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About the journal

Anglican EcoCare came into being in 2006 as a commission of the Anglican Diocese of Perth, charged with being a prophetic voice on matters of faith and the environment. Through the establishment of the EcoCare Commission, the Diocese committed itself to give expression in its own life and ministry to the final point of the Mission Statement of the global Anglican Communion, namely: “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the Earth.” From the outset, Anglican EcoCare was charged with providing opportunities for theological reflection and education, with a view to transforming the life of the Diocese itself in its agencies and parishes, and to engage in environmental advocacy and build relationships with educational institutions, commerce and industry regarding environmental matters.

The need for an Australian theological journal dedicated to the emerging cross-disciplinary area of ecotheology became clear as we began to engage with academic theologians and to seek opportunities for articulating a Christian perspective on creation both within our own churches and in working alongside other agencies and faith perspectives in public advocacy. It became apparent that Australian theologians have a distinct “take” on ecotheology, formed both by our landscape and our historical engagement with immigrant and indigenous cultures and spirituality.

The *Anglican EcoCare Journal of Ecotheology* is offered as a way of gathering the varied strands of contemporary reflection on environmental theology, in the belief that this area presents unique and urgent challenges both for the Church and for our shared life on this fragile and vulnerable landscape. We have been encouraged by the breadth and quality of articles offered for publication, and hope that this journal may become a useful resource and inspiration not only for faith-based environmental groups, but for Australian churches realising the need to incorporate an environmental spirituality within our congregational life and ecclesiology.

Recalling Teilhard de Chardin’s “third nature” of Christ as the midpoint of creation, we believe the contemporary Church is called to nothing less than

the articulation of – and conversion to – an embodied spirituality that understands the meaning of human life and salvation within the context of the living systems of the Earth.

Evan Pederick, for Editorial Board
15 October 2014

Introduction to the papers

We are pleased to present the collection of papers that make up the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Ecotheology*. As ecotheology is an emerging field which is necessarily cross-disciplinary, it is perhaps unsurprising that the papers cover a variety of traditions and interests. While no single theme predominates, it is good to see papers which challenge us to think about the nature of the Church itself, as well as papers reflecting on the relationship between human and other-than-human, a theology of animal life, wilderness, indigenous traditions and agriculture.

Evan Pederick's paper applies the language of Biblical apocalyptic to the existential challenge of climate change in order to develop a way of speaking with appropriate urgency of the suffering of creation which is also the suffering of Christ. Evan suggests God's original – and final – template for creation is *shalom*, and develops the theme of the Church as a community of *shalom* based on a correspondence between the gardens of the Old Testament and in St John's Gospel.

Writing from an environmental science background, Jenny Schabel has undertaken research with Australian Christians involved in environmental action to gauge their awareness of denominational attitudes or action in relation to the environment. Jenny finds many Christians active in environmental issues are largely unaware of any official Church involvement or of biblical environmental theology, and may also feel unsupported by the Church.

Tim Cadman examines whether the environmental movement challenges us to “be Church” in a new way. Tim asks whether the Church is just reflecting contemporary society on environmental issues, or whether environmental awareness within the Church reflects an emerging awareness that calls for new theological and ecclesiological responses. He sees the opportunity for a new ecumenism around environmental issues, and suggests a Christological emphasis that may unite various Church traditions.

Anne Elvey discusses ecological communities (*i.e.*, human and other-than-human) in relation to the question, “Who is the greatest?” (Luke

22.24-27). Jesus' teaching on servant leadership is used as a hermeneutic to collapse the tension between the apparently competing divinely given vocations of Genesis chapters one and two. Jesus' instruction that "with you ... the greatest must become like the youngest" directs us to an understanding of the interconnectedness between the life of human and other-than-human communities. Anne also reflects on the "ecological texture" of the text itself.

John Dunnill explores a Biblical theology of animal sacrifice as gift and celebration, which attributes positive value – and moral status – to animals as a means of relating human life to God's own life. John argues this theological perspective can offer an alternative to the predominant Western view of animals as objects of consumption which negates the intrinsic value of animal life and leads to overly functional practices of animal management. John suggests that vegetarian practice restores the view of the animal as subject and may underpin a celebratory theology of animal life that echoes the sacrificial ideal.

Ted Witham is also interested in animals, exploring views on animals from the theological tradition since St Thomas Aquinas, and contrasting the majority view of animals as commodities with the less-often heard voice of the Franciscan tradition. Ted argues that contemporary Christians need to hear the voices of animals and acknowledge their contribution to a humane society.

Mick Pope explores the contested attitudes towards wilderness which suggest a new locus for theology. Mick begins with the somewhat poignant question *is there any true wilderness left?* His paper looks at key Biblical texts about wild places, exploring ideas of divine sovereignty and purpose, human stewardship, and humility. What does our theological tradition tell us about what should or should not be conserved as a wild place?

Julie Nelson-White's poem, "The Old Fig Tree," is based on the century-old fig tree at the Koora Retreat Centre near Coolgardie. The tree provides an evocative glimpse of the hardships of pioneer life and challenges our reflection on how we inhabit the wild places of our Australian landscape.

Lee Levett-Olson explores connections between the Hebrew Bible and indigenous culture, focussing on the Isaac saga and the quest for land and water. Lee reads Isaac through the lens of God's incarnational presence in the land, drawing relevance from the story for an ecotheological stance on traditional watersources facing threat from exploitative practices such as coal seam gas mining and fracking.

Appropriately, the last word belongs to Geoffrey Leslie, who quotes one of the farmers he spoke to: "Wow! Look at that! It's not boring to me, it's, I

dunno, it's spiritual." Geoffrey reflects on agriculture in Australia which faces particular challenges in remaining both profitable and sustainable, and challenges attitudes that sometimes see agriculture and environmental interests as being in opposition. He finds resources in Isaiah 28.23-26 for a Wisdom theology of agriculture and land based on incarnational presence that requires empathy and deep attentiveness, and suggests the social context for farming in Australia also needs to engage our theological awareness.

Climate change, apocalypse and the community of *shalom*¹

Evan Pederick

The crisis of global climate change, it is now becoming clear, is less about “getting the science right” and more about answering some ancient questions such as: Who are we? What is our relationship to the Earth? How should we live? The paper argues that the challenge for contemporary theology is to offer new perspectives on self, community and creation that can meet the existential challenges of tectonic ecological and economic disruption. The language of Biblical apocalyptic is applied to the current situation, and an ecotheology based on the theme of *shalom* and the connection between resurrection and creation in the Gospel of John is proposed. The paper concludes by suggesting some ways in which the Church as the community of *shalom* may live out its vocation at a time of ecological crisis.

Introduction: creation at risk

The IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report, released in April 2014, bluntly informs us that climate change is no longer a prediction but a present fact. The report details current impacts including rising sea levels, ocean acidification and slowing of increases in crop yield, and provides evidence that these impacts are primarily affecting the poorest of the world’s poor. The IPCC publication warns of a 4–6°C global temperature rise by the end of the century under the most alarming RCP8.5 “business as usual” scenario. The authors note that unless effective mitigation measures are implemented globally by the end of this decade, adaptation will be virtually impossible on the basis of currently

1 A version of this paper was presented at the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological schools (ANZATS) conference held in Fremantle, Western Australia, between 29 June and 2 July 2014.

available technology.² The IPCC report warns of major disruption to human activity, as extreme weather events become normal, fresh water reserves including deep aquifers and river systems become unusable, and crop production is rendered impossible across major parts of the globe. These predictions are not new, and since the formation of the IPCC in 1988 the consensus message from the world's top climate scientists has been consistent. Additionally, the issue of atmospheric carbon emissions is but one part of a wider interlocking puzzle. Climate changes long predicted and now beginning to be measured will only exacerbate problems such as overdrawn of the Earth's resources and the pressures placed by a still-growing global population on fresh water systems and the availability of arable land.

At the same time, political debates, especially in this country, expose the fact that the roadblock to effective action is not the science, but more basic existential issues of how human life is framed and valued. The 2013 State of the World Report, for example, makes the remarkable claim that the primary challenge in breaking through the gridlock of inaction in addressing the climate crisis is the articulation of an adequate moral and spiritual framework for human life conceived ecologically and communally.³ It is against this backdrop that Christian theology is challenged to provide a discourse of hope and a language for framing the existential crisis within the overarching narrative of faith.

In this paper, I address the question of how the Church may live out its vocation in an age of ecological crisis. I suggest an answer in two parts – first, utilising the language of Biblical apocalyptic to suggest a model by which we can speak with appropriate urgency and theological relevance of the crisis affecting God's work of creation, I argue that the Church has a specific vocation to witness to the suffering of creation which is also the suffering of Christ. Second, I suggest that God's desire and template for creation is *shalom* – that rich many-threaded skein of beauty and balance and order and wholeness and delight that weaves its way through the Hebrew Bible and finds its completion in the garden of resurrection. Specifically, I argue the need for an ecotheology of resurrection which is God's commitment to the fulfillment of creation.

- 2 T. F. Stocker et al., *IPCC, 2013: Summary for Policymakers*, Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, March 2014 See Fig. SPM7(a), page 21.
- 3 Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2013: Is Sustainability Still Possible?*, ed. Linda Starke, Erik Assadourian, and Thomas Prugh, Kindle Edition (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2013).

Apocalypse now?

I suggest there is merit in applying the language of Biblical apocalyptic to the current planetary crisis. Apocalyptic language is used in the Bible in relation to existential threat, and so offers starkly delineated alternatives for the future of a creation grounded in God's own life. Biblical apocalyptic deals with final questions, or the true end of all things, and so is necessarily implicated in a crisis which conceivably may so fundamentally alter the physical parameters of our planet that many species including our own may face extinction.

Contrary to popular imagery, Christian and Hebrew eschatologies are concerned not with the obliteration but with the restoration and the completion of all things into their true created identity. It is also important to note that eschatological language in the Hebrew Scriptures is generally a response to localised historical challenges. This is of some importance given our 21st century understanding of a cosmos that grows ever vaster and trickier with every new discovery of microbiology or quantum physics. We need an eschatological language that retains a sense of eternity and finalism while remaining firmly applicable to the local and transient – our local planet, local systems, species, and ecologies.⁴

A second point is that the eschatological language we need is specifically the language of Biblical apocalyptic. Of course it is difficult to take Biblical apocalyptic out in polite society, with its lurid themes of risk and violence, not to mention its disturbing logic of come-uppance. In the Noah cycle, for example, the floods are sent by God, but as even Hollywood can point out, it's just the logical outcome for a self-obsessed humanity that fails to live up to its original vocation to tend and care for the Earth.⁵ We need the language of apocalyptic to give appropriate theological structure to a high-stakes gamble: are we going to keep splurging the resources of 1.5 planets as though there is no tomorrow, and if we do, what if there *is* no tomorrow? Climate change is both an existential and an eschatological crisis, because what is at stake is the subversion of the true eschaton of the Earth and all its living systems.

Stephen Finamore reflects on the apocalyptic themes of Revelation 3–5, noting that the eschaton in John of Patmos's vision is actually hastened by the wit-

4 A local or "systems-based" approach to eschatology is suggested by Walter Wink, "Redeeming the Entire Universe: The Spirit of Institutions," in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin, Kindle Edition (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2011), 171–76. This is a helpful corrective to "big picture" theological eschatologies like that of Teilhard de Chardin, for example, although I am unable to develop this point within the scope of this essay.

5 Darren Aronofsky, *Noah*, 2014.

ness of the “martyrs.”⁶ The *martyrios* in John’s vision fulfill the time-honoured function of provoking the Evil Empire into overreach. Finamore’s Girardian argument is that apocalyptic violence follows on a culture’s loss of effective ritual and sacrificial resources to provide an alternative to victim-creation. The counter-cultural challenge for the *martyrios* is to enunciate an alternative reality based on Jesus’ model of the kingdom of God. This countercultural enactment has the power to break the cycle of ritual fabrication and mimetic violence and so “drives humanity towards the eschaton” – note however that the Church’s imperfect enactment of kingdom values remains incoherent unless we dare to speak from the position of the crucified and dying Christ, because that is where God’s clearest word to a violent humanity is heard.⁷ In Finamore’s analysis the faithful witness of Christian communities thus provokes the violence by which the self-serving ideologies of the powerful are maintained. In the context of climate change crisis, this suggests the Christian community can best unmask the violence being enacted against creation by powerful political and economic interests by speaking from a position of solidarity with the Earth and its living systems.

For Finamore (and Revelation) the witness that provokes the powers and principalities into overreach is that of faithful Christians. However we must resist the temptation to see ourselves as the *martyrios*, especially when the position we actually occupy is one of privilege and we ourselves are implicated in the violence against the Earth. In the context of ecological crisis the whole of creation suffers and bears witness to the disjunction between the relations of *shalom* that are its true vocation, and the relations of predation and exploitation that disfigure life.⁸ Following Ilia Delio we see that creation itself is cruciform, in that its suffering is the *coincidentia oppositorum* of oppression and *shalom*, or suffering and love.⁹ Thus in the context of ecological crisis we may more accurately say that the *martyrios* or witnesses to the unsustainable wrongness of relations in the created world are the living creatures themselves and all the planetary systems of earth and water and air. However creation’s witness is mute and non-verbal; it can only be articulated and made intentional by human witness and specifically the witness of the Church as the body of Christ.

6 Stephen Finamore, “A Kinder Gentler Apocalypse? René Girard, the Book of Revelation, and the Bottomless Abyss of the Unforgettable Victim,” in *Compassionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*, ed. Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin, Kindle Edition (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2011), 205.

7 Ibid., 203.

8 cf. Rom 8.25

9 Ilia Delio, *Christ in Evolution* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

A crucial challenge is how we articulate the true risk and contingency of the climate change precipice – at the same time as grounding our theology in the reality that both the beginning and the true end of all things is grounded in divine initiative, and that the saving death and resurrection of Christ has already been accomplished. Finamore suggests an answer, noting that John of Patmos’s vision of the plagues in Revelation 6 seems to be experienced in a time beyond time, streaming as it were “back from the future” to a world still contingent on the saving work of Incarnation.¹⁰ Finamore argues that the divine work of Incarnation is inseparable from the historical witness of the *martyrios*, which is to say that the Church as the body of Christ must in every age recapitulate through faithful Christian witness the sacrificial death of Christ. This means that the sense of “already but not yet” applies not just forwards in time to the eschaton, but also backwards in time to the work of redemption. Finamore argues that the “martyrs” in this eschatological crisis are those who “secede ... from the mimetic consensus” – which is to say that what provokes the denouement of the crisis is not just the clash of ideas but the enactment of an alternative reality.¹¹ The crisis of climate change thus becomes a defining challenge for the Church to practise solidarity in its own life with the mute witness of creation. By living in such a way that the Church becomes an icon of *shalom* in its own life – liturgically, ecclesially and politically – the Christian community is finally enabled to fulfill its own true vocation as the Body of Christ and is drawn towards its eschaton.

Creation and *shalom*

The language of apocalyptic sharpens our sense of crisis, and suggests the need both for an ecclesiology and praxis appropriate to an age of ecological crisis. We may however be left with more questions than answers: Where are we heading? And what should we do? I suggest the answer lies in the Bible’s great tale of paradise lost and creation restored.

This is a tale of two gardens – more precisely two pairs of gardens, as following the method of the medieval Franciscan, St Bonaventure, I draw Eden together with Gethsemene, and Isaiah’s vision of a restored creation with the garden of the new tomb.¹² The first couplet represents the sixth day of

10 Finamore, “A Kinder Gentler Apocalypse? René Girard, the Book of Revelation, and the Bottomless Abyss of the Unforgettable Victim,” 210.

11 Ibid., 211.

12 Bonaventure relies on this method of correspondences in his theology of history. See primarily *Collations on the Six Days*, trans. J. de Vinck, vol. 5, Works of Saint Bonaventure, Translation from the Latin Text of the Quaracchi Ed. (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970) I

creation – a day of decision and temptation, grief and loss for a humanity challenged to grow up to its co-creative responsibilities. The second couplet is the first day of creation restored. Linking the gardens of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures gives us an appropriate narrative and a language for an ecotheology of resurrection.

The tale of two gardens begins with the story of God's dream for *shalom*. Terry McGonigal explores the Biblical concept of *shalom* as peace within diversity, or "the way God designed the universe to be."¹³ McGonigal traces the major themes of *shalom* from the divine act of creation itself in which the prerequisites for *shalom* are: "order, relationships, stewardship, beauty and rhythm."¹⁴ The pattern of creation sets everything in its proper place and relationship, humankind is placed in a special relationship with the non-human world through its imaging of the divine, which implies a balance between human autonomy and dependence on the creator.¹⁵ The response of the man and woman to each other is intended to reflect "God's own nature in *shalom* relationships." Human responsibility for creation is contained in two instructions, with the command to subdue and dominate in Genesis 1.28-30 (Hebrew *kabash, radah*) being balanced by the instruction in 2.8 to till and to serve (*ebed*) and in 2.15 to watch or protect (*shamar*). McGonigal comments that the humans are intended to "partner with the Creator ... to watch over creation like parents watch over, guard and protect their newborn child."¹⁶ Themes of beauty are made specific in God's rejoicing at the outcome of the creative task (Genesis 1.31 "it was very good" – *tov me'od*). McGonigal comments:

According to God's design, each and every part of creation is distinct, interconnected and interdependent. God's separating-binding process results in creation's distinctiveness and connection: *shalom* beauty.¹⁷

The rhythms of creation are set by the creation of time and the separation into the natural rhythms of day and night. All this is what McGonigal describes as a "webbing together" of God's own life with the life of creation in

reflect elsewhere on Bonaventure's spiritual theology that leads not to the sleep of apophysis but the new creation of resurrection.

13 Terry McGonigal, "'If You Only Knew What Would Bring Peace': Shalom Theology as the Biblical Foundation for Diversity" (Spokane, WA: Whitworth University, 2013), 1, http://studentlife.biola.edu/page_attachments/0000/1395/ShalomTheology-TerryMcGonigal.pdf.

14 Ibid., 3.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 4.

17 Ibid.

a mutual rhythm of “justice, fulfilment and delight.” *Shalom*, he concludes, is “the way things are meant to be.”¹⁸

What happens next however is the breaking of *shalom* and the distortion of the web of creation, and the painful process of restoration that depends on God’s capacity to transform human evil and alienation.¹⁹ Through the narratives of the Fall, the first murder, the Flood and the tragedy of Babel, we see a contest between the destructive ethnocentricity of humans testing the limits of their created condition, and God’s efforts to restore the web of *shalom* relationships. In the prophets, and most particularly in Isaiah, we encounter the human effort to remember God’s template of *shalom* for all creation.²⁰ From the outset Isaiah has a vision not only of the moral and military precipice upon which Israel teeters, but also of the alternative vision of *shalom* that is God’s dream for the Earth and ultimately God’s initiative.

McGonigal’s work on *shalom* theology underlies Randy Woodley’s book, *Shalom and the Community of Creation*.²¹ Woodley sees elements of the Isaianic vision of *shalom* in indigenous (including Aboriginal) spirituality, which he calls the Harmony Way. Woodley points out that in the New Testament Paul “recognises the universality of the creation story and uses it as a backdrop for how Christ brings all things together in harmony.”²² His point is that creation is not an “optional extra” but central to God’s practice of *shalom* and our own. Identifying Jesus as a Wisdom sage and as the archetypal Wisdom of God, Woodley clarifies the connection between the pursuit of divine Wisdom, and the promise of *shalom*.

The one thing missing from this reflection is the *shalom* of resurrection. If, as Orthodox spirituality affirms, both the Incarnation and the resurrection reflect God’s priority for creation, then in the great story of salvation we should find a vision of creation in *shalom*.²³ If resurrection is the “first fruit” of a new creation, then our vision of creation restored must be grounded in an ecotheology of resurrection. This is also a corrective for any notion we might have that the healing of creation is but a human task. For a vision of resurrection as the renewal of creation we turn to the Fourth Gospel.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 7.

20 Isaiah contains nearly half the instances of *shalom* and its cognates in the prophetic literature.

21 Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, Kindle Edition, Prophetic Christianity (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012).

22 Ibid., loc. 697 of 2513.

23 John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*, Kindle Edition, Foundations of Contemporary Environmental Studies (Washington: Island Press, 2014), 101–102.

A tale of two gardens

With the first few words of St John's Gospel we know that we are witness to a grand vision of the cosmos itself. In making the startling claim that Jesus is nothing less than the Word and Wisdom of God, the Evangelist establishes creation as the arena of God's concern and saving action. Through the subversive language of Hebrew Wisdom theology, the Evangelist recasts the first chapter of Genesis and interprets the event of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in nothing less than universal terms. As Orthodox theology emphasises, the Incarnation affirms materiality and makes our humanity holy.²⁴

The Evangelist's orientation towards the second chapter of Genesis is less obvious, but can be read in his tales of two gardens. Both, I suggest, represent the garden of creation itself, and may be read in tandem with the archetypal gardens of the Hebrew Bible.

Naturally, the first of these is Eden, which represents the tension between God's dream of creation in harmony and the human will to power. Things go awry because of our deep-down desire to make the world around us conform to our own fantasies of control. Eat this, and you'll know what's going on. Except when they eat it, all the Bible's first humans see clearly is their own nakedness, their vulnerability and transparency.

Next we come to the Isaianic garden of *shalom*. The most familiar image of peace in Isaiah (11.6-9) is a reconciliation of opposites: wild and domesticated animals, predator and prey all live together in peace. The small child who plays over the snake-hole exhibits casual superiority over the usurper of Eden, and the animals are all vegetarian. Gene Tucker makes the point that this is not a wild utopia but a natural world made safe for human beings – because the emphasis is on the safety of domesticated animals and it is only the predators who have changed their ways. The fact that even the most vulnerable of humans is able to lead and control the animals makes clear that this is a pastoral scene, rather than a natural landscape.²⁵ Whether the vegetarianism of the animals is also practised by the human curators may be debated; however vegetarianism seems to have been the order in Eden, and arguably remains normative. Only after the Flood does God specifically allow the eating of animals, upon conceding powerlessness over human violence.²⁶

24 Ibid., 107.

25 Gene M. Tucker, "The Book of Isaiah 1-39: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. VI* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 141-142.

26 Gen 1.29-30; 2.9 cf. Gen 9.2ff.

Nevertheless, the child of Isaiah 11.6-9 fulfills the human vocation of care and protection given in Eden. The Isaianic vision of *shalom* is no return to Eden, but the peace of reconciliation on the other side of judgement or the Isaianic Day of the Lord.²⁷ This is a vision, in other words, not of an original ideal creation but of creation and human life restored to its true vocation. It cannot be a vision of a “wild planet” so long as it has a human population – and relations between human and animal life are necessarily structured by the human vocation to be co-creative partners with God. The echoes of Eden are there, but this is the peace not of naive innocence but of reconciliation. It is an ecological rather than an individualistic image of human life, modeled on the virtues of restraint and self-limitation.

This passage is part of a longer pericope spanning Isaiah 11.1-9, the first five verses of which present a vision of *shalom* in the sociopolitical sphere characterised by a ruler with practical wisdom, diplomacy and reverence. Although the use of this sort of language does not mark the passage as Wisdom writing, it is nevertheless intriguing that the characteristics of its idealised ruler are precisely those of the sage. What connects this with the vision of natural predators at peace in vv. 6-9, Gene Tucker points out, is the single word that does not actually appear at all in Isaiah 11.1-9: *shalom*. So there is a connection between transformation in the sociopolitical sphere and in human interactions with creation.²⁸ Again the connection between wisdom and *shalom* becomes apparent: if *shalom* is God’s priority and promise for creation then wisdom is the human choice that is congruent with God’s promise.

And so back to the Gospel. The first of the Evangelist’s gardens is the garden of betrayal “across the Kidron valley.”²⁹ The Synoptic Gospels identify this as Gethsemene, but only John identifies it as a garden. Likewise, only John identifies the place of Jesus’ burial as a garden in the place where he was crucified.³⁰ Mary Coloe notes that for John, the entire scene of Jesus suffering, death and resurrection is in this way framed in a garden, with the Cross as its centre suggesting the Tree of Life.³¹ Conversely, John lacks the excruciating detail of Jesus’ temptation in Gethsemene provided by Mark – as well as the related temptation in the wilderness.³² For Mark

27 Isa 2.13.

28 Tucker, “Isaiah 1-39,” 141.

29 Jn 18.1 (NRSV).

30 Jn 19.41 (NRSV).

31 Mary L. Coloe, “Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John,” *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 5, doi:10.1177/1030570X1102400101.

