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The Ecological Predicament: A Crisis of Spirit

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Between 1975 and 1993, my wife and I lived in Pasadena, California. Only two miles from the San Gabriel Mountain Range, there were days we could not see the mountains. The smog in Greater Los Angeles was ruining health, comfort, and beauty.¹

This paper, written from the perspective of a Christian response to the ecological crisis, addresses the proposition that the ecological predicament cannot be met simply by arguments based on reason. Rather, a Spirit-based perspective is urgently required.²

More than Reasonable Arguments Needed

Prophetic voices addressing the ecological crisis clearly have their place.³ Particularly since the 1970s, many such voices have arisen.⁴ Six representative ones are given in Appendix A entitled, “Six Prophetic Voices about the Ecological Crisis”.

¹ G. H. Stassen and D. P. Gushee, “Care of the Creation”, in *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 445.

² *Ibid.*, 435-440. Stassen and Gushee identify three ethical approaches for an ethic of creation care: (1) anthropocentric approaches which place humans at the centre of concern; (2) biocentric approaches which give no special status to human beings, considering them just one species among others on earth; and (3) theocentric approaches which reject the anthropocentric utilitarian and “wise management” approaches in which only humans have intrinsic worth, as well as the radical egalitarianism of the various biocentric approaches. There have been a few attempts to form Christian versions of biocentric ethics such as those by Matthew Fox and Thomas Berry .

³ Denis Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, in *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 100.

⁴ Stassen and Gushee, “Care of the Creation”, 428. In 1971, Francis Schaeffer published *Pollution and the Death of Man* and Eric Rust published *Nature – Garden or Desert*. In 1972, Henlee Barnette published *The Church and the Ecological Crisis*. Many denominations now have environmental offices. Presbyterian social ethicist, Dieter Hessel, edits *The Egg: An Eco-Justice Quarterly*. Target Earth International focuses on serving the earth and the poor. Their website is <www.targetearth.org> (accessed 30 October 2010).

While such outcries faithfully present the scope and intensity of the ecological crisis,⁵ far more, however, is required in order to change priorities and lifestyles.⁶ Urgently needed is a different ethos⁷ – an *ecological conversion* bringing about a new way of thinking, seeing, and acting.⁸ This involves a change of heart, mind, and action.⁹ Six pressing needs for addressing the ecological crisis are presented as follows.

Needed: A Radical Change of Heart

So many aspects and ethical norms of Western humanist and religious culture are anthropocentric (man at centre) where humans are understood as totally different from everything else in creation.¹⁰ Alone endowed with spirit, humans are perceived as superior to the rest of creation, which is viewed as being without any sacred dimension – simply matter and not valued.¹¹ Such an anthropocentric world-view inevitably leads to domination of nature, and is proving incapable of meeting the challenges which the Earth community now faces.¹²

For this reason, humans must broaden their perspective to encompass all of creation – and to see themselves within the larger context of the Earth, which is an integral community of all living and nonliving components.¹³ This involves developing, as Edwards writes, “an authentic personal love for other creatures in all their specificity, a fully human feeling for

⁵ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 108.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Sean McDonagh, “Eco-Centered Ethic and Christian Hope”, in *Passion for the Earth* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 125, 134.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹² *Ibid.*, 128, 134.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 134; Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 100.

them and celebration of them in God.”¹⁴ Such a change, or conversion, to a loving stance before the rest of creation is the fruit of the Spirit of love at work in individuals.”¹⁵

In short, ecojustice calls for a radical change of heart in the way humans relate to Earth.¹⁶

The posture of humans toward the rest of creation must change so that humans relate in a fully personal way to not only other humans, but also to other creatures of God.¹⁷

Ultimately, this is a work of the Spirit of God, and will fulfil the words of the Prophet Ezekiel: “I will give you *a new heart and put a new spirit in you*; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh [emphasis mine].”¹⁸ Such a dramatic shift in perspective, involving a loving respect for all of God’s creatures and creation, would provide the needed basis for an authentically ecological ethos and praxis.¹⁹

Needed: A Vision of Trinitarian Communion

The Sacred Word affirms the presence and indwelling of God both in humanity and in the rest of creation.²⁰ This is the immanence of God in all reality.²¹ The Divine presence is perhaps best explained in terms of *panentheism*. It asserts that while God is present in all reality, and all reality is in God, God also transcends the world.²² Such a vision of God in all creation, and all creation in God, is needed in order to re-sanctify all of nature.²³

¹⁴ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 101.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶ Norman C. Habel, “The Challenge of Ecojustice Readings for Christian Theology”, *Pacifica* 13:2 (June 2000): 141.

