Thus global theological discourse should take place in a creative global forum that is not West-centred, West-dominated and Western tradition bound. (3) We need a new paradigm of theological discourse in this radically changing world, perhaps one that recognizes anew that the Christian Bible was

at its very inception based on an Asian story. The Asian nature of the biblical Scriptures and of the primitive Christian community should be recovered.

I do not have space here to discuss the mission history and the so-called indigenization of Western Christianity, which coincides generally with Western colonialism and the encroachment of Western civilization on Asian civilization over the past few centuries.[1]

Convivial life as the focus of our discourse

For theological discourse in a new key, I propose the theme 'Life in Fullness which is the Alpha and Omega of the Whole History of the Universe',[2] seeking the conviviality of all living beings. This may offer a fresh focal point for theological discourse on the life of all living beings. Ecotheology should be treated as a modification of the traditional theological framework of doctrinal and systematic theology.

The term 'ecology' may be regarded as the total 'oikonomia' of life and may provide an integral and holistic avenue for theological reflection. We cannot simply add an ecological dimension to 'revise' Christian theology and its doctrines in order to deal with the ecological crisis. The limitations and shortcomings of current Christian theological discourse lie in its captivity to Western philosophical traditions and in its interactive bonds with a technological worldview. Modern scientific–technological discourse is the core problem of the West-dominated global civilization, which has become the primary context for theological discourse. A closely related factor is the capitalist system that dominates and controls the current geopolitical order. The inner core of this civilization is modern technocracy, which places Western Christianity 'in the belly of the beast'. Asian and African theologies need to converse with the renewed discourses of 'ecotheology' in the West to create a convergent process for creative global theological discourse.[3]

[1] A. Toynbee, *The World and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).

[2] In East Asia 'life' is designated as *Saengmyong* = 生命 = *zoē*, which is the ultimate (*Taeguk* = 太極) in the semantics of The Book of Change.

[3] I am not entering into theological discourse along the lines of Western theological systems; instead, I will follow the biblical narrative as a form of what I call 'zoegraphy'.

The predicament of the current global situation is the deadly fragmentation of life and the crisis of its total destruction under technocracy. We are witnessing this radical fragmentation of life as we experience the disintegration of the cosmic order of life and at the same its totalistic regimentation and domination. The bodies, spirits, families, local communities, peoples, regional politics, life in the ecosphere and life as a whole are being brutally broken into pieces. This fragmentation and totalization are taking place simultaneously.

The intertwined global empire and market regime are catalysing this intensive fragmentation of people and all living beings in their living places. An aggressive technocracy uses science to objectify, reduce and instrumentalize, control and dominate life. Such 'bankrupt' science fails to grasp living subjects. The ongoing scientific and technological integration is artificial and life-threatening despite its utilitarian claims of improving life.

These destructive forces create a transhuman world and a mechanical history and have brought all living beings to the verge of total destruction through wars, hunger, poverty and oppression. Ecological destruction such as climate change is only one dimension of this process. We cannot treat ecological concerns separately or attempt an ecotheology that merely remodels traditional systematic or doctrinal theology.

Academically speaking, ecology is a specialized area within the discourse of life. The scientific paradigm is based upon the differentiation of various fields. For instance, ecology is separated from sociology, psychology and biology. The simple addition of ecology to other academic disciplines would not offer a full treatment of the ecological dimension of the whole of life. Likewise, ecotheology cannot respond to the ecological crisis by the addition of a 'theology of nature' to the traditional structure of doctrinal theology. Theology has to assume a new role by critically probing into all other discourses on life as a whole, and its fragmentation.

This is why Christians should seek an integrated and holistic understanding of life in terms of justice, peace and conviviality. Conversations that cross the West and the East, the past and the present, are needed in order to go beyond a one-dimensional, specialized search confined to modern Western civilization, and to open a horizon of life for all living beings.