32 Mk 1.12-13; 14.32-39 (NRSV). Mark’s description of the wilderness in which Jesus fasts for 40 days and nights possibly evokes the image of Eden with its comment that ‘he was with the

it is in Gethsemene that Jesus faces the multiplication of his fears and temptations – but unlike the first humans in Eden, resists the desire for self-serving control.

Conflating the Johannine and Synoptic accounts, the early Church saw Gethsemene as the recapitulation of the temptation of Eden.³³ Both gardens represent the sixth day of creation – Eden with its newly-minted human curators facing their fatal challenge, and Jesus alone with the shifting shadows, with his fears and the half-heard voices at the beginning of the sixth day of his final week.³⁴ As in Eden the temptation is presented in the form of a desirable fruit, so in Gethsemene the temptation is to refuse the cup of suffering. Jesus knows that his life can only unfold as it should in dependence on the one he calls his Father, and so he dies as he has lived, forgiving and loving those who have rejected him. Jesus here is practising the priority of relationship that we call self-giving love.

The second garden for the Evangelist is the garden of the new tomb, the cave of Joseph of Arimathea. This garden is a place of silence and rest for Holy Saturday on which, as the medieval theologians suggested, the creative Word of God was so hidden in death that all creation must also have been submerged, walking in its sleep, grieving and purposeless. This is the seventh day of creation, the day on which God also rests.³⁵

But as the night of the seventh day draws to its close a new cycle begins. The first day of the week, which in the Hebrew calendar corresponds to the first day of creation, becomes the day of resurrection. A woman walks at first

wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

- 33 Congdon notes the connection between Eden and Gethsemene in Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor. Specifically, in Gethsemene Jesus must recapitulate the temptation of Adam. “The Humanity of Christ in the Theology of Cyril of Alexandria and Maximus the Confessor” (Princeton Theological Seminary, 2007), <https://www.academia.edu/Download>; Kantzer Komline notes the origins of this recapitulation theory in Augustine “The Second Adam in Gethsemene: Augustine on the Human Will of Christ,” *Revue d’Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 58, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 41–56, doi:10.1484/J.REA.5.101070.
- 34 The sixth day begins with sundown on the Thursday evening. I take my analogy from Hans Urs von Balthasar’s reflection on the correspondence between the six days of creation and the Triduum in Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, ed. Stephen Brown, trans. Philotheus Boehner, vol. 2, Works of Saint Bonaventure, Translation from the Latin Text of the Quaracchi Ed. (Saint Bonaventure University: The Franciscan Institute, 1998), <http://www.franciscan-archive.org/bonaventura/opera/bon05295.html>; Stephen Fields, “Balthasar and Rahner on the Spiritual Senses,” *Theological Studies* 57, no. 2 (1996): 224ff; Raymond Brown, in *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemene to the Grave; a Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels Vol. 1 Vol. 1* (New York [u.a.: Doubleday, 1998) also notes that this connection is made by several of the Church Fathers and various modern commentators, though he believes there is “little in the text to encourage such speculation”.
- 35 St Bonaventure concludes his treatise, Bonaventure, *Itin.*, vol. 2, sec. 7(6) p. 101, with the exhortation: “Let us then die and enter into this darkness. With Christ crucified let us pass out of this world to the Father.”

light across the damp grass of the garden carrying gifts for a dead lover, and finds nothing but an inexplicable absence. The stone has been rolled away, appearing at first like a desecration even in death – she calls her companions who come and confirm the mystery. But then Mary does see clearly when she sees the one she supposes to be the gardener, because that in a sense is exactly who he is. This is a renewed creation and it begins with a man and a woman standing together in a new garden.³⁶

For Luke, Matthew, and John, the resurrection appearances of Jesus are not over-spiritualised. He speaks words of forgiveness, touches and allows himself to be touched, lights a fire on a beach, eats with his friends. If the crucified Jesus conjoins the opposites of hatred and forgiveness, death and life, suffering and love, then the Risen One opens the way to a possible future with the single word: *shalom*. The risen Christ greets his disciples on more than one occasion with the words, “peace be with you” (*eirene*). In this encounter the world is remade. The resurrection is the final *coincidentia oppositorum* by which God commits Godself to creation as the arena of divine self-disclosure and saving action. Resurrection is God’s commitment to the life of creation, and the encounter through which God draws us to the fullness of life for which we were created. The garden of the new tomb, in which Mary encounters the risen Christ on the first day of the week, or the first day of a new creation, is the garden of *shalom*.

Specifically, what is created on the first day is the beloved community. Following his greeting to the traumatised disciples the Risen One breathes on them, saying, “receive the Holy Spirit.”³⁷ The breath which is also spirit (*pneuma*) recalls the wind (*ruach*) of God that hovers over the chaos of precreation on the first day in Genesis 1.2. In both cases we are witness to the primal creative Word of God. In conferring the breath of the Holy Spirit the Risen One draws the community of *shalom* into the triune life of God. It is in this act that we experience all things made new, and it remains only for the community as *martyrios* to fulfil its vocation as an icon of God’s own life.

36 Generally the correspondence is suggested simply by the day of the week, which always has significance for Hebrew writers. A seminal work that draws out the correspondences between Eden and the garden of the new tomb is Mariusz Rosik, “Discovering the Secrets of God’s Gardens: Resurrection as New Creation (Gen 2:4b-3:24; Jn 20:1-18),” *Liber Annuus* 58 (January 1, 2008): 81–98 Another helpful paper is ; Mary L. Coloe, “Theological Reflections on Creation in the Gospel of John,” *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 1–12, doi:10.1177/1030570X1102400101.

37 John 20.22

Conclusion

How, then, shall we live? What is the challenge for the life and witness of the Church in an age of ecological crisis? This paper has suggested an answer in two parts: firstly, that the existential crisis of climate change requires of the Church nothing less than the faithful commitment to recapitulate in its own witness the saving work of Jesus. Specifically, the vocation of the Church is to witness to the divine work of creation, and to stand in solidarity with a creation that in its suffering reveals the suffering of the Crucified Christ. Invoking the language of apocalypse means acknowledging not only the existential risk to the living systems of the Earth, but the reality that the eschaton of a creation at peace requires the faithful witness of the *martyrios*.

The second part of the answer I have suggested in this paper is that the story of the Earth and the divine commitment to creation is woven into the central Christian narrative of the crucifixion and resurrection – which reveals creation as the locus of God's own life and the inescapable context within which the Christian community strives to live out its commitment to the kingdom of God. We are reminded that our created context, and our relationships with the Earth and its living systems, are not optional extras but the core both of our being and of our Christian *kerygma*.

The challenge, then, is simply to take our vocation and our identity seriously. If as a Christian community our own life flows out of the triune life of God, then we must love what God loves. The Christian community becomes suddenly more inclusive, like the Ark; a shelter and a transformative space for all species. The virtue of restraint, long taught by environmental groups, becomes the Golden Rule: Jesus' ethic of reciprocity extended to all creation. We are challenged to develop, and to rejoice in, a spirituality of the physical; celebrating the goodness and beauty of our own bodies, owning a kinship with creatures domestic and wild, birds and fish, and living systems of water and earth and air. We become aware of the creatures that share our planet, the poignancy of their needs and their vulnerability to our self-obsession. We reconsider our own use of animal bodies and of the natural resources and habitat they need in order to live – not just because of the needs of future generations of humans, but because of the delight and the love God feels for all that lives.³⁸ We remember that our original vocation is to serve and nurture (*ebed*) and not to plunder and consume.

The community of *shalom* is the community that delights in Wisdom. We recognise the Earth as our teacher and understand that in its rhythms we feel

38 Vegetarianism, for example, becomes a serious question for all Christians.

the murmuring of God's own life. We understand that to flow into the current of God's life is to live in harmony with the natural world, and that to take for ourselves without thought for creation is to alienate ourselves from God. This is the ethic of poverty that leaves room for the Other. We look for ways to bring our lives into closer contact with the Earth because we have learned that by so doing we are ourselves blessed, and are formed as a community of blessing. We build churches that incorporate environmental spaces shared by human and non-human guests. We celebrate the goodness of creation and the wonder of all life in our liturgy and we proclaim God's love and God's promise for the whole creation. This is the ethic of chastity, which recognises the Other not as a resource to be incorporated but as a Word of God to be attended to.

The community of *shalom* is the community of solidarity. We unshackle our ecclesiology from the structures of power and commit ourselves to living out the relationship with all life for which we were originally created. We imitate the way of self-emptying love that pours itself out in the primal act of creation, just as it does in the Incarnation of God's creative Word. This is the ethic of obedience, that recognises the triune life of God as the template for our own. We pin all our hopes on the Earth that bears the imprint of divine hope. Apocalypse is the escalation both of risk and of love; the hope of God for the *shalom* of the Earth is us.

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Is Christian involvement in nature conservation under-recognised because it happens outside of the church?

An investigation into the actions and motivations of, as well as barriers faced by, a group of Australian Christians involved in nature conservation¹

Jenny Schabel

Christian involvement in environmental activity has been studied less in Australia in comparison to North America and Western Europe. Research in Australia to date has focussed on measuring Christian involvement through a church or denomination's leadership views, environmental policies and programs. This study considers if this approach under-recognises the activity of Australian Christians because much of it happens outside of the church through individual, community and workplace activities. A survey of a group of Australian Christians involved in nature conservation has been undertaken to investigate if this is the case. A series of questions were posed to Christians geographically spread around Australia, based in both urban and rural areas. This study reveals a number of findings and provides recommendations for future research.

1 This paper is an excerpt from an integrative project submitted in June 2014 for a Graduate Diploma of Christian Studies from Sydney Missionary and Bible College. For a copy of the full paper contact the author via email: jenny.schabel@gmail.com

Introduction to Christian environmental literature

A review of existing Australian-based literature indicates that little research has taken place in Australia relating to Christian environmental behaviour and practice. More is known in North American and Western European contexts. What research that has been done appears to indicate that there has been little Christian involvement in environmental action, as it relies on the assumption that involvement can be measured by investigating church leader views, church environmental policies, and church-based initiatives. The results of three Australian studies in particular are seen to contribute to this impression.² This review of Australian literature suggests that knowledge gaps still exist particularly concerning the experiences and actions of Australian Christians beyond the church. Given that Douglas concludes Christian influence is low because church activity is limited, measuring Christian environmental activity and influence beyond the church may significantly challenge such perceptions.³ Consequently the primary research question for this primary research was: “does the assumption that Australian Christian involvement in environmental action is represented by church leader views, church environmental policies, and church-based initiatives under-recognise the activity of Australian Christians because much of it happens outside of the church?” The purpose was to interact in a preliminary way in a new area of research, namely the environmental activity of Christians beyond the church, their motivations and the barriers they face. The aim was to identify some key themes with the hope that it may encourage more detailed study in the future.

Study Design

The survey approach used was non-random sampling, inviting participants through known networks, their contacts, and through the *Australian Christian Environmental group* on Facebook. Twenty responses were received between March and May 2014. The study sampled a diverse range of Australian Christians with diverse experiences.

- 2 Steven Murray Douglas, *Is 'green' religion the solution to the ecological crisis? A case study of mainstream religion in Australia*. (PhD diss., Canberra: Australian National University, 2008); Alan Black. “Religion and Environmentally Protective Behaviour in Australia”. *Social Compass* 44, no. 3 (1997): 401-412; Clive Ayre, *Approach to Ecological Mission in and Through the Christian Community in Australia: Beyond Apathy to Committed Action* (PhD diss., The University of Queensland, 2008).
- 3 Douglas, *Is 'green' religion the solution to the ecological crisis? A case study of mainstream religion in Australia*.

Results and Discussion

To the key research question “does Christian involvement in nature conservation happen outside of the church?” the results from this study compellingly indicate that this is the case. Nineteen of the twenty participants provided reasons why it is important for them to participate in nature conservation, and of these, seventeen outlined nature conservation activities they are involved in. Of these, only one was substantially involved in these activities within church structures as a paid church worker for their denomination. This finding compellingly suggests that previous studies concentrating on leadership views, environmental policies and programs of churches to indicate levels of activity may have significantly under-estimated Christian involvement. A number of other key themes may be noted from this study, including:

1. *The majority of interviewees may not have a well-considered biblical theology for nature conservation.* Only three participants provided an extensive response by referring to multiple books or theological themes in both the Old and New Testaments. One participant over the age of 65 stated “I just do them, I haven’t formalised my theological thinking in these activities.” Another suggested that “most Christians do not have a biblical understanding as to why they should care for creation.”
2. *The majority of interviewees have experienced a low level of support from churches, and little encouragement from the pulpit.* Only three participants provided an unqualified yes to the question of their church knowing and being supportive of their nature conservation activities, whereas twelve said that the Ministry of the Word provided little to no specific encouragement to link environmental action with the Bible. Few churches offered biblical exposition that encouraged a Christian view of nature conservation or environmental action. One participant reflected that “churches have a lot on, many different competing focuses I suppose”. Another reflected that their church family “didn’t put me down or try to shut me up, but didn’t build me up either – would have been good if they had”. Other responses included “I have never been in a church where that has been the case, in all my years,” “No, I’ve never heard a sermon on it in Australia,” and “When I’ve been in denominations they have not even mentioned such things – though some people in those congregations did share my concerns.”
3. *The majority of interviewees don’t interact with much of the available ecotheology literature.* Five participants indicated that they were widely

read, two had read some, and eight had read none. One commented that she was disappointed by the biblical treatment in the books that she read, and another who had done a lot of independent reading in other theological areas said, “actually, I don’t know where I would find that kind of reading”.

4. *The majority of interviewees don’t often interact with other Christians involved in nature conservation.* Only six participants reflected on positive networking experiences, whereas all others were more measured, saying that it didn’t happen very often, or was limited. One reflected, “I can only think of a few who are like-minded in both”.
5. *The majority of interviewees have pronounced differences of opinion to other Christians in relation to some common views about Christian belief and the environment.* This finding was identified through participant interaction with known apologetic “stumbling-blocks,” mostly from De Witt’s work in America.⁴ The most commonly heard views reported by participants were:
 - i. This world is not my home. I’m just passing through;
 - ii. The world will be destroyed when Jesus comes again;
 - iii. People are more important than the environment; and
 - iv. In these last days, Christians and churches need to focus on winning people to Christ through personal salvation.
6. *The majority of interviewees don’t identify their nature conservation activities as a Christian expression.* Only three participants, of the seventeen who outlined nature conservation activities they are involved in, associated these activities as a form of Christian ministry outside of the church.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study indicate that Australian Christians are involved in nature conservation outside of the church, but are poorly encouraged in this activity by churches and other Christians. This aberration may be detrimental to the personal faith journey of Christians and limit constructive faith dialogue with non-Christians in nature conservation contexts where there

4 Calvin De Witt. “Creation’s environmental challenge to evangelical Christianity” in Berry, R.B., ed. *The care of creation: focusing concern and action* (Leicester, Eng.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 60-73.

otherwise may be evangelistic and apologetic opportunities. There may be significant gains to be made in these areas if Christians are encouraged and equipped to integrate their nature conservation activity with a stronger eco-theological framework.

It is therefore seen as extremely important for Christians to intentionally work at developing robust ecotheological frameworks that recognise Christian care for creation to worship and honour the Creator, that humans have failed in stewardship of the suffering creation because of sin, that work in the Spirit extends Christ's healing reconciliation to all things in word and deed, and that Christians bring the Creator glory by protecting and healing creation until the time when it will be restored to wholeness.

This framework is outlined with accompanying scriptural references in the 1994 Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation⁵ and the Australian Evangelical Alliance's "Christians and Climate Change" policy statement in 2012,⁶ for example.

There are many scholars who have provided helpful exegetical and theological contributions to unpack this further. However as this study suggests, a minority of Australian Christians appear to substantially interact with what is available at this point in time.

Grizzle, Rothrock and Barrett identify dialogue between Christians as the "greatest need overall" in order to "move evangelicals more effectively in a proper direction with respect to environmental concerns."⁷ Based on the Australian literature review and study outlined above I would particularly recommend collaboration on the development of an Australian website that outlines helpful ecotheology work, provides a recommended reading list, engages with key apologetic issues, and constructively profiles the actions, experiences and motivations of Christians involved in Australian nature conservation and ecomission projects through case studies. I strongly welcome feedback from other Christians who feel likewise and are compelled to assist in this endeavour for the glory of Christ. A participant in this research summed up the importance of being mutually encouraged aptly:

5 *The care of creation: focusing concern and action*, edited by R.B. Berry. Leicester, Eng.: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000.

6 Australian Evangelical Alliance Inc. "Christians and Climate Change", last modified 7th May, 2012, [http://www.ethos.org.au/site/Ethos/filesystem/documents/in-depth/public policy/Climate Change.pdf](http://www.ethos.org.au/site/Ethos/filesystem/documents/in-depth/public%20policy/Climate%20Change.pdf)

7 Raymond Grizzle E.; Paul E Rothrock.; Christopher B. Barrett, "Evangelicals and Environmentalism: Past, Present, and Future". *Trinity Journal*, 19, no. 1 (1998): 3-27.

To have a central base of believers who understood the importance of nature conservation and didn't question ... why you are involved – to have some mutual support there – would be great. I've found that whenever I've found another believer who says, "Yes, yes, I understand exactly what you are talking about," it is such a relief...

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Where on Earth is the church?

Engaging the Global Environmental Crisis

Tim Cadman and Carol Bond

This paper examines contemporary ecclesiology as a postmodern phenomenon with implications for leadership on environmental issues. Specifically, it raises the question as to whether church-based efforts to engage society more broadly on environmental issues can be seen as an emerging movement within institutional faith communities, or as the church merely reflecting contemporary societal attitudes about environmental issues. It continues with a discussion of what “being church” means in terms of future church practice in providing leadership on environmental stewardship. From a theological standpoint, the paper suggests that the “cosmic Christ” has potential to allow ecumenism on environmental issues across denominations. Finally, the paper suggests ways to integrate the ecclesiological and theological views with various recommendations for ecumenical church governance on environmental issues.

Introduction

The postmodern era has challenged traditional forms of ecclesiology as the church no longer holds the same place in the collective imaginary as many once thought it had. Postmodernists are quick to emphasise that the church is not infallible, priests are fallen, and its institutional structures are subject to human failings. In many ways, the traditional denominational churches are in the grips of redefining what place they occupy in society and where their influence, individually and collectively, can contribute meaningfully to pressing issues such as the environment.

We suggest that the church’s response to escalating awareness of environmental problems lies not so much in devising anecdotal initiatives, but in

the application of the principles of “good” governance throughout the global *ecclesia* at all levels. The church has an advantage over governments. Like the global nongovernmental organisation (NGO) and multinational business communities, it functions as an institution on all levels, and as such it stands apart from government. But as a *faith* community, it exceeds the capacity of business, since it has a series of embedded values that go beyond market liberalism. Unlike the NGO community, the faith commitments of the church’s constituents are more than temporal and political in nature; thus, the faith community has a potentially greater capacity to implement global behaviour changing and problem-solving actions in a durable manner. However, to do so, the church requires a coherent global response to matters of environmental policy, most particularly the development of a consistent message across denominations.

Once general policy positions have been established, it will be necessary to develop jointly agreed standards and frameworks for implementation by the wider society. Given the increasingly co-operative nature of the mainline faith communities, and the embedded nature of their current collective responses to normative environmental measures, this is not an insurmountable task. It remains to be seen, however, whether the complexity of pluralist notions of faith practice will prevail in this era of unprecedented environmental risk – and fundamentalism. Nevertheless, the sceptical notion that the Bible, the church and Jesus Christ have little or nothing to say about the current environmental crises is specious and must therefore be challenged.

Ecotheology and emerging environmental movements in churches

The church has not historically been a powerful voice in terms of protection and stewardship of the earth. Rather, there has been an emphasis on creation being formed for humanity to exploit as it sees fit.¹ This is perhaps a misinterpretation of scripture, the consequences of which are now beginning to be seen on a large scale. Ecotheological perspectives have veered away from Scripture and relied more heavily on Native American myths, goddess stories, and academic discourses of opposition to patriarchy and masculine imagery for God. Recognising that there are theologians who write about environmental justice, the fact remains that the rich Judeo-Christian tradition has not yet been actively reinterpreted as a strong ecotheological voice in the

1 Bauckham 2007.

global dialogue on the environment. This has left many environmentally concerned Christians with the impression that there are limited resources from within their own tradition on which to rely or to advocate for environmental issues. This state of affairs has implications both for the ecumenical unity of the church and for the spiritual development of individual Christians.

Currently, there are multiple Christian ecological discourses with the church. They can be broadly broken down into three categories. First, the environment itself is subject to various discursive interpretations, by both individuals and groups, and exemplified by the cornucopian and Promethean discourses (“nature is boundless”/“we have the technology”).² Second, there are discourses expressed within particular faith communities (e.g., Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), which are generating a series of specific institutional norms (viz. the Church of England’s “Shrinking the Footprint” initiative). Third, there are discourses shared across faith communities, and driven by specific ideologies and individual social-political tendencies.³ The first two make valuable contributions to the otherwise wholly secular discourses on the environmental situation.

A common set of arguments from scripture has emerged as to why care for the environment can be seen as central to the Judeo-Christian tradition. This begins with an apologetic interpretation of the creation accounts of Genesis; most notably, the command to “subdue the earth” (Genesis 1.28). This includes the Hebrew Bible’s account of the covenant between the people of Israel and Yahweh where humanity’s relationship with God includes their responsibility to be good stewards of the earth, with Noah as exemplar.⁴ The Hebrew Bible echoes environmental stewardship themes in the Prophets, Psalms and wisdom literature.⁵ Environmental stewardship in the New Testament builds on themes in the Hebrew Bible. The narrative in the synoptic Gospels of Jesus Christ subduing the waves and the wind when the disciples were adrift in a stormy sea has often been used as an example of Christ’s lordship over all creation. Paul picks up on this revelation and places Christ at the centre of creation (Colossians 1.15-18). In this context, Paul’s understanding of the “Redemption” in Ephesians (1.7-12) is extended beyond human beings to all creation, which is inwardly groaning (Romans 8.24) for freedom from human exploitation.⁶ Out of this has arisen a contemporary reinterpretation

2 Dryzek 1990.

3 For example, using the analysis of Bäckstrand and Lövbrand 2006, broken down into the discourses of *civic environmentalism*, *ecological modernisation* and *green governmentality*.

4 Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 5 and 123–125.

5 Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 5.

6 Bäckstrand and Lövbrand, 163–164.

of the role of Christian mission, in which “advocacy for God’s creation must be at the forefront.”⁷ Although there is not space to cover the full range of environmental movements in the churches of the world, below are indicative examples of environmental initiatives emerging from both Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic churches.

Momentum has gathered for mainstream Protestant churches to develop lobbying capacity, leading to the formation of groups such as the Evangelical Environment Network in the USA, which successfully campaigned against Republican attempts to weaken the *Endangered Species Act* (ESA).⁸ At the time, Evangelical activist and academic Calvin B. DeWitt referred to the ESA as “the Noah’s Ark of our Day.”⁹ Such actions have in turn led to a “greening” of church infrastructure, including the introduction of energy-efficient light globes and solar panels, exemplified by the Interfaith Power and Light initiative, spearheaded by the Anglican (Episcopal) Reverend Sally Bingham.¹⁰

The older church traditions, Orthodox and Catholic, are also beginning to make contributions towards environmental awareness. The Ecumenical (Orthodox) Patriarch Bartholomew began a series of awareness-raising expeditions to threatened ecosystems, including a trip along the Amazon in 2006.¹¹ Similarly in the Catholic Church, there is an emerging understanding of the significance of environmental degradation and a growing awareness of its role in reshaping the theology of environmental stewardship. In a brief statement issued to the Earth Summit, and elsewhere, Pope John Paul II referred to the environmental crisis as “a moral issue” and said that Adam and Eve, “by deliberately going against the Creator’s plan,” destroyed the natural order in their exercise of dominion over the earth.¹² Pope Francis is beginning to advance discussion on the importance of environmental issues in a series of public statements such as the one delivered on the World Day of Peace, 2014.

I wish to mention another threat to peace, which arises from the greedy exploitation of environmental resources. Even if “nature is at our disposition,” all too often we do not respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.¹³

7 Centre International Réformé John Knox 2007.

8 Gardner 2006, 81–82.

9 Gardner, 82.

10 Gardner, 78.

11 Gardner, 76.

12 Oelschlaeger 1994, 133.

13 Accessed at: <http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/catholic-teachings/pope-francis/> [2 Aug 2014].