¹⁷ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 100.

¹⁸ Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1630, 1582. Ezekiel 11:19 states: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”

¹⁹ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 101, 109.

²⁰ McDonagh, “Eco-Centered Ethic and Christian Hope”, 130. In the words of the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God”. *NIV Study Bible*, 1022. Psalm 19:1 declares that “the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

²² *Ibid.*, 134.

²³ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, from a faith perspective, Edwards writes that:

[O]ur communion with each other in Christ is always a sharing in and a tasting of the divine communion of the Trinity, in which all things will be transfigured and find their eternal meaning and their true home. This Trinitarian communion which we share is the source of all life on Earth . . . and, in ways that are beyond our imagination and comprehension, it is what will be the fulfilment of all the creatures of our planet, and all the wonders of our universe . . . the fulfilment of all things taken up into the divine life of the Trinity.²⁴

Through the experience of Trinitarian communion, one begins to apprehend the universe as one of communion and connectedness.²⁵ In other words, the other creatures of Earth are seen as kin, as radically interconnected in one Earth community of life before God.²⁶ This leads to being caught up into, or participating in, God's love for all life-forms and creatures in our planetary community.²⁷ Such genuine compassion for all life on Earth is needed for developing an authentic ecological ethos.

Needed: A Sacramental *and* Covenantal Ecotheology

A *sacramental tradition* starts with the cosmic community as a living whole, not only the human community.²⁸ God is seen not only as standing above and beyond this cosmic body, but also immanent within it.²⁹

²⁴ Edwards, "Worship and Practice", 105.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.; Habel, "The Challenge of Ecojustice Readings", 131-132. Habel states that "the ecological paradigm of reality . . . recognizes that there is no isolating space between phenomena, but that are all connected. There are no hierarchies of power where those claiming to be on one level are independent of those on an assumed lower level. There are no absolute dualities of inanimate and animate, humanity and nature, male and female, subject and object, mind and matter . . . Earth is one living organism, one infinite complex of interlocking ecosystems." In other words, there is an ecological paradigm of *total interconnectedness*.

²⁸ Rosemary Ruether, "Eco-Justice at the Centre of the Church's Mission", in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, ed. D. T. Hessel and R. R. Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 610.

²⁹ Ibid.

As Reuther writes:

The visible universe is the emanational manifestation of God, God's sacramental body. God is incarnate in and as the cosmic body of the universe, although not reduced to it.³⁰

The Hebrew Scriptures likewise depict God as not totally divorced from the natural world.³¹ In fact, God is to be found within the natural world.³² The nature festivals that formed a part of Israel's worship life testify to the Jewish people's belief that the realm of natural creation constitutes a point of contact with divine reality.³³

In the New Testament, Christ is revealed as the one in whom all things were created and in whom all things are reconciled.³⁴ In other words, God's plan for the universe is ultimately "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph 1:10).³⁵ Accordingly, humankind is connected to Earth and all its creatures.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid. Reuther adds that in Hellenistic Judaism, *divine Wisdom* was seen as God's agent in creating the cosmos, sustaining it, and bringing all things into harmonious unity with God.³⁰ Hebrew thought always saw this immanent manifestation of God as female (see for example, Wisdom of Solomon 8).

³¹ J. T. Pawlikowski, "Theological Dimensions of an Ecological Ethic", in *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, and Spiritual Responses*, ed. J. T. Pawlikowski and R. N. Fragomeni (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 42.