The core dynamics of the convergence of all living beings as an axial pivot for reflection

In Asia, many recognize a convergent dynamics for the conviviality of all living beings which is pervasive throughout the universe in space and time and exists in all cultural traditions. For instance, in East Asian cultural tradition, the realities of heaven, humanity and earth (天地人) converge to form a cosmic order of life. This vision of life offers an objective grasp of the universe that contains omnipresent compassion, care and love among all living beings. It is a living whole. Every locus of the universe and every moment of its time converge to give birth and to foster and fulfil life, being pregnant with this kairotic pivot of life in fullness in the ever-changing cosmos. The dynamics for conviviality gain even more vigour in the context of suffering under oppression, for life is itself the subject acting for its full realization. All living beings are subjects who refuse to be objectified intellectually, spiritually, bodily or politically.

This vital energy (*Ki*), or spirit of life, is in direct contradiction with global capitalism and its market regime, with modern social Darwinism and with the imperial 'powers and principalities'. The modern scientific assumption and rationale, viewing life in terms of the survival of the fittest, is cruel and ethically untenable. Its theoretical foundation is totally 'utilitarian', as manifested in the global powers and principalities. For this reason, we cannot simply base (eco)theological discourse on modern ecological assumptions.[4] Instead, one may discern a dynamics of convergence of life to overcome conflicts and contradictions, against the destructive dynamics in the ideology and practice of the logic of the 'survival of the fittest'.

The convergent movement of life resists the destructive forces of death, the geopolitical hegemony and the military might of the global empire. What is affirmed when we resist the power of the global empire is the belief that the convergence of justice, peace and conviviality ('life together', the East Asian concept of *Sang Saeing*, which refers to the whole creation) is a basic precondition for life in fullness in the household of all living beings.

The movement of the convergence for life entails the following: (1) Convergence in liberation from the shackles of global empire is manifested

[4] C. Ponting, *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

in the politics of conviviality to affirm the sovereign selfhood of all living beings. The right of life of all living beings should be constitutional, while direct participation should be the basic principle for the politics of *convivencia*. (2) Convergence in formation of the emergent vision of convivial life involves great peace (*T'aiping* = 太平) in the universe. This is not a *pax imperium* but a *pax cosmos*. It is not a peace negotiated by nation states and institutionalized in international organizations, but a living cosmic order of conviviality. (3) Convergence in action for justice, peace and conviviality involves a political economy of common life (*oikonomia convivencia*). (4) Convergence for convivial community takes place through the orchestration of local, national, regional, continental and cosmic dynamics.

A fresh theological perspective is demanded

The modern ecumenical movement has been concerned with the meaning of science and technology and with their impact on the world and on faith itself. Sometimes, the ecumenical movement has affirmed the role of science and technology for modernization and development; at other times, it has raised a critical voice. The modern technological revolution was celebrated as a contribution to solving the economic problems of production. Appropriate technology was advocated for development in the 'Third World'. Ethical concerns were raised with regard to the biotech industry and ecological destruction.[5]

Recently, however, the convergence of advanced technologies, such as nanotechnology, cybernetics, biotechnology and artificial intelligence, is introducing revolutionary changes in industrial societies with overall implications for the global economy, geopolitics and ecology. This situation demands a fresh ecumenical quest coming from the perspectives of social groups and concern for God's creation.[6] This becomes a question of technocratic civilization, not merely of their negative symptoms.

[5] For the report of the 1978 World Council of Churches conference, see P. Abrecht, *Faith, Science and the Future* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978).

[6] See G. Wolbring, 'The Triangle of New and Emerging Technologies, Disabled People and the World Council of Churches; Able-ism: A Prerequisite for Transhumanism', www.bioethicsanddisability.org (accessed 15 June 2013).

Science and technology cannot be treated merely as tools, products and processes of human society. They are at the core of the technocratic global domination.

> They have an impact on the entire earth; convergent technologies are becoming the "Engine of a New Creation" of the whole order of living beings. Together these new technologies are going radically to transform the whole order of "creation", even re-designing matter, living and non-living. Therefore, recent developments in science and technology must be seen from the holistic perspective of the "whole creation" or the entire earth community of all living beings from local realties to the cosmic. It is not enough to argue just from a limited human perspective and only for the human cause.[7]

The future of the order of all living beings is not dependent only on human choice; it will also depend on resistance and the reactions of all living beings in the earth community with a common destiny and purpose. In the garden of life of all living beings, humans are humble enough to learn how to live together in conviviality with other living beings as inhabitants of the garden of life, that is, the ecumenical earth.