However, this growing awareness is still not shared by some, including then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus, who argued in 1986 that environmentalists were “anti-humanist.”¹⁴ Nevertheless the “greening” of the Catholic church is also under way, influenced externally by the adoption of the growing discourse of sustainable development by the World Council of Churches (WCC), of which the Catholic church is not a member but participates in the Joint Working Group, and the WCC’s argument that the concept needed to be expanded to include issues of social justice and peace as well as the need to protect the “integrity of creation.”¹⁵

Whether the “greening” of the church represents a broader manifestation of the emerging ecclesial manifestations of the church remains to be seen. In the absence of a clear, Christian ecotheology, the growth of an environmental consciousness within the church continues to reflect an essentially postmodern understanding of the world; that is, that the nature of human progress is questionable, and that the world is confronted by ever-increasing complexity, uncertainty and risk.¹⁶

Sustainability and theology

There is a generational shift in new church expressions around environmental issues.¹⁷ The environment has only been acknowledged as a problem in need of a solution within the last couple of decades, and has been a cause taken up by the newer generation of clergy and laity who emphasise socio-political action around issues of environmental justice.¹⁸ Insofar as these responses are expressed in a multiplicity of forms, from the conservative to the radical, Christian environmentalism, like the emerging church, constitutes “an umbrella that covers many diverse movements.”¹⁹ It is also a modality of church that is in formation, and has not yet fully arrived.²⁰ However, since mainstream churches are also expressing an interest in and concern about the environment, it is not a phenomenon exclusive to any one denomination.²¹

As an institution, the church often operates without challenging dominant social paradigms, and as such it has been slow to adopt the necessary actions

14 McDonagh 1990, 189–191.

15 McDonagh, 194.

16 Spickard 1999.

17 Gibbs and Bolger 2005, location 284 of 4627.

18 Carroll 2004, location 2639 of 3730.

19 Gibbs and Bolger, location 434 of 4627.

20 Gibbs and Bolger, location 442 of 4627.

21 Gibbs and Bolger, location 496 of 4627.

to lead on environmental sustainability.²² But there is an almost universal approach to environmental action around the concept of stewardship.²³ It is interesting to note, however, that this convergence is occurring even though there are striking differences in the emphasis accorded to the science of ecology. Although most denominations recognise the contribution of science to understanding the contemporary environmental crisis, the more liberal eco-theological end of the continuum places evolutionary science far more at the centre of the cosmological understanding of the universe than conservative, creation-centred faith communities.²⁴ Nevertheless, both liberal and conservative churches have emphasised both the need for personal and community action within church structures, in the home and in one's own life.²⁵

The response of the Church to the current environmental crisis could be interpreted as an interpenetration of religious environmental ethics with global norms and expectations about how institutions of all types *should* behave. The initial push for action emerged within the secular world of civil society and government, but now the recognition of the need for action has entered the church. There is an acceptance of the need to appreciate nature; promote social, economic and environmental wellbeing; and, at the same time, rethink contemporary materialist culture.²⁶ The response of the main denominations has been identified as falling within a spectrum that reflects conservative and liberal viewpoints but is effectively *moderate* in its interpretation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as creation is understood in largely biblical terms.²⁷

A more *radical* perspective seeks to reinterpret tradition "in the context of a new cosmology."²⁸ Here, the Judeo-Christian creation stories are located within a scientific discourse; as such, they contradict the liberal or conservative approaches that, to varying degrees, seek to reconcile the two (to the extent their own religious perspectives allow). Ecotheologians such as Thomas Berry have argued that the obsession with redemption has obscured the mystery of creation by an overemphasis on human salvation through a personal saviour.²⁹ This has led another commentator to express the view that "much more than personal salvation of humankind is involved in ... the redemption

22 Gardner, 7–9.

23 Austin 2010; Gelderloos 1990, 15–16.

24 Deane-Drummond 2008, locations 1176, 1202 and 4656 of 6389

25 Robinson 2006, locations 1146–1235 of 1366; Centre International Réformé John Knox, 6–10.

26 Gardner, 147–159.

27 Oelschlaeger 1994, 124.

28 Oelschlaeger.

29 Oelschlaeger, 165.

of the entire creation [that] is promised.”³⁰ This perspective seeks to reject the notion that nature, like humankind, is fallen, and eschews the portrayal of the world as a dark and evil place. It is also much more strident in its criticism of the institutionalised church which arguably has contributed to the destruction of the environment as a consequence of such early church authorities as Saint Augustine, who overemphasised other-worldliness and downplayed the significance of what humans do on earth.³¹

As mentioned above, ecotheological perspectives have moved from biblical sources to borrow creation stories from other religious traditions as a way of understanding Genesis. These include Native American creation myths, creation stories of Australian Aboriginal people, and other narratives from traditional peoples around the world. Goddess narratives have become popular with some because they have been interpreted to embody the antipatriarchal analysis of ecofeminism, which they offer as a challenge to what they perceive as the conception of other Christians that God is masculine (and dominating). Such perspectives are along a continuum that ultimately leads to *deep ecology* (an ecophilosophy with a quasi-spiritual dimension), and which consciously reject the institutionalised church, interpreted as a Constantinian construct aimed at gaining control over conquered nations through the suppression of polytheism.³²

Attempts have been made to reconcile ecotheological narratives with the reinterpretation of Judeo-Christian creation myths. A more nuanced view argues that neither utilitarian anthropology nor the privileging of nature is sufficient in its own right; what is required is an “anthropocentrism of responsibility.”³³ Since humanity is damaging the non-human world, a primary Christian task is to minimise the damage done to the earth.³⁴ Achieving this end requires some basic steps. In order to be “a leading global voice,” the public activity of the church regarding environmental issues requires an approach based on the principles of ecology.³⁵ For this, the church needs to exercise its spiritual and ethical authority when speaking on environmental matters. Local and national churches need to become involved in political action that favours maintenance of the integrity of creation. Not surprisingly, a biblically informed theology is also required. Finally, echoing Bonhoeffer’s

30 Gelderloos, 38–39.

31 Gelderloos, 21 and 124.

32 Oelschlaeger, 171–179.

33 Bedford-Strom 2007, 241.

34 Bedford-Strom, 230.

35 Bedford-Strom, 247.

belief in the need for a “will for the future,” the church needs to promote an “eschatology of hope” for the earth and its inhabitants.³⁶ These first and last elements pick up on both the scientific and prophetic emphases of the “deeper” end of the ecotheology continuum.³⁷

Ecumenical environmental governance and the Cosmic Christ

The church’s response can be analysed in the following manner. Although there are differing denominational emphases, institutional ecclesiological responses are similar overall. There is a general degree of sympathy for global responses to environmental problems, demonstrated in church support for and participation in intergovernmental forums. There has been some uptake of market-based approaches to solving environmental problems, notably emissions trading as an approach to tackling climate change, and support for emissions reduction targets rather than the elimination of human-caused greenhouse gases.

Global environmental governance (GEG) has arisen in recent decades as a key means of both responding to the contemporary situation, and understanding existing institutional responses, both within the church and outside it. The political sciences can be used to analyse these contemporary developments. International relations (IR) emphasises institutional structures and stresses the increasingly non-state nature of GEG, including the role for civil society in policy-making, and not simply government. IR also notes the importance of business, and market-based solutions. It interprets these developments as a constituting a “government to governance transition” in global politics.³⁸ The public policy literature emphasises the increasingly social–political nature of institutions, in which collaborative interaction among participants (state and non-state) is the primary governing mechanism.³⁹ Both approaches situate their analysis in the context of environmental policy instruments such as public–private partnerships (PPPs) and market-based forms of private environmental governance such as ecolabelling.⁴⁰ Here, the environmental policy arena reflects an overall trend in both public and private administration towards various forms of what has been collective-

36 Bedford-Strom.

37 Gelderloos, 39–43.

38 Ruggie 2003.

39 See Kooiman 1993a, 1993b, 2000.

40 Jordan, Rüdiger and Zito 2005; Falkner 2003.

ly termed “new governance.”⁴¹ Given the changing role of government, and the rise of new actors, the political sciences also share a series of common preoccupations around how public-private interactions can be democratically legitimated in the absence of formal elections and popular mandates. Issues around interest representation, accountability and transparency, decision-making and implementation are subject to intense debate.⁴² But from these discussions, a common set of understandings about GEG is arising. Governance is effectively multi-stakeholder and occurring on multiple levels; also, given the transboundary, global and often intangible nature of environmental problems, it is nonterritorial and nonspatial.⁴³

Structure and process are seen as interrelated components necessary for the solving of problems within contemporary governance, and participation and deliberation have an institutional significance. It is not the institution per se, but rather how participation and deliberation occurs within it that determines the effectiveness, or quality, of governance.⁴⁴ The church too, is an institutional entity with incarnational aspects, and the governance-related aspects guiding its environmental engagement need to be explored. The church is theologically understood in universal terms (“*one holy catholic and apostolic church*”). In view of the nature of the times, and the long-standing traditions of all Christian faith communities this may be expressed in the contemporary secular context as the *global* church. The church, similar to many institutions of GEG, can also be understood as being comprised of a number of organisational levels, from the macro (*i.e.*, global or ecumenical), to the meso (national, regional, or diocesan) and the micro (local or parish) levels. Again, this makes it not dissimilar to the organisational structures of the policy response to the contemporary environmental crisis, encapsulated in the maxim, “think globally, act locally.”

In the context of church governance, Jesus Christ as head of the church and the source of creation allows a revisioning of the *oikomene* of God. The risen, cosmic Christ is the one through whom creation came into being (John 1.1-4). Christ as *Pantokrator* is also the apotheosis of the resurrection depicted in a variety of metaphors in the apocalyptic text of Revelation. This vision also helps to liberate the church from its various socio-historical contexts around the world. The structures and processes of ecumenical environmental governance might contain the following characteristics: Christ is the institutional

41 Rhodes 1996.

42 Cadman 2011.

43 Haas 2002; Perrons 2004.

44 Cadman.

church, God's people are the building blocks that comprise that institution, and the dialogue of sustainability is the mortar that binds all together. The "shape" of this "building" is not an apex, but a flat structure. The governance structure itself is a move away from the traditional command and control pattern to a participatory, collaborative and interactive pattern, within the body of Christ. This would emphasise Christians' oneness in Christ, as common householders or stakeholders of the Kingdom. It would also emphasise productive deliberation and meaningful participation in environmental action, over a tendency towards tokenism and naïve conceptions of sustainability.

One starting place would be to reclaim the traditional understanding of the *holy, catholic and apostolic church*, referred to as such in the Nicene Creed (c. 325), and reinterpret the church in terms of the whole of humanity, functioning within a unity of faith, following the logic that the activity of God's Son was also universal and eternal. This is not an easy task due to the tension over whether the church is to be conceived in institutional or incarnational terms. This dichotomy is edified in denominational terms. Incarnational understandings of the church resonate more with various Protestant traditions, whereas (Roman) Catholic and Orthodox Christians embrace institutionalism.

To unify the church, a focus on Christ and Christ's Lordship over the church must be clearly defined and understood as the eschatological trajectory. Additionally, the church must come into closer dialogue with other religions that express universal truths. This includes incorporating the wisdom of traditional people, as well as reflecting the voices of both men and women. An exploration of *ecoeccelesiology* identifies two trends in attitude regarding the environment within the church. First, the church appears to be largely influenced by external, political and governmental attitudes towards the environment, and its response is to be largely understood in terms of a *theology of sustainability*. Second, and couched within the discourse of *ecothology*, a more radical stance is adopted regarding religious approaches towards the environment.

Conclusions

The institutional nature (unity, catholicity) and mission (apostolocity) of the church, as physical manifestations of the divine, have been reinterpreted over time in response to the society the church indwells. The holiness of the church, however, driven as it is by the Spirit, remains constant. This is the reality that both informs and keeps the church as the body of Christ relevant

to the era in which she finds herself. However, the church, small 'c' catholic or otherwise, is not unified in several regards. There is no agreed upon way of theologically understanding humanity's relationship with nature, adequately engaging the points of view from other religions or indigenous perspectives, bringing pressure to bear on national or international environmental legislation, or envisioning our common future in relation with nature.

Nevertheless, some commonalities are emerging. The Christian response to environmental issues such as climate change and protecting endangered species within specific faith communities, represent an important contribution to increasing environmental awareness in the church as a whole. However, the inconsistency in theological responses to the environment is less productive for building up a coherent "theology of the environment." Within mainstream churches it is possible to see a norm-following response to global policy responses to the environment (*i.e.*, "everyone else is doing it, so we should too"). The "deeper" ecological attitudes within the church are playing a greater prophetic role, yet there is a danger that these could veer away from a doctrinally sound and scripturally based response to pressing global environmental, social and economic problems.

One way to reclaim the term *holy, catholic and apostolic* as descriptive of the church – both institutional as well as incarnational – is to focus on the origins, rather than destination, of the church. In other words, both the relationship and the distinction between history and eschatology now need to be reconceived. Doing so would take the church out of its "ghetto" mentality.⁴⁵ It would bring it into the world, thus equating fellowship not only with Christian communities, but with the whole world. This expansion of fellowship and unity expands the redemptive meaning of the Passion of Christ into its intended inclusivity "Christ died for all" (2 Corinthians 5.15; 1 Peter 3.18). Paying attention to the eschatological vision of Christ reconciling us with one another and all creation (2 Corinthians 5.19) might generate greater compassion and solidarity within the community of faith for the lost, and for the suffering beyond its own internally constructed walls. The eschatological focus also invigorates the apostolic role of the church to more fully embody Christ's command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28.1f).⁴⁶ Adopting a perspective that looks to where the postmodern church is headed under Christ's Lordship, rather than the modern era from whence it came, could help the church avoid merely adapting to the social order of its current historical context.

45 Baxter 2001.

46 Baxter, 68–100.

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“Who is the greatest?”¹

Reading Luke 22.24-27 ecologically

Anne Elvey

Ecological communities are more-than-human (other-than-human and human) communities. As such Christian communities are already ecological communities in that they are comprised of humans in relation to many other than human entities (especially those that sustain our lives and worship, for example, and even the bacteria that inhabit our bodies). This article uses the notion of ecological communities as a lens through which to interpret the concept of serving in Luke 22.24-27, within the wider narrative context of Luke–Acts. It offers an ecological reading that appeals to the principle of interconnectedness, the ecological hermeneutic of suspicion, and the ecological texture of the text, the latter with particular reference to habitat and the senses. The article situates the question of greatness and the affirmation of *ho diakonon* (the one serving) not only as these pertain to interhuman relations, but also, more importantly in relation to the wider ecological communities in which human relations of power are situated.

My founding assumption for reading biblical texts ecologically is that we as human beings are facing grave challenges that appear under the headings of anthropogenic (human-induced) climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, desertification and deforestation, to name only some. How we respond to these challenges as human beings may involve, especially for inheritors of western cultures, a rethinking of how we see ourselves in relation to the rest of creation, a creation of which we are part.² For Christians, this rethinking

1 This article is a revised version of a paper given in the forum “Christian Communities and/ as Ecological Communities” at the annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools, Auckland, New Zealand, 29 June to 2 July 2013.

2 In this article I will shift between using the language of Earth and the religious language of creation. There are sound arguments for, and critiques of, both usages. Using the language

has particular resonances. For example, we have at hand a notion of *metanoia*, change of heart, that Pope John Paul II invoked when he spoke of an “ecological conversion” in his General Audience of 17 January 2001: “We must therefore encourage and support the ‘ecological conversion’ which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading.”³ The appeal to “ecological conversion” was not primarily a call from Rome for Christians to be converted in their relation to the community of Earth, though it was also this; rather it was first a recognition that in the wider society there were already signs of a change of attitude with respect to human place in the Earth community of which we are inescapably part. This “ecological conversion” involves not only a change of behaviour but also a kind of cultural change, that involves changes in worldview, in how we understand what it means to be human. For humans who are also Christians this includes a realisation that our Christian communities are also already ecological communities, by which I mean that they are more-than-human (other-than-human and human) communities. They are comprised of humans in relation to many other-than-human entities (especially those that sustain our lives and worship, for example, and even the bacteria that inhabit our bodies).

Our lives as human beings, as individuals and communities as well as at the level of species, therefore, are enmeshed with the lives and being of other-kind – both those we understand as living (*e.g.*, fleas, whales, and eucalypts) and those we understand otherwise (*e.g.*, glaciers, sand, and air). This recognition at the very least calls into question pure notions of human pre-eminence over other creatures.⁴ Those Christian theologies that draw on certain

of Earth is a way of bringing to the fore that which has been neglected or taken for granted, by retrieving a proper name for Earth. It risks, however, continuing to characterise Earth and humans as separate, and needs to be nuanced by reminders that humans, as individuals, communities and species, are part of the multiplicity of constituents that make up the Earth community (from rocks and mountains, to deserts and oceans, rainforests and the many varieties of insects, fish, birds, reptiles, mammals, plants, viruses and bacteria that inhabit these in complex interdependencies). To speak of creation allows for an understanding of humans and other than humans as sharing the quality of creatureliness, that is, of being creature/s. However, it risks shifting the focus to a creator God situated in a biblical past without adequate attention to the critical contemporary plight of Earth and its ecological communities. See, the discussions of these points in David G. Horrell, “Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Method and Prospects for the Future”, *Colloquium* 46, no. 2 (Nov 2014): forthcoming, and Elaine M. Wainwright’s response to Horrell in the same issue.

- 3 Pope John Paul II, “General Audience”, 17 January 2001; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117_en.html (accessed 29 August 2014). See also, Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The Change of Heart that Leads to a New Way of Living on Earth* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 2–4.
- 4 Val Plumwood explores this carefully in relation to a master-slave paradigm, showing that while the master may appear to be superior, the master is always dependent on the slave. Val

readings of Genesis 1 and dualistic philosophical frameworks, and to some extent the notion of the great chain of being (though this has both vertical and horizontal aspects), however, have often been underpinned by notions of human supremacy over other creatures.⁵ Nonetheless, when we look at the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2, we find another paradigm for relationship between humans and the rest of creation, a model that arises from the image in Genesis 2.15, where the human being formed from the ground is commissioned to serve and keep (or preserve) the garden of Eden. For Norman Habel, “[i]n Genesis 2, humans were created from Earth for Earth. Earth was not created for humans!”⁶ Is there a basis for preferring this depiction of humans in Genesis 2 over that in Genesis 1? For Habel there is; he invokes “the way of Jesus,” which he argues is a way of “serving rather than dominating” that “stands in clear tension with the mandate to dominate in Genesis 1.”⁷ While I wish to eschew Habel’s move toward a supersessionist invocation of this biblical critical, or Christological, principle,⁸ I am interested in the way the notions of supremacy and service, as they appear in Luke 22.24–27, might be understood from an ecological perspective. My purpose in this article is not to explore the passage as it might contribute to the sort of christological principle Habel proposes, but to consider Luke 22.24–27, which seems to refer only to interactions or exercises of power between humans, in the context of an ecological understanding that human communities are never human-only communities. Human communities, such as that of the Lukan Jesus and the disciples gathered around him, are already constituted by a network of relationships with other creatures, only some of whom are human.

I am not claiming that either the first century CE writer of Luke–Acts, or the early hearers and readers of the text, would articulate an ecological understanding in this way. What I am claiming is that the interrelatedness of hu-

Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Feminism for Today; London: Routledge, 1993), 48–49.

- 5 Norman Habel argues that this view of human supremacy is embedded in the text of Gen 1 itself, at the point where Gen 1:26–28 signals a shift from Gen 1:1–25, introducing a hierarchy of humans over the rest of creation. See Norman C. Habel, “Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1”, in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Earth Bible, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 34–48, at 47. On dualistic philosophical frameworks, see Plumwood’s critique in her *Feminism and the Mastery*, esp. 41–68. On the great chain of being, see Anne Elvey, “Beyond Culture? Nature/Culture Dualism and the Christian Otherworldly”, *Ethics and the Environment* 11, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2006): 63–84, at 72–73.
- 6 See, for example, Norman Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), Kindle Ebook, loc. 1461 of 2907.
- 7 Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, loc. 1787 of 2907.
- 8 Habel uses the word “supersedes” expressly in this regard. See Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, loc. 1787 of 2907.

mans and other Earth beings was part of the reality of human lives in the first century CE (in ways both similar to and different from today, however this interrelatedness may have been understood, assumed or even ignored among the writer and early Christian readers of Luke), and that this reality is relevant to readings of texts, such as Luke 22.24-27, that seem to deal predominantly with human–human relationships.

Reading ecologically⁹

The ecological approach I take in this article is fourfold. First, I affirm the Earth Bible principle of interconnectedness – “Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival” – and bring this principle to my reading of Luke 22.24-27, through the notion of “ecological communities” described above.¹⁰ Second, I apply the ecological hermeneutic of suspicion, that “the text is likely to be inherently anthropocentric and/or has traditionally been read from an anthropocentric perspective.”¹¹ Third, I work with the ecological texture of the text, particu-

- 9 For a critical outline of major approaches in ecological hermeneutics beginning from responses to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1962) and Lynn White’s famous critique of biblical religion (“The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”, *Science* 155, no. 3767 [10 March 1967]: 1203–7), and developing significantly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, see for example David G. Horrell, “Introduction”, in David G. Horrell *et al* (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 1–8, and Anne Elvey, “Interpreting the Time: Climate Change and the Climate in/of the Gospel of Luke”, in *Climate Change—Cultural Change: Religious Responses and Responsibilities*, ed. Anne Elvey and David Gormley-O’Brien (Preston: Mosaic Press, 2013), 78–91, at 80–81. Key texts include: Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Earth Bible 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000); Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (Earth Bible 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Norman C. Habel (ed.), *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (Earth Bible 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Vicky Balabanski and Norman C. Habel (eds), *The Earth Story in the New Testament* (Earth Bible 5; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). Norman C. Habel and Peter L. Trudinger (eds), *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (SBL Symposium Series 46; Atlanta: SBL, 2008); David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, “Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: A Typology of Hermeneutical Stances”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21, no.2 (2008): 219–38. David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate and Francesca Stavropoulou (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T & T Clark, 2010); and Elaine M. Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories: Exploring their Transformative Power in Reading Biblical Texts Ecologically”, *Biblical Interpretation* 20 (2012): 280–304
- 10 The six Earth Bible principles are intrinsic worth; interconnectedness; voice; purpose; mutual custodianship; and resistance. See Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24.
- 11 Norman C. Habel, “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics”, in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (SBL Symposium Series 46; Atlanta: SBL,

larly the notions of *habitat* and of the senses as mediators of the materiality of the text.¹² Drawing on Timothy Morton, Elaine Wainwright says: “Ecological reading seeks to break the distinction between foreground and background, between human/divine story and the more-than-human habitat so that they can become ‘mutually determining.’”¹³ Fourth, I explore what the question the text poses concerning the *one serving* might suggest in the framework of an Earth community.

Coming as part of the farewell or supper discourse at Jesus’ last meal before his death, Luke 22.24-27 reads:¹⁴

But there was also a dispute (or competition, *philoneikia*) among them, as to who was to be regarded as the greatest (*meizon*). But [Jesus] said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over them and those in authority over (*hoi exousiazontes*) them are called benefactors (*euergetai*). But not so with you; rather the greatest (*ho meizon*) among you must become like the youngest (*ho neoteros*), and the one leading (*ho hegoumenos*) like the one serving (*ho diakonon*). For who is greatest (*meizon*), the one reclining [at table] (*ho anakeimenos*) or the one serving (*ho diakonon*)? Is it not the one reclining (*ho anakeimenos*)? But I am among you as one serving (*ho diakonon*).”

A close look at the passage reveals three key literary features:

1. Only the Lukan Jesus speaks directly. The dispute (or competition) concerning who might appear to be the greatest is narrated. In a passage about leadership and the exercise of authority, Luke’s Jesus takes the lead; he has authority to speak.
2. The rhetoric of Jesus’ speech is important; for example, the effect of questions such as, “who is greater/greatest?” and “is it not?” needs to be considered. The reader or hearer needs to think about the force of the rhetoric; is the rhetoric asking the hearer to affirm that the one reclin-

2008), 1–8, at 4. See also, Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 288.