³² Ibid. Pawlikowski adds: "To use the words of the scriptural writers, God's face can be seen within nature."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Edwards, "Worship and Practice", 103; *NIV Study Bible*, 2297. Colossians 1:16-17 states: "For by him all things were *created*: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Colossians 1:19-20 states: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" [emphasis mine].

³⁵ Ibid.; *NIV Study Bible*, 2270-2271.

³⁶ Ibid.

Edwards explains further:

Because the Word is made flesh, no part of the physical universe is untouched. All matter is the place of God. All is being divinized. All is being transformed in Christ . . . Because of this, Earth, the solar system, and the whole universe become the place for encounter with the risen Christ.³⁷

Such a sacramental understanding leads to human action expressing love and respect for all living creatures, the seas, the land, and the atmosphere of the planet.³⁸

Equally important, a *covenantal tradition* provides the basis for a moral relation to one another and to nature, and therefore complements the sacramental tradition.³⁹ The basic contribution of the biblical covenantal tradition is that one must translate right relation into an ethic, which finds guarantees in law.⁴⁰

Enshrined in their body of law, the Israelites saw divine commands of right relation between human beings *and* the rest of creation.⁴¹ This body of law, explains Ruether, presented “moral truth in which relation to God is the basis for both justice in society and prosperity in nature, while disobedience to God’s commands of right relation brings both violence to society and disaster to nature.”⁴² Much later, in the Protestant Reformed tradition, the idea of Christians being a covenanted people eventually gave birth to the idea of citizens who have mutual rights and obligations.⁴³

³⁷ Ibid., 104.

³⁸ Ibid. Wilful destruction of species or pollution of the atmosphere, for example, is clearly incongruent with such an ecological understanding and praxis.

³⁹ Ruether, “Eco-Justice at the Centre of the Church’s Mission”, 605, 610.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 610.

⁴¹ Ibid., 607.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 608.

In sum, both the covenantal *and* sacramental traditions need to be retrieved and encompassed in ecojustice.⁴⁴ However, as Reuther exhorts, “the most important shift must be a renewed vision of our relation to the whole of the creation.”⁴⁵ A deep *metanoia* – encompassing many levels, including the technological, social, and cultural – is necessary to bring about a new ecological consciousness, combining covenantal and sacramental ecotheologies.⁴⁶

Needed: A Solidarity with Victims

The suffering of creation today is serious and extensive.⁴⁷ Consider the cries of the fallen forests, the dying deserts, and the acid air that envelopes the earth.⁴⁸ Habel correctly states:

It is an axiom of social justice that the true nature, depth and force of any injustice can only be understood by those experiencing that injustice. Their voice must be heard first, taken with the utmost seriousness and made an integral part of the process of justice. So too with ecojustice.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Ibid., 613.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Today, both environmentalists and animal rights activists draw on the principle of *natural rights*. They seek to extend this concept to species, ecospheres, and to sentient animals. While the natural rights tradition is necessary for an ecological ethic, an ethic is needed that encompasses the sustaining of the whole ecological community, not simply the members of one community in isolation from each other. “What is needed is a new interconnection of the ethic of the individual and the ethic of the community, and the extension of this ethic beyond the human individual and group to the biosphere in which all living things cohere on the planet” (pages 609-610).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 612-613.

⁴⁷ Habel, “The Challenge of Ecojustice Readings”, 135.

⁴⁸ Ibid. There are numerous passages where Earth, and the Earth community, speak with non-human voices in lament or praise (for example, Ps 96:1; Ps 29). Some biblical writers hear a suffering Earth crying out in resistance against Earth violations by humans (for example, Gen 4:10-11). The suffering of creation is quite explicit in the oracles of Jeremiah. The violation and defilement of the land by God’s people is felt deeply by Jeremiah, by God, and by the land itself. Jeremiah hears the land crying out to God under the burden of the curse that Israel’s corruption has provoked.