Radical social implications of convergent technology

Convergent technologies will radically transform geopolitics, the global economy, social relations and structures, and also cultural identities and values. This radical transformation can be compared to the impact of the industrial revolution. Traditional ethical codes and approaches may be insufficient, if not deficient, in dealing with these issues. Already many people discern that the current ethical debates, for example regarding bioethics, are inadequate. What is needed is an integral theology and ethics for the conviviality of all living beings on earth.

[7] World Council of Churches and World Association for Christian Communication with Bossey Ecumenical Institute, *Science, Faith and New Technologies: Transforming Life, Volume One: Convergent Technologies*, http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/science-technology-ethics/transforming-life-volume-1 (accessed 18 September 2013).

This is especially the case with the new set of technologies that enable human beings to arbitrarily design the lives of all living beings and the relationships among them. The age-old boundary between living and non-living beings is increasingly blurred and permeated. They will be redesigned according to human scientific imagination. Such developments intend to surpass the natural limits of life. This may entail the vision of an entirely newly designed and recreated order. Indeed, convergent technologies are pushing the natural limits of life and the natural order in the interests of 'improving' or 'enhancing' life itself.[8]

The messianic vision of 'technopia'

Messianic claims made in favour of new technologies revolve around the issues of global economic growth, peace, health, human rights and environmental management. Like all new technologies throughout history, new technologies are presented as a cure for the societal evils associated with prior technologies, especially in terms of improving the lives of the poor and marginalized. Those promoting such technologies promise solutions to economic, medical and social problems, such as hunger, poverty, disease, violence and even ecological disaster.[9] Their claims include the enhancement, improvement and artificial redesigning of the created order of 'living beings' and their social and ecological relationships. Design, engineering, invention and even the creation of artificial living organisms or synthetic bio-organic agents all contribute to the vision of 'technopia' – the technological utopia. The U.S. New Science Foundation, in commenting

[8] See M. C. Roco, and W. S. Bainbridge (eds.), *Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance: Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology and Cognitive Science* (Arlington: US National Science Foundation, 2002), pp. ix–xiii.

[9] The U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce for Technology, Phillip Bond, once described nanotechnology's potential as: 'Truly miraculous: enabling the blind to see, the lame to walk, and the deaf to hear; curing AIDS, cancer, diabetes and other afflictions; ending hunger; and even supplementing the power of our minds . . . nanotechnology will deliver higher standards of living and allow us to live longer, healthier, more productive lives. Nano also holds extraordinary potential for the global environment through waste-free, energy efficient production processes that cause no harm to the environment or human health'. See www.scribd.com/doc/145280484/Nanoscale-Science-and-Technology (accessed 12 September 2013).

on the potentialities of converging technologies in improving human life, promises:

> The twenty-first century could end in world peace, universal prosperity, and evolution to a higher level of compassion and accomplishment. It is hard to find the right metaphor to see a century into the future, but it may be that humanity would become like a single, distributed and interconnected "brain" based in new core pathways of society. This will be an enhancement to the productivity and independence of individuals, giving them greater opportunities to achieve personal goals.[10]

Faith in technology, which promises immortality, is quite realistic. Yet, the idea of immortality through technology, even if it were possible, is based on a distorted view of life. Within a framework of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all matter, physical death is really not death but rather a process of life. This claim is made in a comprehensive manner so as to cover the economic, geopolitical, biological, cultural and ecological dimensions of life. This reaches to the religious dimension. How can disorderly design that is not fully understood by its human designer hope to replace God's design?