12 On the concept of “habitat” for ecological reading, see Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 292–93. On the senses as mediators of the materiality of the text, and its material embeddedness in the Earth community, see Anne F. Elvey, *The Matter of the Text: Material Engagements between Luke and the Five Senses* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), esp. 58–67.

13 Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 296. See Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 48, 53–54.

14 See William S. Kurz, S.J., “Luke 22:14–38 and Greco-Roman and Biblical Farewell Addresses”, *JBL*104, no. 2 (1985): 251–68. Brendan Byrne calls this a “supper discourse” in his *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke’s Gospel* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), 173.

ing (at table) is greater? Or is the hearer being pushed to question the basis of greatness, not as a reversal (reclining/serving), but in a different framework entirely? The contrast greatest/youngest rather than greatest/least needs also to be noted.

3. The function of repetition is significant. There are two striking repetitions for such a short passage: *meizon* (the comparative greater or superlative greatest) appears three times (vv. 24, 26, 27); *ho diakonon* (the one serving) appears three times, almost as a refrain (vv. 26b, 27a, 27b).

The principle of interconnectedness

In the context of the meal that begins at 22.14, the question of greatness is reframed in relation to serving at table (22.27). In the hierarchical framework of master/slave, which Luke both assumes and challenges, the master is the greater and has power over the slave.¹⁵ But as ecophilosopher Val Plumwood points out this is only so because the master denies her or his dependence on the slave.¹⁶ Master and slave, self and other, human and other-than-human creatures, are interconnected in often complex relations of mutual interdependence. The answer to the rhetorical question, “who is greater: the one reclining or the one serving? is it not the one reclining?” might be heard as holding at least a hint of irony and an invitation to recollect what is the complex network of relations of agency and labour, on which the ability to act as a ruler, as one reclining, depends. The one reclining depends not only on the slave who serves (or attends) at table – or as John Collins points out the youngest as “from Homeric times it was the Greek ideal that youths should honour their betters in age by waiting on them”¹⁷ – but also on the many others (humans and other than humans) whose lives and deaths make possible the hospitality of the meal. The hospitality of the meal stands in for the divine hospitality extended both in creation itself and in the person of Jesus through compassion, forgiveness, and liberation from debt.¹⁸ There is a kenotic hos-

15 To some extent Luke both overturns and reinstates the master/slave paradigm in a pattern of reversal that we find in particular in the Magnificat (1:46–55), the beatitudes and woes (6:20–26), and the parables of masters and slaves (12:35–48). See also 4:18–19; 16:19–31. See, further, Elizabeth V. Dowling, *Taking away the Pound: Women, Theology and the Parable of the Pounds in the Gospel of Luke* (Library of New Testament Studies, 324; London: T & T Clark, 2007), 109.

16 Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 48–49.

17 John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 246.

18 On this theme of hospitality in Luke, see Byrne, *Hospitality of God*. With particular reference

pitality, exemplified in the Lukan breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup, that is a paradigm of the way sustenance occurs through processes of hospitality and sacrifice in the Earth community.¹⁹

Michael Trainor establishes multiple links between the body of Jesus and Earth in his reading of the Lukan birth narrative (2.1-20): for example, through the Earthy materiality of the swaddling cloths and the manger, that enfold the newborn child (as the burial cloths and tomb will later surround his corpse), the presence of the shepherds, and the promise of peace on Earth that accompanies his birth.²⁰ When he comes to discuss the supper in Luke 22.14-20, Trainor is emphatic about the connection between the action of Jesus and Earth:

Jesus' meal is rich in Earth symbolism. He acts and speaks over bread; he makes the bread symbolically and metaphorically identical with his physical body, and his body with Earth. The identity in turn evokes cosmic and universal connections with which bread and his body are linked. Here is an Earth-centred high point in the gospel, the gospel's ecological crescendo to Luke's narrative symphony. What happens to Jesus' body identified with the bread will mirror Earth.²¹

For Trainor, this high point that is carried on through the memorialisation enjoined on the disciples in 22.19c, “do this in my memory,” effectively eclipses “Jesus’ announcement of the act of betrayal and the disciples’ faction-fight that now breaks out at this final poignant, deeply ecological meal (22.21-27).”²² Trainor does not discuss these apparently discordant notes further; but, given the meal setting in particular, the principle of interconnectedness applies here. With an ear to the ecojustice principle of interconnectedness, I suggest we read the question “who is greater: the one reclining or the one serving (attending) [at table]?” in a wider frame where the hospitality the one at table enjoys is impossible without the one serving, and that this service of

to the hospitality of the meal, see John Paul Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (Atlanta: SBL, 1999).

- 19 Anne Elvey, “Living One for the Other: Eucharistic Hospitality as Ecological Hospitality”, in *Reinterpreting the Eucharist: Explorations in Feminist Theology and Ethics*, ed. Anne Elvey, Carol Hogan, Kim Power and Claire Renkin (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 186–205.
- 20 Michael Trainor, *About Earth's Child: An Ecological Listening to the Gospel of Luke* (Earth Bible Commentary, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 78–95.
- 21 Trainor, *About Earth's Child*, 270. It needs to be recalled that bread already represents a complex of relationships of more-than-human processes of sustenance and labour, including the activity of birds or human farmers planting the grain; the work of sun, rain and soil to feed the growing grain from which the flour is milled through human labour; the human labour to combine flour, water, seasoning and oil, and to knead and bake the loaves.
- 22 Trainor, *About Earth's Child*, 271.

hospitality is a more-than-human act.²³ That is, the one serving is not one but many, human and other than human, on which each of those reclining depends.

A hermeneutic of suspicion

We might suspect, however, that the reliance of those reclining on the many more-than-human agents who “serve” them is forgotten by the writer and many readers of the text as they focus on human concerns. Nonetheless, earlier the Lukan narrative offers an image of hospitality to both humans and other than humans (ravens and lilies), that occurs through sustenance (the attention to basic needs: food, clothing and shelter) (12.22-34). But the text tends to elide the way divine hospitality occurs in cooperation with creation (both human and other than human), though, as Trainor argues, at another level Luke 12 presents ravens and lilies as agents in their capacity to respond to divine hospitality.²⁴ For Luke the sustenance of more-than-human creatures occurs in relation to welcoming the *basileia* of God (12.31-34). While Luke’s world is not ours, with some translation between ancient and contemporary worlds we might begin to welcome the *basileia* of God in the hospitality coming to us not from a God separate from Earth but as one working in cooperation with human and other-than-human creatures, as Acts 14.17 suggests.

We are still left, however, with the problematic dispute between the disciples, that seems decidedly human-focused. The notion of dispute or competition (*philoneikia*) which appears in Luke 22:24 should not necessarily be read in the light of Mark 9:33-37 and 10:35-44 where discussions about greatness reflect poorly on the disciples. In Luke 9:46-48 which parallels Mark 9:33-37, the word translated argument is *dialogismos* not *philoneikia*. *Philoneikia*, competition, might in a Greek context not be understood negatively.²⁵ Nonetheless, the earlier passage in Luke 9 and the placement of this passage in continuity

- 23 Enmeshed with the hospitality of God in Luke, the divine visitation is also judgment, whereby one in effect judges oneself by one’s receptivity to and participation in the divine hospitality. See Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 299.
- 24 See Anne F. Elvey, *An Ecological Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Luke: A Gestational Paradigm* (Studies in Women and Religion, 45; Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 180–81; Trainor, *About Earth’s Child*, 189.
- 25 See Peter K. Nelson, “The Flow of Thought in Luke 22.24–27”, *JSOT* 43 (1991): 113–23, esp. 114–15. Nelson ultimately argues against this interpretation of *philoneikia* and for a more negative sense (pp. 121–22).

with the announcement of Jesus' betrayal (22:22) suggests some level of criticism or judgment concerning the disciples' thinking, as do uses of *philoneikia* in the Septuagint and 1 Cor 11:16 which carry the more negative sense of the word.²⁶ A further contrast with the passage in Luke 9 is also worth noting: in 9:46 the disciples are arguing about who *was* the greatest; in 22:24 the question is who *appears* (*dokei*; likely "seems to others") to be the greatest. The slight shift in emphasis should give the hearer pause and should resonate with Jesus' imperative: "but not so among you!" While culturally the disciples may have been expected to be concerned with how their companions and others saw them, that is not the worldview the narrative enjoins. Whatever may be the appearance, their reality is different. Might this different reality open beyond the anthropocentric focus of their dispute?

Still within an anthropocentric frame, the term benefactor (*euergetai*) appears in the text as an honorific to which the disciples seem to aspire (22.25).²⁷ "Benefactors," writes Jonathan Marshall, "expressed their ἀρετή [moral excellence or virtue] through generous acts and were publicly recognised by the beneficiaries of their generosity."²⁸ This public recognition, sometimes by way of civic inscriptions, served to motivate benefactors to continue acting generously.²⁹ David Lull argues that in 22.25 the title is not being used negatively but can be read in the light of Luke's positive attitude to benefaction and his portrayal of Jesus as a benefactor.³⁰ Indeed one could argue that the community described in Acts 2.44-45 and 4.32 subsists by way of mutual benefaction, though that may be stretching the meaning of the term. Joel Green makes the point that, while they performed generous acts publicly, benefactors acted according to their own "whims," rather than distributing their wealth "where needs were generally agreed."³¹ Peter Nelson makes a good case against Lull's argument; the idea is not to start acting like benefactors, but to recast leader-

26 Nelson, "Flow of Thought", 121.

27 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 768.

28 Jonathan Marschall, *Jesus, Patrons and Benefactors: Roman Palestine and the Gospel of Luke* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 4.

29 Marshall, *Jesus, Patrons and Benefactors*, 4.

30 David J. Lull, "The Servant-Benefactor as a Model of Greatness (Luke 22:24-30)", *NovT* 28, no. 4 (1986): 289-305; see also, Marshall, *Jesus, Patrons and Benefactors*, 321. See also, Judith Lieu, *The Gospel of Luke* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1997), 181, who also argues for a benign reading of "benefactors".

31 Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 768. Howard Marshall suggests that there may be a hint of irony in the reference to calling themselves benefactors (22:25). I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 812.

ship as service.³² The challenge for an ecological reading is to consider such leadership in a more-than-human frame.

The ecological texture of the text

Habitat

“Habitat and in-habitants (the more-than-human),” writes Wainwright, “are inseparable such that ‘habitat’ can function as a key interpretive lens for reading ecologically.”³³ Habitat includes place but is more than place. Lorraine Code focuses on “habitat as a place to know”; she includes “the social-political, cultural, and psychological elements ... alongside physical and (other) environmental contributors to the ‘nature’ of a habitat and its inhabitants, at any historical moment.”³⁴ The linking of habitat and knowledge is particularly important. Humans and other creatures come to know what is sustaining, for example, in relation to the environment in which they live; this environment, or habitat, is not simply the geographic place, but the complex of relationships of climate, sources of food, clothing and shelter, the power relations that affect these factors, and much more. Moreover, habitat both shapes and is shaped by humans.³⁵ In applying the concept of habitat to a reading of Luke 22.24-27, we might think of the habitats of the characters within the text, the author, and the readers (ancient and contemporary, and all those in between) of the text. For now, I will focus on the habitat of the characters, namely the Lukan Jesus and the disciples.

The setting of the narrative at a meal (22.14) during Passover (22.7, 13) in a large furnished guest room (22.11-12) in the city (of Jerusalem) (22.10) evokes several aspects of habitat. The physical needs for the meal – food, drink, table and benches, and guest room – are provided through other-than-human and human labour and perhaps gift, and signal the complex more-than-human interdependencies of Jesus and the disciples as they inhabit a habitat that is not their usual one: they need the assistance of the man carrying a jar of water and the owner of the house to secure a place for their meal (22.10-12). The Passover setting reminds the reader/hearer of the religious community of which those gathered at table are part, and the costs in general for other than humans of this meal, especially in the reference to the sacrifice of the Pass-

32 Nelson, “Flow of Thought”, 116–22.

33 Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 293.

34 Lorraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37. See also, Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 298.

35 Wainwright, “Images, Words, Stories”, 298.

over lamb (22.7).³⁶ The city setting recalls not only the reliance of inhabitants of cities on lands and peoples outside (as well as within) the city for their sustenance, but also on the relations of power that city structures imply, here for example the Roman occupiers and the Jewish aristocracy. These structures of power enter the text explicitly in the reference to kings and benefactors (22.25).

The movement from the meal to the threat of betrayal brings into poignant counterpoint these habitat/inhabitation aspects of sustenance, shelter and power. Luke 22.24-27 arrives in the context of Jesus' self-gift, as he serves those at table a cup and bread and another cup, his self-gift pointing toward his coming passion and death, a self-gift intimately linked with the expectation of the rule or *basileia* of God (22.16-20). Into this scene of giving the threat of betrayal, which Jesus announces in verses 21-22, breaks in as a human action to be condemned but also as part of a divine necessity which has echoes both in the passion predictions throughout the narrative (9.22; 17.25; 24.5-7, 25-26) and in necessity of sacrifice of the Passover lamb in 22.7, the sacrifice with which the Lukan Jesus becomes both metaphorically and metonymically linked. At the announcement of his betrayal, the disciples begin to ask one another which of them might be the betrayer (22.23). Then follows the short discourse on the question: "Who is the greatest?"

It begins: *egeneto de kai philoneikia*. The use of both *de* and *kai* is interesting. In the use of *de* there is a sense of continuity (and perhaps some contrast) with the preceding passage about betrayal, and in *kai* there is continuity and perhaps also adding to the previous discussion. Donald Senior notes the "penetrating irony" that "the very apostles who were shocked at the possibility of betrayal begin to argue among themselves about which of them was the greatest!"³⁷ Their anthropocentric focus on their own status in the face of a deeper ill, is not unlike the response of some, if not many, humans to the betrayals inherent in much ecological damage today. That the context of Luke 22.24-27 is a meal suggests that the question of greatness not only looks to table service as a metaphor for wider leadership questions, but also that more-than-human hospitality is integral to the kind of leadership that the Lukan Jesus is both exemplifying and calling forth.

36 It is beyond the scope of this article to rehearse the arguments for and against whether Jesus actually ate meat at this final meal. For a nuanced approach to the question, see David G. Horrell, "Biblical Vegetarianism? A Critical and Constructive Assessment", in *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology*, ed. David Grummet and Rachel Muers (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 44-59, esp. 46.

37 Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 66.

Senses

Another aspect of habitat pertains to the physical text itself. The materiality of the text, as it arrives as papyrus, codex, printed book, light on a screen, or sound through air, is intimately entwined with the more-than-human community that makes its production and reproduction possible.³⁸ The senses are one way for readers/hearers, especially through sight and hearing, to engage with the materiality of the text. With Luke 22.24-27, I focus on hearing and the way repetition works on the ear. Three repetitions are of particular note. In this short passage, *meizon* and *ho diakonon* are repeated three times and *ho anakeimenos* twice. The repetition works on the body of the hearer to impress meaning. While *meizon* (greater or greatest) is contrasted with youngest and the leader with *ho diakonon* (the one serving), the effect of the repetition is to contrast (and equate) *meizon* and *ho diakonon*. As noted earlier, the contrast that then flows between *ho anakeimenos* and *ho diakonon* calls into question the basis of the hierarchy of served over servant, master or ruler over slave or youngest. What can we draw from this emphasis in the passage for an ecological ethic? I have already hinted that we might see the Earth community itself as the one serving, the one on whom the one reclining depends. But we can take this another way. The Lukan Jesus identifies himself as the one serving.

The “one serving”

An ecological reading of Luke 22.24-27 cannot simply reverse the idea of greatness and say that the least amongst the creatures of the Earth is the greatest, though some may wish to argue this. To do so, would be against the grain of Luke 12.7 where Jesus describes the disciples, addressed as friends, as “of more value than many sparrows”. At another time, I would read this against the grain. Here, working more with the grain of the text, I suggest that Luke 22.26 already unsettles the potential reversal of greatest and least by contrasting greatest with youngest, and so suggesting a shift from a framework of public leadership in v. 25, to a framework of kinship in v. 26. In this framework of kinship, the Lukan Jesus is among the disciples as one serving (*ho diakonon*). What is the manner of his serving? In the local narrative context of the meal, his serving marked by a kenotic hospitality, of bodily, material self-giving. In the wider frame of Luke, this kenotic hospitality is experienced as the visitation of God through compassion and *aphesis* (both liberation from debt and forgiveness; see especially 4.18-19) and the abundance of the messianic feast,

38 See further Elvey, *Matter of the Text*.

which we should not read as unreservedly otherworldly especially in the light of the meal scenes in Luke–Acts.³⁹ This visitation is also judgment, as a consequence of a failure to actively receive and participate in the divine hospitality. In the following passage (22.28–30), the Lukan Jesus confers on the gathered apostles a *basileia*. This might seem odd after the previous elevation of the activity of table service. But it is the image of Jesus as one serving, serving at the table of his own self-gift, that forms the context for this conferral, which is made with images of hospitality (they will enjoy the messianic feast; 22.30a) and judgment (they will judge the twelve tribes; 22.30b).

There are at least two worldviews in tension here when the imagery of kingship and the imagery of table service meet. The tension is not entirely resolved, but for an ecological reading we need to recall that worldviews influence not only human–human interaction but the way we imagine and encounter otherkind, and even the way we form our knowledge of otherkind. Do we describe the interplay of creatures and species in the processes of sustenance and provision of other vital needs in terms of competition for survival, cooperation, or something else?⁴⁰ Do models of greatness or service predominate? What are the implications for our inhabiting our own habitats for the ways we form knowledge? How might our understanding of the *one serving* be broadened to account for the complex and often tragic interdependencies that underpin the hospitality of everyday life?

Conclusion

While addressed to those gathered at the meal, the genre of Luke 22.24–27 as a final discourse assumes a broader audience, one that it might call forth to participation in a divine hospitality. Can we as hearers/readers recover the more-than-human mutuality of service that underscores a divine hospitality, for example as mediated through the self-gift of the Lukan Jesus, not simply as marked by unproblematic relations of cooperation but as always etched with the losses that the kenotic gift of such relations implies? Are we to place

39 Thomas S. Moore argues that in Acts (3:13, 26; 4:27, 30), the term *pais* (meaning child or youth, as well as servant) is a christological title, through which the Lukan Jesus is identified with the servant figure of Isaiah, particularly by way of the language of *aphesis* (4:18–19, 24:47; Isa 61:1–2a; Isa 58:6c). Moore, “The Lukan Great Commission and the Isaian Servant”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (Jan–Mar 1997): 47–60, esp. 41–50, 59. This usage of *pais*, identifying Jesus with both young and servants, resonates with the appeal to the youngest in 22:26, and highlights the kenotic aspects of this identification where the *pais* (child or servant) is at the mercy of those with greater power within the ancient household (see, for example, Luke 7:7).

40 See the discussion in Tim Flannery, *Here on Earth: An Argument for Hope* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2010), Kindle Ebook, loc. 538 of 4350.

ourselves at some anticipated messianic banquet beyond Earth or to see the promise of a feast as pertaining to the ways in which we receive and offer hospitality now, the ways we receive the gifts of creation as ones serving and as ones reclining, neither one nor the other, but both? Perhaps we judge ourselves by our readiness to imagine ourselves as being served by Earth,⁴¹ as being coagents with Earth in our serving, and as finding ways to extend our imagining of Christian kinship beyond the frame of Christian community to an Earth community. In this community, we may be one of the younger species, a species who might yet learn to be in mutual relationships of service with our more-than-human kin.

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41 It is important here to note that service language is not without its problems, as feminists have pointed out, noting the way in which women's roles were traditionally circumscribed by service. It would be a mistake to circumscribe the sustaining roles of other creatures similarly. On the different ways of understanding Luke's depiction of women and service, noting particularly that *diakonein* is used principally of women in Luke, see for example Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke and Acts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), esp. 83–88, and Barbara E. Reid, *Choosing the Better Part? Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), esp. 99–101.

Animal sacrifice and animal rights

John Dunnill

Animal sacrifice, although a major feature of many of the world's great cultures from China to Central America, is an alien notion in ours. For most people it is linked to oppression and savagery, associated (like fox-hunting) with unnecessary and irrational cruelty, and regarded as violent, barbaric and primitive. The word *sacrifice* has uniformly negative overtones, connoting loss to the self or, worse, oppression of another leading to their suffering and loss. Human sacrifice is often seen as the norm, with the act of killing as the essential part. Dismissal of sacrificial ideology is assumed, often without argument, by most people in our day. If considered at all it is regarded as part of the primitive world of pre-modern societies, and necessarily excluded from civilised thought and practice.¹

Since sacrifice is a significant component of the Biblical world, its dismissal is tantamount to rejection of the Bible, and often the Church and God too – it is part of modernity's "sacred horror" of the Bible noted by René Girard. Yet Christian theology needs to affirm the meaning of sacrifice, since it is intrinsic to the Biblical understanding of God and humanity, and essential to any account of atonement through Christ. It is true that Christianity has played its own part in attacking sacrifice. In the New Testament, Hebrews mounts a powerful argument for the bankruptcy of sacrifice, specifically in the light of Christ. But sacrificial imagery was also used by Hebrews, as well as by Paul and John, in interpreting the cross, and continued to be used by later writers. Until the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE Jewish Christians may have continued to practise prayer in the Temple at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices (Acts 3). Problems arose later when sacrificial imagery was used in isolation from a living practice – with the tendency to substitute for

1 On the whole topic see John Dunnill, *Sacrifice and the Body: Biblical Anthropology and Christian Self-Understanding* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), especially chapter 1.

sacrifice images of penal suffering, financial transactions, legal satisfaction and other restatements which tend to distort its meaning. The late Medieval and Reformation penal interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ led to the misreading of all sacrifice as penal, and prepared the way for its wholesale rejection in the Enlightenment period. But Christians need to find an affirmative way to think about sacrifice, or they misread the New Testament and much else.

In any case sacrifice is not intrinsically “primitive” or “barbaric,” but flourishes in settled pastoral and agricultural societies. Looking across the whole range of sacrificing cultures, offerings are overwhelmingly vegetable in content (cakes, grain, oil, and so on). In a subsistence economy, animals are highly prized, so animal sacrifice, though much more conspicuous, is reserved for special occasions or high status worshippers, whether in penitence or celebration. In most animal sacrifices, there is minimal suffering and most of the meat is consumed by the offerers. Such a meat meal, eaten in a sacred precinct, serves both to unite humans to the deity and also to nourish and enhance community, uniting a family: binding two groups formerly at war, or sealing a covenant.

All this is, of course, giving a very broad and general description, not taking account of the infinite variety of sacrificial customs but based on the mainstream of ancient and modern practices. The atmosphere of oppression often thought to be characteristic of sacrifice is typical only of apotropaic rites in which the victim is equated with evil to be expelled. Notably, practitioners of these rites often do not call them sacrifice at all, or not in the usual sense (for example, the kill may be without invocation of the god, and without usual symbolic acts). In the great majority of sacrifices, the “victim” (despite the grim overtones of that word in modern English) is not despised but highly regarded, festooned with garlands, kept in special place close to the settlement, and given special treatment, identified positively as the group’s representative. Girard’s argument that violent “scapegoating” is the norm is without substance, and assumed, not even argued, by him.² Mostly, what critics call “sacrifice” is a fantasy projection of the “primitive,” and tells us more about us than about other cultures.

In contrast to the oppressive view of sacrifice, I assert – but cannot in this context argue – an affirmative view of sacrifice as Gift, offered in response to divine Gift. Sacrificial practice recognises a divine creator, however conceived, from whom all life pours. The natural response of contingent being

2 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 4; see Dunnill, *Sacrifice*, 148-9.

is an exuberant giving of gifts, in a spirit of gratitude, such as by dedicating part of a harvest to God before consuming the rest. God is therefore treated as a participant in the human economy, while animal sacrifice, although not determinative, has a special place, because the close similarities of large mammals like bulls and sheep to humans ensure that the offering of their life, maybe symbolised by blood, serves in a mysterious way to relate humanity to deity. It serves to recognise the place of death in life.

While sacrificial practices in ancient societies, or in societies still practising this today, may appear strange to us, we need to be wary of passing judgement on what others do in their own worlds. The aim must be to attempt first to understand them, to put ourselves in an imaginative space where we can appreciate sacrifice as a social and religious practice from which positive values might flow.

Animal rights

But can such a positive and sympathetic account of animal sacrifice be now defended against the ethical argument that animals have rights and cannot legitimately be used by humans for this or any other purpose? One reason why *human* sacrifice and cannibalism are absolutely excluded for us is because humans have rights and cannot be exploited in this way, but does this exclusion not apply also to animals? Is it right to eat meat? Both the practice of animal sacrifice and the custom of the Western world assume that it is, but on what basis? More particularly, is it right to use an animal for human purposes to which it cannot consent?

Concern about the philosophical status and the practical suffering of animals is generally more typical of Eastern religious traditions than of the West. Genesis 1.26-28 grants to humans the right and responsibility to dominate all other species, and this, added to Aristotle's low placement of animals in the hierarchy of being on the ground that they lack reason, have governed thinking in Europe and its offshoots. But concern about unnecessary suffering has been expressed increasingly from the 17th century onwards and led to laws and charitable action promoting animal welfare in the 19th century. Thus RSPCA Australia was founded in 1871.

A hundred years later, the modern philosophical debate may be held to stem from the publication of Peter Singer's 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, which established a utilitarian position based on the right of sentient animals, like humans, not to suffer.³ This builds on the increasing scientific recogni-

3 Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1975).

tion that animals do indeed suffer, and it marks an interesting shift by taking sentience rather than rationality as the determinant of moral status. Singer argues that where animals have feelings we have no grounds for preferring our own feelings and our own interests to theirs. Another approach is that of the rights-based philosopher Tom Regan, who argues that each animal is a subject-of-a-life (roughly what we might call a soul) and as such cannot legitimately be made an object of others' purposes, even if we treat them well.⁴

The fundamental question is whether or not an animal has moral status, but the question of how we determine the moral status of animals remains controversial. Some opponents of animal rights would say that the key factor is not sentience or rationality or consciousness but capacity for moral determination. Since humans are the only animals known to be capable of moral determination, the only moral agents in the full sense, the argument runs, therefore they alone have moral status or rights.⁵ Humans alone are able to determine appropriate uses for other creatures.

At the opposite extreme, it is argued by the writers named above that all animals, as living beings, or certainly all sentient animals, have absolute and intrinsic rights, equal to those of humans, and so we can never use them as resources for conferring benefits on humans, even if we treat them kindly and even if they gain benefits themselves in the process.⁶ The fact that they are not moral agents capable of responsible action does not diminish our responsibility to and for them; indeed because they are not moral agents they cannot give consent to uses we propose, and so any use is inherently exploitative.

Both traditional and radical views seem problematic. The traditional view places no limits at all to how animals should be treated and so reduces a living being to the level of mere matter, to be used at our whim. On this basis kindness to animals is only self-interest. This seems to ignore the widespread intuition that animals do share at least some of the qualities which make us human, including the capacity to suffer pain, and that caring about their welfare is a duty we hold both to them and to the fullness of our own humanity.

The radical view, on the other hand, in pursuit of pure motivation, insists on such a high level of respect for animals as to ensure that no animal could be used at all, whether to supply meat or eggs or milk or labour, or even as a pet and companion. It suspects that every human benefit from an animal is necessarily exploitative, even if the animal would also benefit. The practical

4 Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

5 See H.J. McCloskey, "Moral Rights and Animals", in *Animal Rights*, ed. Clare Palmer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 79–110.

6 See Tom Regan, "The Case for Animal Rights", in Palmer, *Animal Rights*, 17–30.

result of that radical view would be the disappearance of all domesticated animals. A world in which animals could not be owned, confined or used would be a world without cats, dogs, cattle, sheep or chickens. Any that remained would be morally autonomous and free from the shackles of domesticity – in other words, wild.

So one response places a moral gulf between humans and the rest of animal creation, to facilitate a slavery of the subhuman; the other posits such a strong moral equality of higher animals and humans that they become competitors for limited ethical space, so that domestic animals, having no legitimate use, would practically disappear from our economy and our life.

Neither perspective is reasonable. If humans engage with animals at all they do so necessarily in unequal ways just because humans have (for good or ill) the capacity to make and enforce decisions about what animals do. Behind the emphasis on rights seems to be a concern that, in a relationship which is necessarily unequal, all use of animals must be a form of slavery (possibly benevolent). The question then is simply, is this permissible, or not? Ethically, both views manifest a utilitarian concern with maximising pleasure. One argues that animals exist for our pleasure as humans, the other that they exist solely for their own pleasure. Both radical and conservative seem caught in a functionalist mindset.

Neither view seems to remember how in traditional farming societies (including our own down to say 1900 or 1930) the countryside was shared by animals and humans. The extreme views described above (of course there are more moderate positions) seem to mirror the functionalist use of animals in postwar society, especially for scientific experimentation and as pawns in the industrialisation of agriculture. Can a consideration of sacrifice help to restore some balance?

Sacrifice and the care of creation

I have argued that in sacrifice the normal dynamic is not aggression but identification with the victim. This goes along with evidence that in the small scale pastoral and agricultural societies in which sacrifice flourishes humans (and perhaps men in particular) tend to identify with their domesticated animals as partners in the human enterprise, who share their milk, wool and ultimately their meat with humans in return for protection and care. This identification implicitly ascribes moral status to these animals, and is expressed in a generally respectful treatment, extending to the manner of sacrifice. Without idealising, this seems to suggest the possibility of an alternative model for

relations between the species, based in mutuality and mutual identification, which could be called a modified form of friendship, or at least of personal servanthood. Under whatever name, it implicitly ascribes moral status to animals by setting limits to human exploitation and by assuming humans have duties towards those they “use.”

According moral status to another living being (whether human or animal) does not usefully depend on speculation concerning their inner experience, but should be grounded in a real or implied relationship, and express itself in ways proportional to the mutual expectations arising in that relationship.⁷ On this basis, it is justifiable to use animals for farming purposes which benefit us when that is the purpose for which they have been given existence, and when that use is duly reflected in human responsibilities. If life itself is a good, and a good gift of the creator, then a cow or a sheep given life on a farm does indeed benefit from existing for this purpose. The drawbacks of confinement are traded against benefits such as protection and care.

On moral grounds, it matters how animals are treated, and that is not an obligation to be regarded lightly. It is striking that the current ethical critique has not been prompted by traditional small-scale family farming, where animals lead relatively normal and natural lives. It occurs against a background of industrial farming practices in which (unless modified by law, as they are in some countries) many features of what may be normal and natural are set aside in the pursuit of profit. These include the harm inflicted on individual animals through selective breeding, over productivity leading to exhaustion and early death, separation of mothers from their young, forced confinement into small spaces, and cruel modes of slaughter. In all these ways animals are increasingly reduced to automata or machines for the production of food. They live, for our benefit, lives which Hobbes might have described as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” We have to acknowledge that many so-called primitive societies put to shame the treatment of animals according to Western mass production farming methods.

But even if, at its best, the domesticated state confers many benefits, such as protection against harm by accident or disease or starvation or from the action of predators, and being valued as a partner within a human enterprise, can we include *death* in such a list of benefits? To be prescribed from the start to end as meat on a human table seems at best a necessary evil. But length

7 On the history of human kinship with animals, see Richard A. Posner, “Animal Rights: Legal, Philosophical and Pragmatic Perspectives”, in *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*, ed. Cass R. Sunstein and Martha C. Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51–77.

of life may not be the highest virtue, for humans or animals, as accounts of martyrs (ancient and modern) remind us.

Sacrificing societies show that there can be a positive value ascribed to death, when an animal chosen as sacrificial victim is given an honoured place in a celebration which it performs on behalf of the human community. It is being ascribed high moral status when (as sometimes happens) it goes garlanded in procession and is asked to nod symbolic consent to its own death. The rituals surrounding a death in sacrifice are not necessarily modes of oppression but may be the best human means of ascribing transcendent value to a life. These are wholly different from the devaluing and demoralising spectacle of the factory style slaughterhouse.

The real problem for our culture is entering imaginatively into a non-enslaving attitude towards animals when we neither offer sacrifice nor eat meat with such a celebratory attitude. In sacrificing cultures a meat meal is a rare and notable occasion: special, expensive, protein-laden, a break from a monotonous and largely vegetarian diet, and involves the whole community.

But meat for us is the normal and the ordinary, rather than the exception, and our diet is anyway much more stable, varied and nutritious. Whether meat-eating is necessary or even healthy at the current level is open to question. In any case, the stance of gratitude, which is the essence of sacrifice, is not dependent on the particular food consumed. We might say that a loaf of bread, well baked, is worthy of giving thanks for, and doing so makes it a higher and more life-affirming meal, in a different moral and spiritual order, than a guzzled hamburger.

So a sacrifice does not need to involve the life of an animal, while vegetarian or vegan diets are wholly compatible with a positively sacrificial attitude, an offering with thanks. This is the more so because vegetarian and vegan practice is frequently grounded in questions not only about animal rights but about the violence done to the environment when a huge percentage of the world's grain goes to produce beef and pork for Western tables with dire consequences for the developing nations in degradation of land, unequal distribution of food, and impoverishment of the people.⁸ It is not only animals who have rights!

8 See Lelia Green, Leesa Costello and Julie Dare, "Veganism, health expectancy, and the communication of sustainability", *Australian Journal of Communication*, 37 (2010): 51-72; H. Steinfeld et al., *Livestock's Long Shadow: Environmental issues and options* (New York: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2006), accessed 10.11.2010, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e00.htm>.

In conclusion

From a theological viewpoint, it is important that, whatever we eat, we eat with thanks, because a Gift has been given, and not in a state of guilt or indifference towards those with whom our lives are interdependent. The theology of celebration intrinsic to sacrifice effectively critiques the dominant Western culture of consumption. It is this culture of consumption without thanksgiving which in our day sustains the wholesale functionalising of animal lives.

The admittedly remote but persistent theme of sacrifice as it winds through the Bible and liturgy and soteriology keeps drawing our attention to an attitude to life which questions the dominant values of our society. The dismissal of sacrifice as primitive or oppressive serves to protect those who systematically exploit animals' lives from recognising the heresy they are promoting and the evil they do. It also, rather comfortably, keeps meat on our bourgeois tables. Far from avoiding the topic of sacrifice, Christians need to affirm that through reflection on this ancient and (for us) outmoded practice, theology provides the best and most holistic answer to the ethical question of how we may live at peace with our neighbours, human and non-human.

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Animals as subjects

Ted Witham

The majority theological tradition positions animals as resources, things to be used by humans. Thomas Aquinas was the most influential of this mainstream view but it persists into the 21st Century and has practical out-workings in public policy, for example is protecting human beach-users from shark attacks, the treatment of livestock being transported and the breeding of animals for pets. This paper surveys the minority theological views of Franciscans, beginning with the intuitive activity of Saint Francis of Assisi, sketching the theological contributions of the early Franciscan intellectual tradition, and tracing its influence in the post-Reformation period. It argues that Thomas Aquinas's dismissal of the possibility that animals have "minds" has allowed contemporary Christians to fail to hear the voices of animals and their contribution to a humane society.

Thomas Aquinas both followed and solidified the mainstream philosophical and theological tradition that animals were things. Thomas declares in his *Summa Theologica* that because animals do not have minds, they have been placed on earth for our use.¹ They are resources. The only restraint placed on human use of animals is that humans should not be cruel, because "cruel habits might carry over into our treatment of human beings."²

This mainstream positioning of animals both pre-dates Thomas and continues long after his death. After the Reformation, for example, Thomistic thinking is found in both Catholic and Protestant thinkers. Among those that take a positive interest in animals, the Catholic poet Jean de la Fontaine (1621–1695) wrote charming Fables including the *Ant and the Cicada*, the purpose of which was not to help the reader understand the animals, but to

1 Thomas, *Summa*, 2,2,64,1.

2 Thomas, *Summa* 2,2,64,1.

illuminate human behaviour. For example, *The Frog Who Wanted to Make Herself as Fat as the Ox* concludes with the explicit lesson being drawn,

The world is full of *people* who are no wiser [than the frog]:
 Every ordinary man wants to build a noble castle;
 Every minor prince has his ambassadors;
 Every town clerk wants to have a team of office boys.”³

The Protestant teacher Guillaume Salluste du Bartas (1544–1590) set down long catalogues of animals, urging the human readers to imitate imagined characteristics.

“I see that the elephant,
 Studious scholar is ruminating on his own,
 The lesson taught him:
 He venerates his king.”⁴

These writers were like the writer of Proverbs urging us to “Observe ants, you lazybones. Watch their behaviours and copy them yourselves.” (Proverbs 6.6, my paraphrase). So the faithfulness of dogs became a commonplace model for *human* Christian faithfulness.

My complaint with this kind of writing is not that it is simplistic: it could be highly sophisticated. The French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) has a lovely image of the way God binds himself to us. The swallow makes its nest by suspending material from four firm fixtures, corners in a barn perhaps, then weaves it together to make a compact knot, a nest like the knot of knowledge and love whose twists and turns God balls together and binds up to make a nest for our souls.⁵

This language depicts animals only to draw a lesson for human behaviour.

In the period after the Reformation, René Descartes (1596–1650) believed that the bodily operations of animals – and humans – were caused by internal machines. The key difference between humans and animals was the possession (by humans) of a mind. This is the traditional Thomistic thinking in a new guise.

I suppose that the body is nothing else than a statue or a machine
 of earth, that God forms for the purpose, to make it resemble us

3 Lawler, J.R. *An Anthology of French Poetry*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press 1960, 15. (My translations from French to English except where otherwise noted; my italics.)

4 Randall, Catharine. *The Wisdom of Animals: Creatureliness in Early Modern French Spirituality*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2014, 55.

5 Randall, 37.

as much as possible: so that in the end, not only does he give it the colour and the appearance of all our members, but he also puts inside all that the pieces needed to make it work, eat, breathe, everything for it to imitate all our functions that can be imagined to proceed from the material, and which depend entirely on the disposition of the organs.

We see clocks, artificial fountains, windmills, and other similar machines, only being made by men, are left with the power to move themselves in several different ways, and it seems to me that I couldn't imagine so many types of movement in this one, that I suppose were made by the hands of God, neither attributing to him so much artifice, that you do not have the subject to think that he couldn't have more.⁶

Thomistic understandings of animals persist to this day. As objects without minds or rationality, animals can be treated in any way that suits their use for human beings. Sharks must give way to human beings in marine encounters. Livestock must be transported by the most economically efficient means available. Animals are for the use of humans. Writing primarily of the fur industry but making a general point about the modern use of animals, Lauren Gazzola writes, "... it is clear that this violence is not limited to particular workers or an individual facility or a specific industry. Rather, violence is the very nature of raising animals for the purpose of killing and eating them – or wearing them, or testing on them."⁷

There is, however, a minority tradition also inviting our attention. His biographer Thomas Celano credits St Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226) with moving worms to the edge of the road in case a cart ran over it.⁸ (*I Celano 29, FAED I*, 250) He was fully aware that wherever the worm was – on the road or on the verge – its fate could be to be eaten by a bird. We need to move forward in history to discover the Christian interest in worms for their own sake; their life-cycle, the magnificent way they grow and their intriguing reproductive process and their contribution to soil quality. Francis paid attention to birds. A later legend credits him with taming a wolf near Gubbio.⁹

6 Alquié, Ferdinand. *Édition des Œuvres philosophiques de Descartes*, 3 vol., Garnier, 1963-1973, 379-380, my translation.

7 Gazzola Lauren. "Is Freeing Minks Terrorism? Questions we should be asking ourselves," in *Truth-out*, 29 July 2014 <http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/25222-is-freeing-minks-terrorism-and-other-questions-we-should-be-asking-ourselves> Accessed 30/7/2014.

8 Armstrong R. J., Hellman J.W. & Short W.J. (eds). *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, New York: New City Press 1999, Volumes 1 & 3. Cited hereafter as *FAED*; here *I Celano*, vol. 1, 250.

9 *Little Flowers 21, FAED 3*, 601-604

St Francis did not develop a theology of animals. His understanding was intuitive. His interpreter, Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c. 1221–1274), accepted Thomas’s hierarchy of being, but with a novel twist. He taught that every individual creature was a *vestige*, *image* or *similitude* of God.¹⁰ Non-rational creatures displayed traces only (“vestiges”) of the divine image, whereas creatures with minds, humans and angels were made in the *image* or *similitude* of God.

However, Bonaventure’s attention to the individual creature is an assertion that *every* creature had value. Another Franciscan friar, John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), building on Bonaventure’s thought, claimed that every creature was a little Word of God. Each creature came into being at the command of God. This was an expansion *ad infinitum* of the Word of God in Genesis 1, the command “Let there be!”

Each creature therefore came into being at the explicit command of God. Each creature spoke of its history with God. Duns Scotus coined the philosophical term *haecceitas* (“thisness”) to describe the individuality of each creature. In the passage following, Duns Scotus asks what makes this stone unlike any other stone and unlike any other object; and what makes it unlike any part of itself. In other words, what is its *haecceitas*?

Because there is among beings something indivisible into subjective parts – that is, such that it is formally incompatible for it to be divided into several parts each of which is it – the question is not what it is by which such a division is formally incompatible with it (because it is formally incompatible by incompatibility), but rather what it is by which, as by a proximate and intrinsic foundation, this incompatibility is in it. Therefore, the sense of the questions on this topic [*viz.* of individuation] is: What is it in [*e.g.*] this stone, by which as by a proximate foundation it is absolutely incompatible with the stone for it to be divided into several parts each of which is this stone, the kind of division that is proper to a universal whole as divided into its subjective parts?¹¹

At the heart of Duns Scotus’ thought was the supreme Word of God, Jesus Christ. He both came into being as a command of God, “Let there be a baby

10 Bonaventura Bagnoregis (Saint). *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum* (*Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences of Master Peter Lombard, Archbishop of Paris*), Latin Text *Ad Claras Aquas*, English Translation Br Alexis Bugnolo, 1882, 2010. Here 1 *Sententia* d.2 a. un a.12

11 Duns Scotus. *Ordinatio: On the Necessity of Revealed Doctrine*, Latin text *Studio et Cura Commissionis Scotisticae*, English Translation, *The Franciscan Archive*, (N.D.) <https://franciscan-archive.org/scotus/opera/dun01001.html>, Accessed 3/9/2014; here *Ordinatio II*, d.3, p.1 q.2, n.48.

born to Mary,” and was at the same time uncreated, equal to the Creator. Jesus Christ as the Word of God is the heart of creation, giving value to each little word of God.

Two French thinkers after the Reformation pushed their understanding of animals in a new direction. For both Saint François de Sales, the founder of the Salesians, and Father Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant, animals in themselves became important.

In *The Wisdom of Animals*, Catharine Randall shows how Francis de Sales cloaks his language in ambiguity, and does not commit himself to a theological position that can be construed as differing from that of the Catholic Church. His position can only be guessed at by comparing his hints with Bougeant, who develops a complex description of animals’ language and subjectivity. Animals are demons who refuse to serve God. Bougeant would like to claim that animals have souls, but is afraid of falling foul of the Church’s teaching that souls must have free will to choose heaven or hell.¹² His solution satisfies no-one, and Bougeant was eventually forced to recant.

By this unsatisfactory description of animals, however, Bougeant wants to show how animals have language, live in community and cooperate more readily than humans but fails to find a way of expressing this within orthodox theology.¹³ A survey of modern research affirms that animals do have emotions which they communicate. Researchers at the University of Minnesota have found that rats experience regret after making bad choices when treats are presented to them.¹⁴ Voices from academia and common sense indicate that animals have a form of consciousness. Animals do feel pain. Domestic dogs add to their communication repertoire in the interactions with humans. Hens make different alarm calls when a sentry spots a predator bird overhead or to indicate preferred food.¹⁵

12 Randall, Catharine. *The Wisdom of Animals: Creatureliness in Early Modern French Spirituality*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2014, 105.

13 Randall, 107.

14 Steiner A.P. & Redish A.D. “Behavioral and neurophysiological correlates of regret in rat decision-making on a neuroeconomic task,” *Nature Neuroscience* 17, 995-1002, 2014 (doi:10.1038/nn.3740) <http://www.nature.com/neuro/journal/v17/n7/full/nn.3740.html> Accessed 4/7/2014.

15 Sneddon, Lynne U., Braithwaite, Victoria A., and Gentle, Michael J. “Do Fishes Have Nociceptors? Evidence for the evolution of a vertebrate sensory system,” in *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, London 2003, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1691351/pdf/12816648.pdf>. Hare, Brian, Brown, Michelle, Williamson, Christina, and Tomasello, Michael. “The Domestication of Social Cognition in Dogs,” in *Science* 22 November 2002, 298 (598) 1634-1636, <http://www.sciencemag.org/content/298/5598/1634.full> Accessed 22/8/2014. Evans, Christopher and Evans, Linda. “Representational signalling in birds,” in *Biology Letters*, 3(1) February 2007, 8-11. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2373811/> Accessed 22/8/2014.

This minority theological tradition, then, through Bonaventure, Duns Scotus and Bougeant, leads to the assertion that animals are sentient beings capable of feeling and experiencing. This theological tradition is confirmed by recent science. That animals are subjects has implications both in public policy and in law. The current bar for humane treatment of animals is the Thomistic standard of avoiding cruelty “for fear that cruel habits may carry over into our treatment of human beings.”¹⁶

If individual animals are subjects then a much higher standard prevails. Our ethical choices in raising animals for meat, in the ways they are penned and fed, in their transport and methods of slaughter, and in the very fact that we eat animals, must be not only in avoiding cruelty and neglect but in animal practices that promote the flourishing of individual animals.

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16 Thomas, *Summa*, 2,2,64,1

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The Earth is full of your creatures

A theology of wilderness

Mick Pope

Wilderness is a debated term today, given that no place on Earth is free from modification via human activity, such as anthropogenic climate change or the spread of DDT through the biosphere. This is of particular interest in the Australian seen, given the challenge to the status and integrity of World Heritage Areas. Definitions of what or what doesn't count as wilderness, what should be conserved and what conservation means are philosophical as well as scientific questions because they pose questions about what is of value, how that value is measured, *etc.* Such issues are therefore open to theological analysis, to guide Christians through decision making processes in conservation and ecomission. This paper will examine key Old Testament texts that speak about the role of wilderness and places beyond human settlement alongside those that set out the creation mandate to explore ideas of divine sovereignty, human stewardship, nature, the image of God and proper humility.

Wither wilderness?

Nature is a deeply ambiguous concept for Christians. Problematic for many is that nature appears, as Tennyson observed, "red in tooth and claw."¹ Predation is often understood as a result of the Fall, something to be set aside as in the eschaton (*e.g.*, Isaiah 65.25). Wilderness is unordered and needs our cultivation. In *The Cross and the Rainforest*, Robert Whelan, Joseph Kirwan and Paul Haffner elevate flower beds above trees, which they see only hav-

1 Alfred Tennyson and Erik Gray (ed), *In Memorium* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company: 2003).

ing value as timber.² The cultural mandate of Genesis 1.26-31 is seen as *carte blanche* to cultivate the world, and eliminate disorder.

Such an approach is not without its critics. Ever since Lynn White's landmark paper, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, texts like Genesis 1.26-31 have been viewed with a sceptical eye.³ Norman Habel identifies it as a grey text, preferring the greener text of Genesis 2.15.⁴

According to J.B. MacKinnon, wilderness is increasingly seen as "a gentle and giving realm of the spirit."⁵ Starting with the Romantics, wild places are where we go to reconnect with roots and find ourselves. There is now even a scientific rationalisation for this, known as biophilia.⁶ A Christianised version of this asks us to recognise God's glory in his creation, as in Gerard Manley Hopkins's *Pied Beauty* which celebrates "dappled things."⁷ So do Christians need wild places for their spirituality, or is creation simply there to meet our physical needs for agriculture, recreation, resources and natural ecosystem services?⁸

Such a question is ever more pressing in a world where there are fewer and fewer places where human feet have not trampled. Is this a loss? Even in places where humans have not stepped, we have changed the world by warming the atmosphere and oceans. Our waste plastic ends up in the oceans, forming huge vortices of rubbish, like the Great Pacific Garbage Patch.⁹ Poisons like DDT are now found in penguin chick eggs in the Antarctic.¹⁰ If we need wilderness, we are losing it. This issue is of particular relevance in the Australian context given recent threats to World Heritage Areas in Tasmania and Queensland. The attempt to delist parts of Tasmanian forests was under the utilitarian view of forests as timber, and that too many trees were locked

- 2 Robert Whelan, Joseph Kirwan and Paul Haffner, *The Cross and the Rain Forest: A Critique of Radical Green Spirituality*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 41.
- 3 Lynn White, Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis", *Science*, 155 (1967): 1203-1207.
- 4 Norm Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF 2012).
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- 8 On ecosystem services, see for example E.O Wilson, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company: 2007).
- 9 Susan L. Dautel, "Transoceanic Trash: International and United States Strategies for the Great Pacific Garbage Patch," 3 *Golden Gate U. Envtl. L.J.* 181 (2009).
- 10 Aleksy B. Lukowski, "DDT Residues in the Tissues and Eggs of Three Species of Penguins from Breeding Colonies at Admiralty Bay (King George Island, South Shetland Islands)," *Polish Polar Research* 4 (1083), 129-134.

up.¹¹ The other area at risk is the Great Barrier Reef. Already at risk of rising ocean temperatures, ocean acidification and pollution, the Reef is threatened by dredge spoil from a coal terminal.¹² The irony of expanding the mining and export of coal and potentially damaging this wilderness, so that in turn greenhouse gas emission will further damage the reef, should not be lost.