While such blasphemous thinking may not be acceptable to those who are critical of the impact of science and technology, proponents of converging technologies also justify them from novel ethical perspectives. They adopt new meanings for such concepts as justice, freedom, person, health and life and tend to reduce ethics to cost–benefit analyses in a utilitarian framework. Such technocratic discourse may be functional in terms of meeting the needs of its designers, the powerful, but it is dysfunctional with regard to the pursuit of holistic development.

Reassessing our faith traditions

This situation presents faith communities with the challenge of liberating their faith from such dangerous messianic claims. A position of faith necessarily

[10] See Roco, and Bainbridge (eds.), *Converging Technologies*; also http://www.salvomag.com/new/articles/salvo1/coleman.php (accessed 12 September 2013).

begins with the recognition of the God of Life as Creator and Sustainer, as well as the purpose and destiny of all creation. In reassessing the interconnectedness of all living beings, faith-based communities must engage deeply with cosmic and social reality and provide a radical critique of technocracy. This demands a re-reading of the Bible as wisdom of life in its fullness.

Traditional African societies, for instance, present great wisdom in their understanding of human life as life in community which is not just in harmony with other human persons but also with the whole of creation. As far as Africa is concerned, natural law, articulated by African sages and handed down orally from one generation to the other, is the only law that safeguards the whole earth community.[11]

East Asian examples of historical convergence for wisdom of life are found in nineteenth-century religious and political movements with paradigmatic significance. The Tonghak and T'aiping traditions are historical paradigms of convergence, integrating Christian wisdom into Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, and other indigenous traditions. The turning point was liberation from the oppressive 'powers and principalities'. This vision emerged through convergence among divergent religious traditions.

Asian traditions on the wisdom of life must converge with all indigenous traditions as well as with Western Christian traditions so that a new theological horizon to deal with the threats of life, including implications for action and living together, may emerge.

Discerning the presence of the God of life

In liberating theology from the abuse of new technologies, churches need to expose the symbiotic relationship between religious, political and technological power that perpetuates unjust structures and practices. Against this background, faith communities are challenged to engage in a profound critique of the modern technocracy, thereby exposing the main actors and victims in the struggle for power. This would form the basis for resistance

[11] J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969).

and change. Beyond this, churches have to renew their theological discourses so that the principle of solidarity, or sharing in community towards a common purpose and destiny, may be integrated with the Christian principle of love (*agape*) to become the general principle for all relations in the world community. This transformation of theology would be part of a process to restore justice and consequently the wholeness of life through God's grace (Rom. 3.1–11).

Theologically speaking, the politics of Jesus against the Roman Empire is the politics of new life on earth. The book of Revelations describes this as the messianic politics of the garden of life of the new earth under the new heaven (Rev. 21). In this perspective, a politics of life is the art of living together as a community of life on earth, locally, nationally and globally. It includes justice, participation, peace and conviviality in the community of all living beings. Its horizon is portrayed as a fiesta of life in all its different dimensions: ecological, geopolitical, socio-economic, cultural and spiritual.

Such a politics of life resists the global technological regime which controls and manipulates living subjects and their participation in the community of life. A politics of life resists any reduction of life to mere objects or fragmented parts. It resists every form of power that would destroy living beings or their communities. This involves the political struggle of all living beings at all levels, who are already moving dynamically in the midst of their suffering, pain and death.[12]

A faith stance!

At this moment in space and time in Asia, what are we to do with Christianity? This is for me a deeply existential question. It seems that Christianity has been one of the main obstacles to a convivial life among all people in the world. Is it possible to regard Jesus as the Alpha and Omega point of life in its fullness (justice, peace and conviviality)? This question entails a radical critique of the history of Christianity.

[12] J. Rifkin, *Biosphere Politics: A Cultural Odyssey from the Middle Ages to the New Age* (New York: Crown, 1991).

The Christian religion has become a chaplaincy to global military domination. Christianity is yet to deal with the hegemony of global empire, global market and global technocracy. It blesses the greed of capitalism as manifested in the global market regime. It is not merely the theology of prosperity that is to blame. The pursuit of unlimited wealth, economic power and domination is deeply ingrained in Christian ethics, with its theological justification of the doctrine of private property. Christianity celebrates modern science and technology as a cultural descendent of Western Christian civilization while modern technocracy, in convergence with the global economic, political, military and cultural powers, makes radical interventions in the very order of life, destroying, manipulating and 'creating' life itself. This is the way in which Christianity has become the religious ideology of the global empire. This is an illicit convergence of Christianity with global empire.