We therefore need to think very carefully what we are losing, and whether or not a theology of wilderness will not just allow us to appreciate it better, but that it will form a part of a genuine spirituality that shapes how we treat it, as well as how it affects us.

Where is wilderness?

The 1964 Wilderness Act defines wilderness as:

in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.¹³

Is this definition useful, or even realistic? Does wilderness refer to places totally devoid of human habitation or activity? Leopold states that “Wilderness is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artefact called civilization.”¹⁴ Given humanity’s historical association, do we have anything more to do with wilderness, or with Holmes Rolston should we maintain that there are “critical differences between wild nature and human culture,” and hence see them as entirely separate?¹⁵ Rolston does not base his differences on metaphysics or culture, but Christians will emphasise that the doctrine of the *Imago Dei* insists that we are somehow different to the rest of creation. For example, Grudem provides the following definition: “The fact that man

11 Tom Fairman, “‘Degraded’ Tasmanian forests can still be World Heritage”, *The Conversation*, March 20, 2014. Accessed July 13, 2014. <http://theconversation.com/degraded-tasmanian-forests-can-still-be-world-heritage-24540>.

12 Isabel Roe and Allyson Horn, “UNESCO condemns Federal Government’s approval of dredge spoil near Great Barrier Reef”, *ABC News*, June 12, 2014. Accessed July 13, 2014. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-05-01/unesco-decision-dredge-spoil-near-great-barrier-reef-condemned/5422802>.

13 Wilderness Act, Public Law 88-577 (16 U.S. C. 1131-1136), 88th Congress, Second Session, September 3, 1964.

14 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: With Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Ballentine Books: 1970), 264.

15 Holmes Rolston, III, “The Wilderness Idea Reaffirmed”, *The Environmental Professional* 13 (1991), 370-377.

is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God.”¹⁶ Rolston maintains that we do not reduce human culture to nothing but a natural system, for this risks both reductionism which devalues human culture, and primitivism which rejects human culture.

This divide can be driven too far. Although English translations are often coy, the various animals in Genesis 1.20 and 1.24, and humans in Genesis 2.7 are all described as living creatures, or in the Hebrew, *nephesh*. Likewise, God fashioned Adam from the dust or *Adamah* (humans from the humus if you will, Genesis 2.7), as he did the other animals offered as helpers (Genesis 2.19) and the plants (Genesis 2.9). Without forcing an unnecessary concordism of the text with science, this shared vocabulary means we are closer than to other creatures than we sometimes admit; which begs the question of how close we should get.

Before fully answering the question of the relationship of humans to wilderness, we need to consider whether or not wilderness is any longer meaningful. Given climate change,¹⁷ overfishing, pollution of or air and water and the spreading of humans over most of the globe, should we simply accept no places are truly wild and advocate for sustainable development as Callicott suggests.¹⁸ Or should we instead continue to look for relatively pristine locations to fence off and stay out of for their own good? Is our cultural mandate such that we have to tend all places, or does the bible teach us that wild places have value apart from us, while still offering us spiritual succour?

Wilderness myths

In *Authenticity in Nature*, Nigel Dudley wants us to avoid two myths.¹⁹ The first is that unmodified, wholly natural landscape and seascapes still exist. The second is that naturalness is irrelevant, which would be to give into Callicott and an overemphasised dominion theology. In deconstruction of the former myth, Dudley notes that apart from climate change, agriculture, urbanisation, intensive mining and overfishing, human changes to the climate go back much further than the past 150 years or so since the start of the Industrial Rev-

16 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press: 2007), 442.

17 Thomas F. Stocker et al., *Climate Change 2013, The Physical Science Basis: Working Group I Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change Summary for Policy Makers* (Switzerland: IPCC: 2013).

18 J. B. Callicott, “The Wilderness Idea Revisited: The Sustainable Development Alternative”, *The Environmental Professional* 13 (1991), 235-247.

19 Nigel Dudley, *Authenticity in Nature: Making Choices about the Naturalness of Ecosystems* (London: Earthscan: 2011), 11.

olution. Throughout Central and South America, and Southeast Asia, seemingly ancient forest surrounds the ruins of once vast empires: Mayan, Aztec, Toltec, Inca, Khmer. Tim Flannery showed that the first peoples in America had sophisticated cultures and agriculture.²⁰ In Australia, Flannery has also shown that the indigenous peoples modified the land using fire: the idea of *terra nullius*, which was used to dispossess Australian Aborigines, is a myth.²¹ It is inappropriate to think of wilderness in many parts of the world without some level of human habitation or management.

Dudley also lists three arguments used to support the myth that wilderness is irrelevant. The first is that naturalness is gone, and we should just embrace what we now have.²² Urban areas are increasingly becoming important wildlife habitats, particularly when agricultural monocultures are often vigorously defended with pesticides and the shooting of wild animals. A case in point is urban foxes in the UK, which in 2006 were numbered at 10,000 in London.²³ However, while these urban connections bring many people close to God's creatures, we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking they are a worthwhile replacement. For example, studies of natural soundscapes have shown otherwise natural looking logged forests do not contain the same level of biodiversity.²⁴ We will see shortly why such impoverishment has theological significance.

The second argument is that nature needs our intervention to maintain important values.²⁵ However, as both Dudley and Rolston note, nature is not static. Hence, it is more likely that the values that we seek to maintain are our own, those associated with our way of life and our experience of the way things have been during our lifetime or that of a few generations back. This suggests that for wilderness to be truly itself, we should be leaving itself to its own devices, to explore its own development and let God alone care for it. This might seem to be at odds with Genesis 1, and the idea of humans having dominion. More likely however, we need to understand that there is difference between land and wilderness, between those areas that we manage for our use and those that we need either to leave alone, or minimise our harm.

20 Tim Flannery, *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and its Peoples* (London: William Heinemann 2001).

21 Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters* (Sydney: Reed New Holland 1994).

22 Dudley, *Authenticity in Nature*, 46.

23 James Owen, "10,000 Foxes Roam London", *National Geographic News*, May 15, 2006. Accessed July 11, 2014. <http://news.nationalgeographic.com.au/news/2006/05/foxes-london.html>.

24 Bernie Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra* (London: Profile Books Ltd 2013).

25 Dudley, *Authenticity in Nature*, 50.

The third argument for naturalness being irrelevant is that naturalness and wilderness are social constructs, the flipside of culture and civilisation.²⁶ Ultimately though, such an argument is the product of deconstruction which selectively doesn't deconstruct its own arguments. As Dudley notes, it does not actually help decide what should be done to undo the damage that has been done. It is also scientifically naive view in that we can study ecosystem functioning and well-being. This idea will be re-examined below when considering the role of predators in ecosystems. Finally, it is a theologically unsatisfactory view, cutting to the heart of the *Imago Dei* and what makes us different. As with Rolston, we need nature and culture to be perceived as distinct enough to think constructively about how the two relate, while recognising that culture is shaped by our created nature. It is also noteworthy, although beyond the scope of this paper, to consider that much of nature has its own culture.

Wilderness ethics

In thinking about nature and wilderness, Dudley recognises that there is much moral confusion.²⁷ Confusion between conservation and human rights has occurred when returning places to wilderness conditions has meant the ejection of indigenous peoples without regards to their rights or management of the land. Defining wilderness as being devoid of permanent human habitation is problematic, even if there are occasions where a human presence would be inappropriate. This has resulted in clashes between conservationists and anthropologists and human rights activists, as in the case of the "Path of the Panther" in Central America.²⁸

A second confusion is between existence rights for animals versus animal rights for individuals.²⁹ In conservation, this has proved problematic when human management of ecosystems where predators have been removed. The animal rights of individuals not to be culled often ends up trumping the existence rights of whole ecosystems, which without their predators are deficient as ecosystems and doxologically lacking. A recent example of this was the planned 2012 and in 2014 kangaroo cull in the Australian Capital Territory, which provoked a public outcry.³⁰

26 Dudley, *Authenticity in Nature*, 55.

27 Dudley, *Authenticity in Nature*, 86.

28 Caroline Fraser, *Rewilding the World* (New York: Picador: 2009), chapter 3.

29 Dudley, *Authenticity in Nature*, 90.

30 Lisa Cox and John Thistleton, "Activists Ready to Disrupt Cull of 2000 Roos," *The Canberra Times*, May 21, 2012, accessed April 25, 2014. <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/>

Following Dudley then, we might look for a biblical mandate for the existence rights for all living creatures, and not simply in isolated pockets, but in the sheer abundance that we have denied them. The existence rights of species and the whole ecosystem as a whole is discussed in Genesis 1. Walton describes the Genesis account as the dedication of the cosmos-temple, rather than its material creature.³¹ Human beings are the last to be mentioned, because as the image of God, they represent the deity within the cosmos-temple. This account is both theocentric as it is the temple of God, and anthropocentric in that we represent the divine nature. At one level then, humans cannot be excluded automatically from anywhere.

Yet because the entirety of creation is seen as a temple, all of the created order has value that is independent of human needs or interests. In verses 20-23, the blessing of abundance is given to living creatures, birds and sea monsters, identical to that given to humans.³² The waters are said to swarm with God's creations, and the fish are given the blessing of filling them. Likewise, the birds are to fill the air. This is a picture of not simply of the right to exist, but to exist in abundance. The massive reduction of numbers seen in many species, such as the American Bison, let alone the extinction of once widespread species such as the Passenger Pigeon, is not only a loss for ecosystems, but a denial of a creature's existence rights. The sheer abundance of these creatures is doxological. This is not to suggest that species are fixed through time, or that the goal of conservation is to freeze ecosystems in time, a point Dudley is quick to make.

If Genesis 1 acknowledges that wilderness is composed of a sheer abundance over which humans have dominion, Psalm 104 speaks for the independence of wilderness in this abundance. Water, so important for life, is discussed in verses 10-16. However, only two of these six verses discuss human needs. Likewise, most of the Psalm is dedicated to discussion creatures which are either irrelevant or potentially harmful to human endeavours. Each of these creatures has its habitation allotted by God, including the high mountains for the wild goats, and the sea for leviathan and various innumerable creeping things. In this, we can see many creatures in their wilderness, apart

activists-ready-to-disrupt-cull-of-2000-roos-20120521-1yzv3.html. Tom McIlroy, "Canberra Kangaroo Cull Kept on Hold", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 29, 2014, accessed July 11, 2014. <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/animals/canberra-kangaroo-cull-kept-on-hold-20140529-zrrox.html>.

31 John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, (Leicester: IVP 2009).

32 John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis", in *The Expositors Bible Commentary: Volume 2*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House: 1990), 35.

from human needs, concerns or habitations. All of these things have value to God in and of themselves, and reflect Yahweh's greatness and power.³³ As Psalm 104.31 says "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works" (NASB).

Such a theology solves the issue that Sir David Attenborough raises in his BBC documentary *Attenborough in Paradise* (1996).³⁴ In it, he quotes Alfred Russell Wallace from *The Malay Archipelago*:

I thought of the long ages of the past during which the successive generations of these things of beauty had run their course. Year by year being born and living and dying amid these dark gloomy woods with no intelligent eye to gaze upon their loveliness, to all appearances such a wanton waste of beauty. It seems sad that on the one hand such exquisite creatures should live out their lives and exhibit their charms only in these wild inhospitable regions. This consideration must surely tell us that all living things were not made for man, many of them have no relation to him, their happiness and enjoyments, their loves and hates, their struggles for existence, their vigorous life and early death, would seem to be immediately related to their own well-being and perpetuation alone.³⁵

Wallace rightly recognises the existence rights of these birds. His claim that their beauty was wasted is wrong on three counts. First, his chauvinism, which was typical of the period, did not recognise the intelligence of the Papuans, or their aesthetic sense. Second, the bird's beauty is a function of sexual selection, and hence appreciated by the females for the reproduction of the species. As Darwin noted, "When we behold a male bird displaying his graceful plumes or splendid colours before the female ... it is impossible to doubt that she admires the beauty of her male partner."³⁶ Third, God himself delights in their beauty; they do not have to exist for human eyes to be intelligently appreciated. By extension, we are able to enter into such wild places to appreciate the beauty of these creatures precisely because our identity as *Imago Dei* allows us to so.

In this act of aesthetic appreciation, we join in this doxology by recognising God's creative wisdom. While watching a documentary or visiting a zoo might be doxological, nothing replaces being in the wild observing such crea-

33 John Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 3: Psalms 90-150* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic: 2008).

34 *Attenborough in Paradise*, first broadcast April 8, 1996. Directed by Paul Reddish and written by David Attenborough.

35 Alfred Russell Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago* (Singapore: Periplus 2000).

36 Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (New York: Penguin Classics: 2004).

tures first hand. In considering ecotourism, doxology needs to be added to the mix of impacts and contributions to the local economy.

Where the wild things are

If the idea of wilderness is to be retained, what is the critical factor in determining what constitutes it, and of what value is it in Christian theology and praxis? A key feature of wilderness is what makes it wild: predators. It is now being recognised that ecosystems without their top predators are impoverished and unbalanced. As Monbiot noted that there was no golden age in the past where people lived in total harmony with nature.³⁷ What is true is that people learned to adapt and live in less tension, but only after large predators or herbivores went extinct.³⁸

The process of replacing the original plants and animals, or a reasonable analogue is known as rewilding. Monbiot defines it as “resisting the urge to control nature and allowing it to find its own way.”³⁹ There is, to be sure, a degree of management: reintroduction, removing exotic species, building or removing fences, *etc.* For the most, however, it is not about trying to freeze for all time a particular state, but letting things work themselves out. Reintroducing lost species helps return diversity to ecosystems, and God is the God of biodiversity (Psalm 104.24-25), so diversity and its restoration is doxological (verse 31).

The reintroduction of wild boars into parts of Britain, with their rooting about in the dirt, allows tree and flower species to proliferate, as well as the robin. Boar are wild, but hardly dangerous.⁴⁰ For some, the reappearance of boars has led to new business opportunities; boar watching holidays. More dramatically, the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park has seen a drop in deer numbers, and as a result, the recovery of trees along rivers banks, and hence an improvement in water quality and fish stocks, beaver numbers, songbirds, and so on.⁴¹

In texts like Psalm 104, we recognise that wilderness is not tame. Asiatic lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God (verse 21). These creatures were said to attack humans (Judges 14) and threaten flocks of sheep (1 Samuel 17). Wilderness is wild because of its wild creatures, its predators.

37 George Monbiot, *Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Nature* (London: Allen Lane 2013), 7.

38 Flannery, *The Future Eaters*, *ibid.*

39 Monbiot, *Feral*, 11.

40 Monbiot, *Feral*, 94.

41 Monbiot, *Feral*, 84. See also Fraser, *Rewilding the World*, 47f.

MacKinnon argues that it is only now that nature is largely tamed, do we view it in a religious or quasi-religious sense. He thinks that making nature sacred is a false idol. However, Psalm 104 shows that before the Romantic ideals of nature grew in response to the Industrial Revolution, the Psalmist saw wilderness in a religious sense, precisely because of its wildness.

Apart from wildness for its function in ecosystems, the doxology of diversity and the relativising of human needs by divine care of nature, the wildness of wilderness addresses human hubris. We are not as in control as we think. In Job 38 and following, God answers Job's questioning about his own suffering from out of the whirlwind, not by addressing his concerns, but by showing that God is God and Job is not, and that God is quiet capable of managing the universe that Job does not understand.⁴² God is creator (38.4-11); our own creative efforts are secondary. It is he who controls the weather (38.22-41); we can only deform the climate to our and creations detriment. We might think that our increased knowledge in biology and ecology means that we control the animals (39.1-30); and yet our dominion has been misrule, as evidenced by the many which have been driven to extinction, often wantonly. As Jared Diamond has shown, only a few creatures are able to be domesticated;⁴³ yet only God can capture and tame Leviathan (41.1-34).

When we enter into wild places, we are not entirely at home. MacKinnon suggests entering the habitation of dangerous predators should invoke awe (though he acknowledges no God) but not peace. In the wild is danger, and it is this danger that reminds us that we may be the creature who bears God's image, but we are still only a creature. Monbiot suggests that rewilding is not simply something external, but is internal as well. Wilderness is for those "scratching at the walls of life," and entering it means risk.⁴⁴ Currently, the West Australian government is conducting a cull of sharks that many, including some survivors of shark attacks, deem unnecessary and ineffective at reducing attacks. One study conducted among visitors to the Sydney Aquarium in 2013 showed that most people blamed "no one" or the swimmer for shark attacks, not the shark.⁴⁵ When we enter the water where sharks live, we enter their world. The oceans have always been seen as wild, particularly to

42 Francis I. Anderson, *Job: Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press:1976), 290.

43 Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company 1997).

44 Monbiot, *Feral*, 11.

45 Christopher Neff, "The Politics of Shark Attacks: Time for some Myth Busting", *The Guardian*, April 14, 2014, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/14/the-politics-of-shark-attacks-time-for-some-myth-busting>

the Israelites. At best, our ships share the space with Leviathan and the other creeping creatures (Psalm 104.25-26).

Not only is the biological wild of wilderness humbling, but its isolation has significance. The lack of light pollution helps us see ourselves in perspective, allowing us to see more than the limited sky view of urban living. Travel any significant distance from habitation, and the sky opens up as a huge vista of stars, the Milky Way, becomes bright, and shooting stars chase across the sky. In settings like that, Psalm 8 comes alive, forcing us to ask that eternal existential question, of what significance is the human race?⁴⁶ The answer is ultimately nothing inherent in ourselves, but God's own choice. That alone should keep us humble, mindful of the existence rights of other creatures, and protective of wild places.

The wild in our backyard

One of the perceived problems with the concept of wilderness is that we think we can do what we like in our own backyard. However, we now know this can't be done. Wilderness and civilisation are connected, with many shade of grey, or green, in between. We've already seen that wilderness as wild as we can allow it, by restoring and stepping back, should be maintained in as many areas as is practical. There will always be tension at the edges, but it isn't simply a comfortable western idea to maintain civil relationships. Thirteen year-old Richard Turere of Masai community invented a simple, solar powered way of deterring lions from taking their livestock.⁴⁷ People all over the planet recognise that we have to try and get along with the wildness at our doorstep.

This is a theme that pervades Marris' *Rambunctious Garden: Saving nature in a post-wild world*. Be they exotic species or novel ecosystems, there is "conservation everywhere." To focus only on "pristine wilderness," we will fail to see that nature is close by, and not just far away. Doing so will mean that we "lose the ability to have spiritual and aesthetic experiences in more humbling natural settings."⁴⁸ As a recent ABC article notes, even the humble suburban park contains wildlife that is feral and native, safe and (mildly) dangerous, offers us rewards and deserves our care.⁴⁹

46 Leupold, H.C., *Exposition of the Psalms*, (London: Evangelical Press: 1972), 103

47 Richard Turere, "My Invention that Made Peace with Lions." Filmed February 2013. TED Video, 7:20. Posted February 2014, http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_turere_a_peace_treaty_with_the_lions.

48 Emma Marris, *Rambunctious Garden: Saving nature in a post-wild world* (New York: Bloomsbury 2011), 150.

49 Bill King, "Wildlife flourishes in a humble suburban park", *ABC Environment*, July 11, 2014.

Ultimately, we need nature in all of its forms, from the birds at our window, to life in the deepest depths and the darkest jungles. All things are connected, and all things bring glory to God in their own way. We need the rest of creation, and it needs us as a choir needs a choirleader.⁵⁰ Yet all of us rely on God. Whether we go to it or it comes to us, the wild teaches us about God and ourselves. Sometimes it may be risky, but sometimes we will need to take a walk on the wild side.

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The Old Fig Tree¹

Julie Nelson-White

tree
ancient tree
ancient fig tree
ancient Moreton Bay fig tree
root buttresses
arch cathedral like
welcoming and protecting
a holy space
cushioned with last year's detritus
safe to sit and reflect
solid and protected
surrounded by God's strength
by ancient Moreton Bay fig tree

by ancient Moreton Bay fig tree
standing sentinel at the entrance
to a maze of mystery
as ancient as the humanity
which enters quietly
and reflectively paces
seeking relationship and connection
with gentle wisdom
silently approaching
contemplatively meeting spirit
mating with ourselves
and profoundly accepting who we are

1 This poem was written while the author (janelsonwl@bigpond.com) was on retreat at Koora in June 2014.

Isaac the Aquarian

Water-source traditions and ecotheology

L Lee Levett-Olson

Studying with Indigenous Australians has helped me read the Bible in new ways. Clear parallels between the Hebrew Scriptures and Indigenous cultures, centred on land, law, and identity, continually reshape my understandings.¹ Those reshaped understandings help reveal new ecotheological insights in a patriarchal Genesis saga. With eyes opened through Indigenous interactions, I was taken by surprise at a key feature of the Isaac story: a surprise that exposed how my (dominant-culture) training overlooks significant levels of truth. The Isaac discovery raises implications for our western readiness to dismiss embodied readings of the Bible which might help us care for a threatened natural resource.

The Isaac Saga: Identity Displaced

Isaac the foretold one – a promise of mocking laughter transformed into the laughter of joy² – serves as the hub for the turning wheel of Hebrew identity. Through his line as the sole son of favoured Sarah, God fulfils the promise that took Abram from Mesopotamia into Canaan. Blessings of land, blessings of descendants: it is Isaac who will “father” the people of Israel. That “laughter” name centres the formula claiming Hebrew lineage and relationship to God. Through the burning bush God tells Moses, a stolen-generation murderer in hiding, that he is no clan-less “stranger” (*ger*, Exodus 2.22): “I am the God of *your ancestors*: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Exodus 3.6). Isaac

1 Cf. Wali Fejo, “The Voice of the Earth: An Indigenous Reading of Genesis 9” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, Norman C Habel & Shirley Wurst, ed.; Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield UK, 2000, pp 140–146.

2 That is the lovely contrast between Genesis 18:10-15 and 21:6-7.

bestows identity upon generations to this day. Yet his own identity represents a struggle because it is disconnected from ancestral land.

Land, in the Bible and today, is the ultimate source of identity.³ We share a planet filled with boundary lines and bitter tribal, national, and international combat. Dispute over inherited land, including ancestor places, is a significant obstacle for global cooperation to mitigate dangerous climate change. Most predictions of the near future imply that such strife will increase as resources dwindle; and amongst the most precious of these contested resources is *water*.⁴ Access to ancestral watersources – and blocking access by competing groups – is predicted to produce more bloody battles than our profligate wars for oil. Isaac, water-finder, identity-maker, provides a lens to view this potential future.

Land, water, and the “gaze which obscures”

Traditional commentary sees Isaac primarily as the object of others’ actions: Sarah’s defence against Ishmael’s abuse;⁵ Abraham’s readiness to offer human sacrifice;⁶ Rebekah’s conspiracy with Jacob to defraud and betray.⁷ These views frame the Second Patriarch as consistent victim, leading to a widespread dismissal of Isaac’s importance in his own right. Typical is the old *Interpreters Bible*: “In comparison with the towering Abraham, the complex Jacob, and the noble Joseph, the Isaac of the Old Testament story is weak both in character and in portrayal ... he is patently the least significant.”⁸

Thus Isaac becomes a further victim of “the gaze which obscures,” a disengaged perspective framing other as object rather than engaging empathetically with their subjectivity. It is a form of open-eyed blindness well known

- 3 Yet it is surprising how little this point figures in commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures. Many do not even list ‘Land’ in the index! How else to interpret this but as one example of ‘the gaze which obscures’?
- 4 E.g. <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/WWDR4%20Volume%201-Managing%20Water%20under%20Uncertainty%20and%20Risk.pdf>; and <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/water-issues/global-water-scarcity-predicted-to-rise-by-40-20131218-2zke9.html>
- 5 Whether the play on Isaac’s name in Genesis 21:9 (*mtzaaq*) means ‘fondle’ as some commentators have suggested, or ‘mock’ according to others, the weanling is portrayed as a pawn between competing mothers.
- 6 The saga of ‘Abraham’s faith’ in Genesis 22 would read very differently if Isaac were the story’s *subject* and not its ‘rescued victim’. No doubt Sarah also would have told the tale another way – as would the slaughtered ram!
- 7 Once again an entire chapter portrays Isaac as pawn of others’ rivalry, culminating in his ‘violent trembling’ in Genesis 27:33 when he discovers he has been duped.
- 8 *Interpreters Bible Dictionary*, vol. E–J, Abingdon Press, 1962; pp 728–9

to Indigenous people, themselves seen, if noticed at all, as *victims* of others' actions benign or malign, "relentlessly being pushed into obscurity."⁹ Jesus, in the stories of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15),¹⁰ Bartimaeus and the anointing woman (Mark 10, 14), Zaccheus (Luke 19), and the one born blind (John 9), rejects the gaze which obscures in order to emphasise in each case the agency of the "victim" in their own restoration.

The "relentless push into obscurity" not only blinds us to the agency of ancient peoples, but to the agency of the land and its creatures. Mircea Eliade long ago warned that for a "nonreligious age," the entire "cosmos has become opaque, inert, mute; it transmits no message," thus can be disregarded.¹¹ Professor Norm Habel's *Earth Bible* project¹² is a pioneering attempt to confront the pervasiveness of the Christian gaze which obscures towards the agency and subjectivity of *the land* in Biblical interpretation.

I believe dismissiveness towards Isaac flows (like a polluted stream) from a reading of Scripture almost perversely opaque to the embodiment (or *incarnation*) of God's presence in the land. An "earthed" reading of the patriarchal stories not only restores balance to our interpretations but is also more likely to prompt insights useful for ecotheological praxis. Consider an alternative view of the patriarchal narrative:

Abram left a rich land of permanent water, the delta between two of the three great rivers of the Ancient Near East. At God's call, he travelled to a very different landscape, a wet-season dry-season region where surface water was both scarce and unpredictable (hence Abram's sojourn in Egypt, where the gift of Hagar to history is an endowment from the Nile to a place with no great river).

Abram identified and enshrined sacred places on the journey. His faith found fulfilment in descendants and land. His descendants continued that aetiological journey, supported by significant women to whom God promised then fulfilled both Presence and blessing.

This, for Hebrews, is the great Ancestral Songline, born out of the pilgrimage from "between the rivers" "to a place I will show you".¹³ From renamed

9 Berndt, Ronald M. and Catherine H., *The Speaking Land: Myth and Story in Aboriginal Australia*; Ringwood VIC, Penguin Books, 1989. p xxvi

10 Matthew's use of 'Canaanite' as opposed to Mark's 'Syro-Phoenician' seems specifically directed at the Jewish dismissal of Indigenous peoples they had displaced.

11 Eliade, Mircea: *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959.

12 *The Earth Story in Genesis*, Norman C Habel & Shirley Wurst, ed.; Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield UK, 2000.

13 Mesopotamia, the land 'between the rivers,' applies to both ancestral places related to Abra-

Abraham's line comes a second creation story, a fresh-water counterpart to the saltwater story in Genesis 1. Abraham is also the founder of an enduring genealogy. In other words, he is the source of *story* and of *seed*. These matter for identity; but they cannot bear fruit on their own. Isaac continues offering both *story* and *seed*; but Isaac also contributes watersources. This adds the crucial legacy. Dependable water is the gift of life itself. For Indigenous Australians, songlines of ancestral watersources form the heart of proper knowing:

On the Inawilgin plain, close to Oenpelli, they made a well at Udjun ... As the two Dogs came along to the Waterfall, they went "one way, one way" cutting the rocks to form rockholes... Here at Guwoid behind Oenpelli (or Gallery) Hill, Inyalag, they dug a well ... They then went into the bottom of this waterhole and made themselves Ngalyod: "We are Rainbows now, we have to stay at this place!"¹⁴

I have seen the Three-Legged Dog rock from this story. Similar stories abound, many associated with the Rainbow Spirit or various rain-ancestors. An interesting counterpoint is the origin of Ungata Pool in Mututjilda Gorge, a sacred waterhole at the base of Uluru, where "the transubstantiated blood of the dying Ungata" denotes a violent death for others' sake: "Ungata died for his people, the Kunia, just as Christ did for his." The holiness of that sacrifice-water retains life-saving power to this day.¹⁵

From aquarian ancestors come both Law and grace. Waterholes in desert country, deep bores in temperate zones, these form a treasured legacy to pass from one generation to the next, as Maratja Dhamarrandji teaches:

Raypirri refers to wisdom, gift, blessing, culture, and tradition. *Raypirri* is what fathers pass on their sons, and mothers to their daughters ... *Raypirri* is about boundaries, and it is sacred. One generation passes it on to the next one ...¹⁶

ham's story: Ur, situated near the Euphrates-Tigris delta, and Haran, north of the confluence of the Euphrates and Balikh rivers (= 'Aram *Naharaim*, "of the two rivers"). 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you' (Genesis 12:1). Significantly, Abraham's servant is sent back to the Two Rivers Place to secure an appropriate covenant bride for Isaac after Sarah's death. The bloodline of Hebrew ancestry flows through the mother, and has a 'river country' source for both Sarah and Rebekah.

14 E.g. "Peopling the Land" in *The Speaking Land* op.cit., (pp 31-12).

15 Cowan, James: *Sacred Places in Australia*; East Roseville NSW: Simon & Schuster Australia, 1991, p 184.

16 Maratja Dhamarrandji (with Jione Havea), "Receive, Touch, Feel, and Give *Raypirri*" in Havea, Jione: *Indigenous Australia and the Unfinished Business of Theology*; New York, Palgrave, 2014 (p 12-13). See also Fejo, op.cit., et.al. Maratja – one of my own mentors – also

Reading the Biblical text when Aboriginal wisdom has opened non-Aboriginal eyes shows Isaac as not the least but perhaps the *most* significant patriarch; and from his story wells up a refreshing new challenge to our care for God's creation.

Ancient water, ancient stewardship

Isaac was a survivor, spared (through the ram's intervention) from his father's faithful dagger. He was also a lover: his encounter with Rebekah is one of the only true love stories in the Bible. He lived long, and prospered, and saw his two sons to maturity. The saga hints that Isaac had another love besides his wife: love for the earth. In the evening (as a new Hebrew day begins) Isaac walked in the land, "meditating."¹⁷ There he "raised his eyes" to see his new betrothed arriving (Genesis 24.63). Just as Rebekah provided care for camels (Genesis 24.19-20),¹⁸ Isaac nurtured flourishing animals. Isaac's preference for Esau over Jacob was based on his love for wild food – bush tucker – and the outdoor life the firstborn also prefers.

But it is particularly in the Abimelech encounter of Genesis 26 that Isaac's connection to the land becomes most explicit. His success in caring for expanding tribes of animals rests on his unique ability to seek out watersources and secure them for use. Genesis chapter 26 contains so many parallels to Abraham's similar encounter in Genesis 12 (and Genesis 21) that most commentators assume one story simply restates the other.¹⁹ I do not propose to discuss these textual matters; instead, I want to focus on the unique element that flows through the Isaac saga: the centrality of *wells*.²⁰

notes in this context that Isaac's *raypirri* was stolen by Jacob, "and so Esau was cheated. The firstborn was robbed. This is still true for Aboriginal people. We are cheated and robbed. Governments refuse to acknowledge us, and big companies mine our lands" (p 13).

17 The unique Hebrew word reads similarly to *dadirri*, the contemplative silence described by Miriam-Rose Ungimirr-Baumann as we listen intently and open ourselves to the voice of the land. http://www.liturgyplanning.com.au/documents/main.php?g2_view=core.Download-Item&g2_itemId=4832 Cf. Westermann, op.cit., p 390, whose 'to take the air' for *Isoach* adds the correct sense of communing *in nature* to 'meditate' or 'pray' (cf. Calvin, John: *The Book of Genesis*; trans. and ed. John King, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1984; Volume 2, p 28.). No English word melds contemplation within nature and awareness of the divine the way *dadirri* does.

18 Laura Hobgood-Oster: "'For Out of That Well the Flocks were Watered': Stories of Wells in Genesis" in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, p 194.

19 the *IB* assigns primacy to the Isaac story; Westermann disagrees, citing Gunkel: Genesis 26 is "interpolated into an already existing sequence [Genesis 12] as a self-contained literary composition" (p 423).

20 Hobgood-Oster, pp 187-199, looks more closely than most at this aspect of Genesis 26. But her claim that Isaac is a rich (dis)possessor of a common resource is not the inference I draw.

The story begins with a new famine (as in Genesis 12); but instead of heading west to the security of the Egyptian Nile, Isaac and Rebekah travel to Philistine land. There, for the first time in Isaac's story, God appears directly to him, both warning ("Do not go down to Egypt") and blessing him ("All the peoples of earth shall be blessed through your descendants"). The promise includes a gift of the land: but Isaac is shrewd enough not to mention this to his hosts!

Indigenous identity is here obscured in the text itself. Most scholars connect "Philistines" to the "Sea Peoples" of Egyptian history.²¹ This implies an anachronistic story where one invading people welcome another invader. Genesis 26 interweaves ancestor dreaming saga with political aetiologies in a complex narrative web.

Isaac's shrewdness also prompts the same subterfuge with his wife as Abraham and Sarah; but Isaac's love for Rebekah eventually erupts into public carress! Abimilech's noble response shows that this story is not simply anti-Philistine propaganda; his blessing of Isaac combines with God's blessing until Isaac's "hundredfold" increase makes him wealthier than his generous hosts. Prompted by his own people, Abimilech asks Isaac to leave their territory, and the patriarch honours the request. In "the valley of Gerar" where he sojourns (v. 17-18), the aquarian sequence begins.

First, Isaac honours his own ancestral tradition, restoring the wells dug by Abraham which had been stopped up by the nearby Philistine clan.

The blocking up of wells in v. 18 is generally interpreted as a sign of aggressive land claim by the Philistines.²² That may be correct, but Indigenous traditions suggest an alternative: when a significant person dies, the sacred places strongly associated with that person become taboo. The taboo is only lifted when the "proper" time has elapsed – or when the proper relative leads a cleansing ceremony to purge the place of its deathliness. I have witnessed such ceremonies personally. If Isaac was purging the sacred well his deceased father had initiated, then he was also asserting his "knowledge-power" as the rightful custodian of the place's sacredness. Having established his sacred link in the *raypirri* chain, Isaac could move on from dispute, showing respect for those who had honoured his father's death. Disputes about who owns the water rights, those who find and develop them, or those from whose land the underground aquifer flows (v. 18-20), continue to this day, including in Australia.

21 E.g. Anderson, G.W.: *The History and Religion of Israel*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, p 207).

22 Westermann, p 426.

Isaac's response is highly significant: he both claims (by naming) *and relinquishes* the watersource he has restored. It appears that restoring the flow of water is enough for Isaac; he does not need to "possess" what emerges as a blessing from JHWH. The well's name will commemorate the dispute (and thus become part of the local songline) and also show that the Naming Ancestor did not stay to police the treasure he had shared. In typical Biblical fashion, this significant action is reinforced by repetition: verse 21 also involves digging a well, contesting the claim, naming it (*Sitnah*, used only here in the Hebrew Scriptures), and moving on.

The sequence matters: blessing, discovery (of further blessings), conflict, naming, and journeying. A similar sequence marks scores of Aboriginal teaching and creation stories.²³ Seeing with Indigenous people helps us recognise this ancient songline for what it is – an ancestral shaping of landforms to enable human thriving.

As though to reinforce the point that this is Ancestor Dreaming, verse 22 specifically connects the Isaac songline with that of creation (Genesis 1.28) and the flood-rainbow re-creation (Genesis 9.1) – and in direct opposition to the urban hubris of the Babel tower (Genesis 11.4, 8). The name Rehoboth means "room to spread wide," so from the blessing of that well Isaac could fulfil God's creation call for humankind to "be fruitful across the face of the land." The ancestral wanderings have not finished spreading out: in 26.23-25 a final well not only provides a link between the God of the ancestors and the God of the primal waters beneath the soil; it also links natural resources and sacredness. In response to a second vision and promise from God, Isaac invokes the divine name, pitches a tent, builds an altar (*cf.* Exodus 25!), and *digs one final well*.

This becomes the water of reconciliation. Abimilech has drawn the appropriate conclusion from all Isaac's blessings and seeks a covenant of peace between them, since "You are clearly the blessed of the Lord" (26.29; *cf.* Proverbs 31.28?). The aquarian is also a peacemaker. He feasts them, hosts them, exchanges covenant vows, then sends them on their way "in peace."

Beersheba becomes a place of deep sacredness: divine (because it represents God's blessings), natural (a place of plentiful water), and social (an ancestor site to keep alive for all generations the covenant of peace). Its sacred connections bring to Beersheba a special human responsibility. Our role is to safeguard ancestral sacred sites, and severe consequences follow for those who fail (*cf.* Leviticus 26.27-39).

23 E.g. *The Speaking Land*, pp 15 – 70.

Once again Indigenous wisdom can heal our blindness to this sacred human task. Many stories describe the punishment for defiance of sacredness. Netta Loogatha from Bentinck Island tells that when a relative eventually capitulated to white entreaties and took money to allow photos of a sacred cave and its watersource, “my uncle got very sick” until “he died in Mt Isa. We heard that the two blokes that went with him died later, back in their own place.”²⁴

Isaac the victim in this story becomes Isaac the Blessed Ancestral Hero; establishing the sacredness of watersources, he serves as a teacher through the generations. We do well to learn from this ancient, deeply *earthed*, sacred wisdom.

Mining theology

Ancient wells are ancient news; yet the contemporary challenge of Isaac’s story for an ecotheological stance on traditional watersources shouts from Australian headlines. Indigenous custodians face threats to ancestral inheritance, and share common cause with pastoralists small and large. The current threat to traditional watersources and the wells, springs, and rivers they feed is the extraction of coal-seam gas by hydraulic fracture methods: *fracking*.²⁵

The mining of underground resources – like the discovery and digging of wells – has been practised for millennia, including by Indigenous peoples. The best Biblical description of this ancient activity, in the book of Job, describes mysterious *Hokmah*, “Wisdom,” who hides more effectively than any treasures found in mines (Job 28). The Hebrew Scriptures understood the connection between underground water and precious treasures. First

24 *Listen to our stories: An anthology of writing by Aboriginal and Islander women*; Darwin: Nungalinga College Inc (undated), p 23. It is significant that in this and other stories, the punishment for defiling sacredness is not reserved only for those who should know better: ‘ignorance is no excuse’ in sacred land.

25 E.g. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-30/gloucester-valley-prepares-for-coal-seam-gas-blockade/5705776>; <http://www.nlc.org.au/media-releases/article/nlc-fracking-submission-supports-traditional-owners-rights>; <http://northernriversonguardians.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/nt.pdf>; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-17/state-government-will-allow-buru-energy-to-frack-in-kimberley/5531112>; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-04/alan-jones-and-greens-co-founder-reunite-for-csg-fight/5644506>; <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/07/04/3538450.htm>; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-09-02/the-queensland-experience-of-csg/4928972>

For a personal (Anglican) encounter with this issue, cf. “In the face of ecological damage and social injustices, people of faith must affirm our love for this planet and its inhabitants which God loves and declared good”, Pamela Phillips, 17 March 2014. <http://www.anglicancg.org.au/articles.php/100/who-pays-the-price-for-new-gas-resources>

amongst the four original rivers sourced in the aquifer beneath the garden eastward of Eden was the Gihon,

... that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there (Genesis 2.11-12, *NRSV*).

The Hebrew Scriptures did not reject underground activities like mining. Mined gems and metals were incorporated into worship items to beautify the Covenant Ark in the wilderness and the sacred objects it included (Exodus 25–28, 35–36). Bridal adornments sourced from the earth feature in a number of Biblical texts.

Tempering this freedom to extract earth's bounty was the overriding claim that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24.1). In times when land-holding was recognised as stewardship under God's ownership (Leviticus 25.23) it followed as a necessary corollary that the good things of the earth came from God and were intended for sacred use. Even personal jewellery was read in symbolic ways (*cf.* Ezekiel 23).

A second strand of the Biblical approach to mining rests within the wider socioeconomic context – work in mines was both dreary and dangerous, commonly assigned to slaves captured in war or used as punishment for the rebellious.²⁶ Mines for tin, lead, and salt were notorious places where condemned labourers were not intended to survive. Spartacus was one famous exception to this classical death sentence. Such treatment of other human beings, including slaves, defied God's covenant:

... you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this (Deuteronomy 24.18; *cf.* 5.15, 15.15, 16.12, Leviticus 19.33).

26 E.g. Diodorus Siculus, "Forced labour in the mines" (in reference to Egypt): http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/law_and_order/diodorus.htm#3.12 See also <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/mining.htm> For Mesopotamia, *cf.* Asian and African Systems of Slavery, edited by James L. Watson (p 19): <http://books.google.com.au/books?id=f4DMk9-mI-J8C&pg=PA19&lpg=PA19&dq=mesopotamian+slave+mining&source=bl&ots=dXnlgEGC-6B&sig=tZRBzjKeDBoJa9lBnDs5LPBQonQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=ghwBVNaAGsadugSagIG-oDw&ved=0CEUQ6AEwBzgK#v=onepage&q=mesopotamian%20slave%20mining&f=false> From Roman times, see: <http://www.ancient.eu/article/629/> or <http://www.mpumc.org/uploads/file/Prisons%20in%20Paul.pdf>; or this:

A sentence to the mines was deemed capital punishment, because just one in ten had a chance of survival, and unlike decapitation, it was a slow, agonizing journey to martyrdom. So terrible was such a sentence that many decided they would prefer being torn to pieces by animals in the amphitheater. <http://www.christianhistoryproject.org/to-the-constantine-era/diocletian/roman-slavery/>

In other words, whilst mining was a permitted activity within both the Torah and the more restrictive Holiness Code, it was clearly not a “free market” activity designed to profit some at the expense of others. When used that way (by rulers) it constituted evidence of the assimilation practices condemned by the Hebrew prophets.

Indeed, the pervasive Biblical phrase “polluting the land” may not be only metaphorical: activities that resulted in defilement of soil and waters were condemned in the strongest terms as idolatry against the Creator.²⁷ It is worth noting that Hebrew customary law included regulations against trade industries that spread pollutant particles, chemicals, and even excessive noise within communities.²⁸ Mining was one such regulated trade.

As the Isaac saga reveals, the digging and maintenance of wells was seen as such an important activity in sustaining the life of humans and animals that it was woven into the ancestral stories by which successive generations learnt God’s will for earth. This closely matches the pattern in Australian Aboriginal cultures, where ancestral beings shaped the earth – including the treasures beneath the ground – as part of God’s creation. For them too the re-telling of ancestral stories is part of the process by which creation is sustained to enrich, rather than be despoiled by, the human inhabitants who share kinship with all other living creatures.

It is hard not to draw a disturbingly direct lesson from the culmination of the Isaac watersources saga. Beersheba becomes the sacred site of an enduring covenant between Isaac *and his descendants* and the descendants of the *Philistines* – whose cognate contemporary name is “Palestinians.”

What does it tell us, we who claim to honour the Scriptures, that in the most recent violence between Israelis *and Palestinians* that water-treatment systems across Gaza, *including wells*, were successfully destroyed by Israeli missile strikes?²⁹ The lessons of Beersheba do not always survive.

27 Habel, Norman C., *The Land is Mine: Six Land Ideologies*; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995. Cf. especially “Land as יְהוָה’s Personal *nahalah*: A Prophetic Ideology”, pp 75-96.

28 Cited in Zuesse, Evan M., “Ecology, Biodiversity and the Jewish Tradition” (p 89) in *Biodiversity & Ecology: An Interdisciplinary Challenge*; Edwards, Denis, and Worthing, Mark, ed.; Adelaide, ATF Press, 2004

29 Cf. “The Palestinian Water Authority said ... in a statement that 11 water wells had been completely destroyed and 15 partially destroyed in the assault, while 17 kilometers of water supply networks were completely destroyed and another 29 partially destroyed.” <http://www.juancole.com/2014/08/thirsty-destroyed-knocked.html>; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-30/gaza-conflict-the-costliest-battle-in-more-than-a/5636618>; <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-07-29/gaza-only-power-plant-attacked-as-israel-steps-up-offensive/5633718>; http://www.blacklistednews.com/Israel_airstrike_bombs_major_water_line%2C_sewage_station_and_water_wells_in_Gaza/36574/0/38/38/Y/M.html

Aquifers under threat

Another kind of threat is involved in Australia; yet here as well it involves human blindness to Indigenous sacredness, and threatens a resource older than we can even imagine, and serves as a source of bitter dispute.

The Anglican Church (like other churches in Australia) has already spoken out about the issue of shale gas extraction by means of hydraulic fracturing.³⁰ It has pointed to the need for the use of the “precautionary principle” in application of this relatively new technology. That implies that fracking should not proceed until it is proven to pose no adverse effect on the environment, either at present or into the future. We are not yet close to such proof. To the contrary, studies in Canada and the USA have already established connections between fracking and groundwater contamination.³¹ These studies have focused on chemical pollution of drinking water; there is little work to date on the long-term implications of geomorphological disruptions to deep aquifer systems. Yet given both the fragility and value of deep groundwater sources, including their potential contamination by seawater dredging, unhygienic testing processes, and lack of cross-disciplinary communication in mining processes,³² it is not surprising that the authors of one widely-cited paper conclude that:

- 30 Issues and Questions for the 2013 Federal Election Process from the Public Affairs Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia: “Will you refuse to accept short term economic benefits with serious risks from coal seam gas extraction, instead applying the precautionary principle and ensuring that independent scientific evidence will guide more informed decisions?” (p 3); and “It is vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the ability to protect their important heritage areas and objects and to protect their ability to access and use their traditional lands and waters.” (p 9) Cf. also pp 12-16; <http://www.anglican.org.au/governance/commissions/Documents/public-affairs/Issues%20and%20Questions%20for%20the%202013%20Federal%20Election%20Process.pdf>; and: [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/\(Evidence+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/5394065570C033DE48257C3F002A9B6A/\\$file/ev.fra.130920.sub.066.anglican+ecocare+commission.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/(Evidence+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/5394065570C033DE48257C3F002A9B6A/$file/ev.fra.130920.sub.066.anglican+ecocare+commission.pdf)
- 31 In the report released today, the EPA said that pollution from 33 abandoned oil and gas waste ... pits could not be blamed for contamination detected in the water monitoring wells 1,000 feet underground. That contamination, the agency concluded, had to have been caused by fracking. <http://www.publicherald.org/archives/14777/investigative-reports/energy-investigations/fracking-energy-investigations/>; and “Increased stray gas abundance in a subset of drinking water wells near Marcellus shale gas extraction” by Robert B. Jacksona, Avner Ven-gosha, Thomas H. Darraha, Nathaniel R. Warnera, Adrian Downa, Robert J. Poredac, Stephen G. Osborn, Kaiguang Zhaoa, and Jonathan D. Karra, Edited by Susan E. Trumbore, Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, Jena, Germany, and approved June 3, 2013 (received for review December 17, 2012); and <http://energypolicyforum.org/2013/01/04/canadian-government-confirms-contamination-of-groundwater-from-hydraulic-fracturing/> Canadian Government Confirms Contamination of Groundwater From Hydraulic Fracturing
- 32 “Aquifers and hyporheic zones: Towards an ecological understanding of groundwater” by Peter J. Hancock, Andrew J. Boulton, William F. Humphreys Received: 18 March 2004 / Accepted: 22 November 2004; Published online: 25 February 2005; Springer-Verlag 2005 [Hydrogeol

For groundwater use to be sustainable, it must be supported by relevant, high-quality research that addresses water resource needs and answers critical questions about the factors that control water quality as well as volume. This will require constant liaison among managers, hydrogeologists, and ecologists to identify and fill existing knowledge gaps.³³

As this article demonstrates, a significant “knowledge gap” is our inability to recognise the relevant wisdom of this continent’s First Peoples, and the complex governance systems they have used to sustain earth’s resources far longer than any other cultures.³⁴ It is therefore interesting to note that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the United States, when conducting testing on contaminated water in the state of Wyoming, included in their consultations the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes to identify the source and extent of impacts on domestic well water quality.³⁵

The USA joins Canada and other colonising nations in acknowledging the value of First Peoples’ insights into the land and its resources, including deep water reservoirs. This respectful direction has thus far been almost universally ignored within Australia.