Can we name and discern the axis of the global empire, the illicit symbiosis of 'powers and principalities'? Can we forge a vision of life against this empire? For this task we better ask people in all continents, and all living beings who are suffering, in order to hear the voice of life in their stories, stories of suffering and hope, which may be called the story of all living beings in the cosmos.

This is a methodology followed in what I call 'zoegraphy': the story of life of all living beings. We shall hear the cries from the pit of the suffering of the dead, the hurt and the injured; those divided and imprisoned by the wall of brutality in Palestine, where children and youth have lost hope in the future. We will listen to the stories of women who have been raped and mutilated, victims of religious and cultural damage (religious prostitution, debased religion, religious ideology), the poor and the hungry, those who are sick and without hope for healing, those imprisoned by oppressive states, hostages, those suffering in inconceivable ways, those living in occupied areas. In these stories we encounter the reality of the global empire and global market – the pivot of the struggle of all living beings for life in justice, peace and conviviality.

Methodologically speaking, in the context of this story, there is a need for cross-textual readings on the wisdom of life across many religious and cultural traditions so that the wisdom in the Biblical texts can converge with those traditions for the emergence of fresh theological horizons.

A concluding word

How can the pivotal point of discourse on the God of Life be recovered? My response would be that theological discourse on life ought to be incarnated in zoesophia (the Wisdom of Life)!

Jesus of Galilee's ministry against the Roman Empire is the pivotal point that triggered a vision of new life, inheriting the prophetic visions of justice, peace and life and overcoming the domination of *pax Romana*, socio-economic class contradictions, ethnic and national divisions, gender and cultural injustices, intellectual segregation, power domination and religious discrimination. The Christian faith needs to recover Jesus the Galilaean, who holds the wisdom and the vision of life for all living beings, for their conviviality to open a new horizon out of the convergence of different faiths and philosophies.

The convergence of a vision of life means the convergence of all wisdoms – religious and cultural, philosophical and intellectual, historical and ecological. This is a multifaith, a multicultural and a multiphilosophical convergence. Jesus the Asian stands among these convergent movements and dynamics, for Jesus becomes the Alpha and Omega of the liberation and conviviality of all living beings. This convergence involves the dimensions of time (past, present and future) and of location (the far and the near, the West and the East, the South and the North) at the Omega point of all living beings. The convergence of liberation movements should include all religious and philosophical wisdoms.

In order to address the critical issues of life, theological discourse should be distinct from general discourse on life. It should be a discipline that is critical towards the technocracy that forms the engine of the global regime, which threatens the totality of life on earth. At the same time it should invite the creative fermentation of all forms of wisdoms in the whole history of earth.

Jesus the Galilaean from Asia also proclaims the fiesta of all living beings amid the global empire. The vision of the fiesta of life has risen from the convergence of the faith experiences of the early church with Asian traditions and faith experiences. The fiesta of life is the direct opposite of domination by the Roman Empire. The fiesta of life of all living beings is the core of Jesus' vision. The search for an integral Asian convergence for the liberation of

life may be a way to offer theological resistance against the global imperial regime.

Furthermore, we need to be in touch with the rich cultural heritages of indigenous people and with all religious and cultural struggles of people, along with our Asian cultural and religious heritages and struggles. We need to embrace them to understand and digest their wisdom for life. This includes what we might call people's philosophical and intellectual traditions for liberation and for life. Our ecumenical intellectual horizon must be as deep as it is all-inclusive.

Our final criterion is the abundant life of all living beings, that is, the fiesta of life. In and for this fiesta there is a convergence of a cosmic vision of life among all 'nations' and against the global powers of empire and market. This is the vision of life in fiesta provided by Jesus the Galilaean in Asia.

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