The case against our current rush to cover the land with fracking wells seems a strong one on both scientific and social-governance grounds. The alienation of agricultural land, the export of finite resources away from Australia (along with the profits), the risks of aquifer contamination by untested introduced chemicals that remain “commercial in confidence,” and the potential to expand the gap between those enriched by resource exploitation and those impoverished as a result – all of these points reinforce the wisdom of invoking the precautionary principle and pausing our pursuit while we still can. But there is another case to be made, a theological warning embedded within the Christian tradition, its Biblical sources, and the parallel stories of Indigenous people: wells are sacred. They are holy sites deeply connected to human identity and the wellbeing of God’s creatures.

J (2005) 13:98–111]

33 Hancock, et.al., p 108

34 E.g. Trudgeon, Richard: *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die: Towards an Understanding of Why the Aboriginal People of Arnhem Land Face the Greatest Crisis in Health and Education Since European Contact- Djambatj Mala*; Darwin: Aboriginal Resource & Development Services Inc, 2000

35 <http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/20ed1dfa1751192c8525735900400c30/dc7dcdb-471dcfe1785257b90007377bf!OpenDocument> (EPA Press Release, 20 June 2013)

Care for aquifers, honouring ancestors, honouring God

Preservation of watersources is not an option for those who take the divine seriously, much less an opportunity for exploitation, enrichment, and alienation. It is our responsibility as those who believe in God as the Creator of all things through Jesus Christ. The story of Isaac helps us in two ways:

1. It makes clear that the Judaeo-Christian tradition of caring for the land on which we are “only strangers invited as stewards” (*gerim wa toshavim*, Leviticus 25.23) applies equally to the treasures God has created *beneath* the land.
2. It challenges us to listen to the Isaac-stories of *this* place – the sacred songlines of Aboriginal Australia – and with them help move beyond the “gaze which obscures” into a genuine partnership of knowledge and due diligence as we build a sustainable future together.

A familiar New Testament text becomes more apposite than ever when we consider the implications of defiling waters inherited through unimaginable stretches of generations. We are witnesses to the “groaning of creation” (Romans 8) as it waits for its redemption. We can act in ways that add to the groaning, or choose ways that preserve what God has given until all is made new. Recognising that God sustains and saves all creation, and appoints people as stewards, we can honour God only if we act with care and respect not only for other people but for all the earth ... At very least we should approach this responsibility with humility and respect. Where we lack certainty we should not only invoke the precautionary principle, but also be honest about any assumptions that underline the “management” actions we may take.³⁶

The story of the Hebrew Exile in Babylon is a story about abuse of land (2 Chronicles 36). In the midst of that tragedy, a people forced from their ancestral home received *in a place not their own* this counsel from Jeremiah:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce ... multiply there and do not decrease. But seek the wellbeing (*shalom*) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf: for in its wellbeing you will find your own (Jeremiah 29.5-7).

I believe that is also a message for the Second Peoples of Australia. We will find no *shalom* in this place until we learn to walk it humbly and hear from

36 Green By Grace: A Report Prepared for the [Anglican] General Synod 2004 (pdf), p 5.

First Nations people the ancient stories of its *shalom*, for the surface land we share, and the deep waters of life below they know as sacred still. A “gaze which obscures” creation’s First Peoples will also be blind to creation itself.

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Sustainability in Australian agriculture

Geoffrey D Leslie

The place of agriculture on our planet deserves theological reflection because of its effect on the earth, its difficulty and yet its necessity. Particularly in Australian conditions, farming struggles to be profitable and sustainable. Isaiah 28.23-26 suggests that mastery of the many skills and variables required for farming requires sensitivity to God's proper order of things, including soil management, plants and planting, climate and context. Australian farmers continue to search for greater understanding of their vocation. The rural church can contribute to sustainability by incarnational presence, by exploring a theology of agriculture and land, by liturgical practices and prayers.

Human occupation of our beautiful planet depends on agriculture, yet today only a small percentage of people in Australia have much connection with agricultural life. So great is the distancing that some people seem to hold farmers in contempt because their work modifies the environment which they enjoy more when it is in a natural state, unaffected by human use. Yet we cannot survive without agricultural produce, and we cannot produce food without modifying the earth. Without destructive practices such as clearing, ploughing, pruning, creating channels and banks, and so on, we will not be able to produce food. Without butchering, we will not obtain meat products. Similarly, paper, timber and mineral products require us to manhandle the earth drastically. For most people, a visit to an abattoir or a logged forest is a shock, inducing feelings of sorrow and protest, but for most of the time we are removed from the process; we delegate the destruction and enjoy the final products more or less thoughtlessly.

As Wendell Berry has said, “To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. The point is, when we do this knowingly, lovingly, skilfully, reverently, it is a sacrament; when we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration ... In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.”¹

Any spirituality of the earth must have a place for agriculture, and as Berry suggests, propose ways in which human impact can maintain some reverence, skill and love rather than heartless desecration.

In a study of the beliefs of Australian farmers, particularly during a time of severe drought, I sought to identify the issues that they confront as they seek to make a living and produce food.² Their suffering was immense; many desperate farmers left the industry in defeat. I found that effective, sustainable farming requires a supportive social context that nurtures families. It needs an economic system that rewards the effort and expenditure proportionately, and it demands a wise and sensitive understanding of the land.

When Europeans arrived in Australia, there was a system of land management being practised which was apparently effective and sustainable. Bill Gammage has proposed that all of Australia was carefully managed for productivity by Aboriginal Australians, keeping forests at bay and maximising the desired plants and animals by the judicious use of fire.³ He adduces evidence of a wide range of agricultural activities such as clearing, planting, crop selection, harvesting, storing, irrigating, grinding and processing which were never acknowledged by the first observers to be agricultural because they did not produce a sedentary lifestyle – they were not farmers as we use the term.⁴ The Aboriginal land management system was dramatically replaced in most parts of Australia by a European farming system. The two systems were completely incompatible. In a short time, the fire regimes changed, the vegetation changed, the hydrology and soil structure changed and the European settlers sought ways to make a living in this new place with their imported plants, animals and methods. The variability of climate, the infertility of soils, and general ignorance of the conditions have led to the failure of many farms over the century or two we have been farming, and many families walk off with nothing. The administrators of the colonies strove to encourage small

- 1 Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1981), 281.
- 2 Geoffrey D Leslie, *Australian Farmers and Their Beliefs: What make for Sustainability?* (Thesis submitted to the Australian College of Theology, MST, Melbourne, 2014)
- 3 Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011).
- 4 *Ibid.* Notably chapter 10, “Farms Without Fences”.

farms with yeoman families supported by bustling villages, but many times such attempts at closer settlement quickly failed.⁵ Empty farmhouses dot the landscape, empty shops blight the declining towns and churches are converted into accommodation as testimony to the struggle encountered as we seek to farm this land.

Isaiah 28.23-29 is an interesting passage of Scripture that reveals some truths about successful agriculture. In the first stanza of this two-stanza poetic speech, the prophet asks some questions the answers to which are considered obvious:

Listen, and hear my voice;
 pay attention, and hear my speech.
 Do those who plough for sowing plough continually?
 Do they continually open and harrow their ground?
 When they have levelled its surface,
 do they not scatter dill, sow cummin,
 and plant wheat in rows
 and barley in its proper place,
 and spelt at the border?
 For they are well instructed [“instructed in judgement” (*mishpat*)];
 their God teaches them. (NRSV)

This text is in a Wisdom-style, pointing to the learnings from nature and experience that farmers employ. It proposes that agricultural “success” (the word is a possible translation of *tushiyyah* in v. 29⁶) is based not so much on covenantal obedience as from learning the *mishpat* of the place in which they farm (v. 26). *Mishpat* seems striking here because it is not a word readily connected with agriculture; most often it is used in a juridical context, whether divine or civil law. However, there is a recognised non-juridical use with which this sits more comfortably.⁷ It denotes the proper order of things,

5 See Graeme Davison, “Rural Sustainability in Historical Perspective,” in *Sustainability And Change In Rural Australia*, ed. Chris Cocklin and Jacqui Dibden (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2005); Marilyn Lake, *The Limits of Hope: Soldier Settlement in Victoria, 1915-38* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987). The disheartening story of soldier settlement schemes is only one of many; they began when the selectors were encouraged to move onto smaller acreages on the vast runs of the squatters. We still don’t know the best size of a farm in many places as small farms continue to amalgamate.

6 John Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, Revised, vol. 24, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Electronic division, 2005) translates v.29, ‘Also this is from YHWH of hosts, from whom goes out wonderful strategy, excellent success.’

7 Similar non-juridical use in Gen. 40:13; Ex. 26:30; Jud. 13:12; 18:7; 1Ki. 18:28; 2Ki. 17:26f; Jer. 8:7; Eccl. 8:6

a right pattern or habitual practice.⁸ So translators here use phrases like “God teaches him the principles of agriculture” (NET Bible), “the right way” (NCV), “the prescription” (Lexham Bible), “discretion” (KJV). God teaches canny farmers the principles of agriculture, but such teaching, I assume, must be indirect, through experience individual and accumulated, through research and expertise.

The *mishpat* of any particular farm, as this text suggests, gives attention to the soil and the appropriate amount of preparation of the soil. Over-ploughing will reduce the soil to fine dust and destroy its tilth, or friability – to use some of the words farmers use to describe soil that is soft and loose and ready for planting.

Also this passage discusses a selection of plants: dill, cummin, wheat, barley and spelt, of which two are herbs and three are more staple cereal grains. The text draws attention to different methods of planting – “scattering” for the light seeds and “planting” or “placing” for the heavier seeds. There is also a distinction drawn between the location and arrangement of various seeds, some in rows and some at the borders of the land. These nuances are clearly part of the *mishpat*, the proper order of the agricultural process.

In a covenantal spirituality of agriculture such as we find in Deuteronomy, rain, fertility and productivity are given by God as a reward for faithfulness and obedience. By contrast, in the Wisdom discussions of agriculture such as are sprinkled through the book of Proverbs, God grants success by allowing farmers to learn what is appropriate for their farm. This Isaiah text supports that mood: there is a *mishpat* of climate and place; there are proper ways to treat the soil, select the crops and plant them. The passage goes on to describe the appropriate methods of threshing and processing the food (vv. 27-29).

While this text comes from a particular context in Isaiah and is probably intended as a metaphor of how God treats Israel – proportionately and avoiding total destruction – it bears many resonances to Australian farmers’ experience.

In my interviews with irrigation farmers in Northern Victoria and Southern New South Wales at the end of the worst drought they had ever known (2002–2009), none felt that the drought was a judgement of God which could be overcome by more intense prayer or repentance. Instead they recognised that there are cycles in Australia’s variable climate and that droughts will end and recur. In the Hebrew Bible, the drought in Elijah’s time is not like this – it is definitely declared to be a punishment from God and the object of Elijah’s prayers and pronouncements. Similar understandings of drought are

8 Willem Beuken, *Isaiah: Isaiah Chapters 28-39* HTOC (Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2000), 61.

assumed in Jeremiah 14, in Hosea 2 and Amos 4, and in the curses of Deuteronomy. There are however, significant droughts in the Bible that have no moral cause and no hint of human responsibility; they just “happen.” Joseph’s 7 years of drought, or Naomi and Ruth’s experience of famine are not depicted as judgments. Psalm 104 considers times of natural adversity to be part of the complexity and variety of life:

All of them [the creatures of land and sea] look to you
to provide their food in due time.
You give to them, and they gather it up;
you open your hand, and they are well satisfied.
You hide your face, and they are terrified.
You take away their breath
And they expire and return to their dust.
You send back your breath, and they are re-created.
You renew the face of the earth.⁹

There is no reason given for the cycle. There is no explanation of why God sometimes grants abundance and at other times “you hide your face.” But it is a recognised cycle which humans must accept. There is here almost a certainty that there will be times of extinction, there will be times when the seasons are adverse, when nature is miserly and creatures die.

In my interviews the farmers tell of the pain they felt at seeing their own stock starve, their crops fail and the paddocks bare in the terrifying drought years. They are also aware of the pain of the forest dying and of the fish gasping in muddy waterholes, of wetlands drying out leaving no frogs or insects. There were few mosquitoes in the drought years, few spiders in the garden, fewer moths, butterflies, lizards. When the floods came in 2010 and 2011, spiders strung webs everywhere, frogs croaked, wildflowers emerged. It was an extraordinary year for dragonflies and butterflies. God sent back God’s breath and the face of the earth was renewed. Some translators of course will want to see “spirit” instead of “breath” in verse 30, if not “Spirit,” and it was indeed as if the Spirit of God surged through every green stem and brought a long-missed Spring-time.

This psalm does not suggest that there will be immunity for some from nature’s difficult times; there is no mention of special piety or practice that might mitigate the times when God’s attention and care is withdrawn. The promise is only that afterwards there will be renewal. Just as in the geological and prehistorical times of mass extinction, life resumed and in time flour-

ished once again, just as in the Flood account of Genesis where there is mass extinction save for a few yet the earth sponsors a new abundance, so in our times, there will be droughts and the rivers will dry and the forests suffer and many creatures will return to dust, but God's Breath will return and so will life. Notices of the death of the Murray River, which was blamed on agriculture, were premature. After merely one wet year (2010), the wetlands were full of croaking frogs and foraging egrets while drought-deciduous trees put on new leaves and provided nesting sites for vast flocks of wood-swallows and corellas.

Some of the farmers I interviewed were crop farmers and just as the farmers in Isaiah 28 moderate the destructive practice of ploughing, the contemporary Australian cropper has mostly given up ploughing altogether and has begun to practice no-till cropping.

The Aboriginal practice of burning left the soil ashy and porous, very water-absorbent. Major Thomas Mitchell, the early explorer complained that the hooves and wheels of his horse-drawn wagons kept sinking in the soft soil.¹⁰ The arrival of hard-hooved animals, plus the draining of swamps and wetlands quickly changed the nature of the soil surface. Ploughing was practised in all kinds of ecosystems, removing all native plants so they could be replaced with crop plants. In the Mallee districts, wind erosion blew half the soil away in mighty red dust storms especially in the 1940s on the Eastern coasts. Ploughing is the main method of weed control in traditional European-style farming. After harvest, the stubble was burnt and the paddock was turned to fallow by ploughing. Summer rain would turn the fallow green and the weeds would be ploughed in before sowing could commence. It was not necessarily good for the soil:

“Whenever it rained you'd go out and work it up again, get it a bit finer, to make a seed bed, and kill summer weeds ... You'd end up with a soil that was really fine, especially if you did a lot when it was fairly dry. It was like bloody talcum powder. And then it'd set like a brick. Next year, when you burnt the stubble and ploughed the paddock up, the soil would just come up like rocks. Then you'd have to hammer them even harder to break them down and make them fine. You'd end up with this really hard soil, terrible stuff.”¹¹

- 10 Paul Haw and Margaret Munro, *Footprints across the Loddon plain: A shared history* (Boort, Vic: Boort Development Incorporated, 2010), 161. Gammage, *The Biggest Estate*, 101 outlines 5 major changes induced in the landscape by Europeans, the first being that 'compacted soil and speeding water have constricted water sources and the foods they nourished'.
- 11 Garth Strong, farmer in the Birrego district of NSW; http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/the_paddock/jul_2013 accessed 18/12/13

Many of my interviewees took great satisfaction in the move away from ploughing of this type to the no-till practice, in which the stubbles are left after harvest and instead of ploughing to kill the weeds, the paddocks are sprayed with chemical herbicides. More powerful tractors of recent years are then quite capable of sowing seed directly into the thick accumulated plant residue. This method is believed to be far superior for soil health because the soil retains its structure, and the worms and insects that break down the plant material contribute to a healthy ecosystem.

The practice is not without problems – the sheer quantity of herbicide can be a worry – but it uses much less fuel, reduces wind erosion and does less damage to the soil structure. Many other types of improved soil preparation and paddock care are being developed such as cell grazing, controlled traffic farming, and the so-called “natural farming system.” Any attempt to nurture the soil based on increased understanding of the ecosystem can only be for the good.

The rural church can play an important role in sustaining the farming community. Historical divisions and declining memberships present obstacles which should not be allowed to stop the church in whatever shape it is seeking significant ways to support the agrarian community.

Firstly, they need to develop an incarnational presence, breaking out of their set paths to provide genuine contact and compassionate care for the hurting. In the great drought times, and subsequently in the floods, the church of which I was a part became a trusted conduit for relief money and programs because we had extensive community connections. It is a wonderful privilege to be able to dispense material support, knocking on farmers’ doors with money, goods or invitations. At the same time, the farming sector is one that tends to resent being an object for charity and we sought more discreet ways to help, such as funding training courses, organising community events and providing resources and information. Even a small group can contribute to social cohesion and strength.

Secondly, the church will benefit the farmers if it explores agriculture and land in the Bible as part of its curriculum. A well thought-out theology of farming will help farmers understand their vocation and make good decisions. In addition to the Isaiah and Psalm texts discussed above, the early chapters of Genesis provide many insights. Older, unhelpful interpretations of the language of subduing and having dominion over the earth in Genesis 1.28 need to be re-examined in the light of contemporary discussions.¹² The

12 Ever modern commentary on Genesis will provide insight into these texts in light of contemporary issues, but I particularly recommend the chapters devoted to the passage in Ellen F

ecological implications of Genesis 2 are also helpful: the connection between *‘adam* and *‘adamah*, the meaning of the words *‘abad* and *shamar* in 2.15, and the relationships between *‘adam* and all else are particularly insightful. This chapter shows more interest in the commonality of humanity with the rest of creation, sharing a common breath and a common rooting in soil, as compared to the previous chapter where a distinction from the rest of creation is made by giving humanity a unique role as dominus. As all contemporary discussions note, this latter role is bound to a sense of stewardship, tenancy and entrustment; the land is God’s and remains so.

There is also in the biblical writings a recognition that sometimes the relationship between God, humanity and the earth could be described as symbiosis. Billingham has developed this concept in her discussion of Jeremiah 4.23-28.¹³ She discerns that each has a voice, each has a point of view and each needs to listen to the other. Churches often talk about hearing God’s voice and seeing from God’s point of view, but it would be good to acknowledge the land has a voice, and too often it is a groaning.¹⁴ Learning the *mishpat* of the land, the soil, the ecology and seeking to work with it sometimes contrasts with what has been called *productivist* agriculture, which subordinates every other concern to the focus on production. Farmers with this mindset are impatient with the nuances, subtleties and variables of each place, seeking instead to create uniformity, planing the soil flat, totally managing its structure and content, artificially supplying its water and nutrients. Writers like Wendell Berry deplore this attitude, predicting grim consequences for earth.¹⁵

Over the centuries, agriculture has been encouraged to maintain a proper attitude to its task by religious rites and ceremonies. All the Israelite feasts, in

Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture an Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and William P Brown, *The Seven Pillars of Creation: The Bible, Science, and the Ecology of Wonder* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

- 13 Valerie M. Billingham, “The Earth Mourns/Dries up in Jeremiah 4:23-28: A Literary Analysis Viewed through the Heuristic Lens of an Ecologically Oriented Symbiotic Relationship” (PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009).
- 14 The ‘groaning of creation’, Romans 8:22 Cf. the prayer of Basil the Great, *We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of humankind with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realise that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for thee, and that they love the sweetness of life.* Cited in Davis, *Scripture, Culture, Agriculture*, 47. Reading the text from the point of view of earth is the special interest of *The Earth Bible* project. See for example, Norman C Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1-11* Earth Bible Vol.1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011).
- 15 Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*; Wendell Berry, *What Are People for?: Essays* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010). These two books, 30 years apart are representative of his many writings advocating this point.

addition to their connection to salvation history, also connect with part of the agricultural year: Passover and Unleavened Bread are observed with the first cut of the barley harvest, and Weeks or Pentecost celebrates the conclusion of harvest 7 weeks later; Tabernacles is also known as the Feast of Ingathering when all the agricultural produce for the year has been ingathered, equivalent to a Harvest Thanksgiving. It would be helpful for both church participants and farmers if some of the not-so-ancient practices of the church could be re-invigorated such as Harvest Thanksgiving, and Rogation. Perhaps the Season of Creation as advocated by Norman Habel would be a worthy inclusion in the church year.¹⁶

The rural church also needs to explore the question of prayer, because although drought and other natural adverse conditions prompt much of it, the nature, purpose and spirit of prayer remains mysterious to many. During the drought, I conducted anonymous surveys of church-attending farmers exploring what they expected and desired from church during this time. Every respondent thought it was important that the church prayed for rain on behalf of the community. The two highest-rating responses came to the statements: "It is up to us to ask and up to God whether it is granted," and "Praying about hardship is worthwhile even though I don't get the answer I want."

My own understanding of prayer deepened immensely during this time, and together the community came to explore the meaning of *unanswered* prayer. We came to the conclusions that prayer for rain may not produce rain, but the act of prayer – lament, confession, petition, thanksgiving – may show us God's activity in surprising ways and may call for a different approach to the problem. If God should solve the farmers' problem by sending rain, it would simply restore the status quo and allow everyone to continue in the same direction as previously. When this does not happen, when painful change is not relieved, then the people who pray need to look for other ways and responses that God might be opening up to explore with courage. Perhaps God wants the church to get out of its walls? Perhaps God wants the church to minister with compassion to the hurting community? And so it proved to be. Unanswered prayer was "an invitation to adventure" as I dubbed it in my preaching. Our prayers to end the drought became instead prayers to drive us to support the community in some creative and fresh ways.

In conclusion, farming is indispensable in human life yet its continuance is a painful struggle in many times and places. Isaiah depicts success in farming as being the result of God teaching farmers the *mishpat*, the proper order, the

16 <http://seasonofcreation.com> has suggested readings, studies and liturgies for the 4 weeks leading up to the Feast of St Francis.

patterns and laws of the farm and its elements. There is a *mishpat* of the soil, of the plants, the preparation of the soil and the planting of the plants. There is a *mishpat* of the climate, of drought and rain, rivers and seasons. There is a proper way to process food for human nourishment. Churches in rural areas can support farming by celebrating and exploring our human connections with the land. This may include advocating for farmers, or encouraging alternative economies such as Farmers' markets and farm-gate trading. The church can provide and boost the social support that agriculture needs, caring for farm families and enriching the cultural and spiritual life of the community. Pastoral care and prayer can be crucial during times of natural adversity.

At its heart, agriculture is a spiritual pursuit. One battle-weary farmer described to me the transformation he observed when land that was bare, hard and dry bursts with a new green crop: "They say 'watching grass grow' is boring – and it may be if you sat there and watched – but you go and plant a crop, and it comes up a week or two later, and you drive by and go 'Wow! Look at that!' It's not boring to me, it's, I dunno, it's spiritual."

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Submission guidelines

Contributions are invited for the second issue of *Journal of Ecotheology*, scheduled for publication in October 2015. Papers should generally be in the area of environmental theology, including: systematic theology, Christian spirituality, ecclesiology, Biblical studies, Church history or Christian ethics. Articles with a distinctly Australian orientation and which engage with contemporary environmental issues are desirable. The editorial committee is happy to review abstracts and comment on whether or not a proposed paper falls within the scope of the publication.

We aim for a journal that combines academic rigour with contemporary relevance and accessibility. Of its nature the *Journal of Ecotheology* is interdisciplinary, and we welcome contributions from all theological traditions. We also welcome contributions from emerging as well as established scholars.

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Papers should be no more than 5,000 words excluding references, and forwarded in MS Word (.doc, .docx or .rtf) or Open Document Format (e.g., Libre Office .odt) without embedded field codes to the Anglican EcoCare Project Officer, Ms Claire Barrett-Lennard (ecocare@perth.anglican.org).

Papers should follow the referencing guidelines in the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition (footnotes) with an accompanying reference list. This may be referred to online at www.chicagomanualofstyle.org. Spelling should follow Australian conventions, and Biblical references and abbreviations should follow the Society of Biblical Literature *Handbook of Style*. If you use citation software such as Endnote or Zotero, please ensure *op. cit.* is not used and ensure all citation fields are converted to plain text before submission. Please format your document with double spacing using Arial 12 (body text) and single spacing using Arial 10 (footnotes). All papers must include an abstract

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