(Jer 23:9-12; 4:23-28)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Ecojustice requires that, where necessary, Earth be recognized as an oppressed party and which implies joining Earth in the struggle for justice for the entire Earth community.⁵⁰

However, the task of identifying with Earth as a partner in the struggle may be hampered because of a Christian heritage which has exalted humans and devalued Earth as mere matter that can be exploited for human wealth.⁵¹

Edwards proposes that a religious faith community, whether for instance within Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity, can challenge “self-serving and ideological justifications of the misery of the poor and the victims of war, oppression, and natural disasters.”⁵² Such solidarity includes not only all human victims, but also the animals and plants that are threatened or destroyed.⁵³

In seeking solidarity with victims – human and non-human – perception of the other is critical. Ideally such perception, explains McFague, is based on the way of loving knowledge.⁵⁴ This is a knowing that a person has of a beloved friend – not a love that claims to comprehend or to control the other, but a love that recognizes the other, even in friendship, as an abiding mystery.⁵⁵ In other words, it understands the limits of what one can claim to know and accepts the mystery of the other in humility – and does not imagine

⁵⁰ Ibid., 127, 133 Habel further states that “the ecojustice principle of voice assumes first that Earth is a subject intended to be heard rather than an object destined to be analysed. In reality, Earth is multiple subjects with multiple voices to be heard. This principle also holds that Earth as a subject may be viewed as a living organism rather than a voiceless machine governed by rigid ‘laws of nature’ . . . A consciousness is emerging that Earth is a living whole, a subject and partner.”

⁵¹ Ibid., 127-128; *NIV Study Bible*, 1010. Ps 8:5-6 states that “You made him [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.”

⁵² Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 106.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 110-111. McFague contrasts a “loving eye” (the way of loving knowledge) with the “arrogant eye”. Edwards writes that “the arrogant eye is characteristic of the typical Western attitude to the natural world. It objectifies, manipulates, uses, and exploits.”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 110.

that it knows who or what the other is.⁵⁶ This requires *detachment* in order to see the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the other.⁵⁷ In sum, such loving knowledge respects difference.⁵⁸ It sees each creature – whether suffering or not – in relation to God, as a unique manifestation of divine wisdom, and as destined to share in the redemption of all things in Christ.⁵⁹

Furthermore, the incarnation shows *reconciliation* as the model for the divine-human relationship.⁶⁰ Pawlikowski suggests that “if reconciliation has become the primary paradigm for God’s action in the light of the incarnation, then it must become the primary paradigm for humanity’s actions as well . . . [including] humanity’s stance towards the world with which it shares the basic life process.”⁶¹

In sum, this type of solidarity with the global community of creation can then lead to a basic ethical norm of well-being for the comprehensive community, not just for the well-being of certain segments of the human community.⁶² Solidarity with victims can lead to recognizing the earth as a single ethical system⁶³ because all creation is bonded together into a single community.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Such loving knowledge pays attention and takes the trouble to find out – so that perception will be objective, based on the reality of the other, and not on its own wishes or fantasies.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pawlikowski, “Theological Dimensions of an Ecological Ethic”, 47. Pawlikowski further states that “God has shown reconciliation, not dominance, to be the essence of majesty.”

⁶¹ Ibid., 46-47. Some have claimed that the emphasis on incarnationism within the Christian theological tradition has resulted in a wholesale *devaluation of the dignity of the rest of the creation*. However, this is not the case – the earlier revelation of divine presence in all of nature found in the Hebrew Scriptures was not invalidated by the subsequent revelation of divine-human union in Christ. Incarnational Christology gives added significance to the Genesis proclamation of human co-creatorship.

⁶² McDonagh, “Eco-Centered Ethic and Christian Hope”, 134.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 139.

Needed: A New Ecological Ethic

The Hebrew Scriptures present the belief that the human community shares in the responsibility for the governance of creation.⁶⁵ Human *co-creatorship* in the biblical sense is found in Genesis 2.⁶⁶ This passage shows that care and development of the inherited creation was given as a primal religious duty – “to work it and take care of it” (Gen 2:15).⁶⁷ Such enhancement and preservation of creation, given to humankind by the Creator God, are coequal duties – neither can be neglected; nor can one be sacrificed to advance the other.⁶⁸

In the context of co-creatorship arises the concept of humans having *dominion over creation*. While the Hebrew word *radah* (“have dominion”) is forceful, the word nearly always appears in the context of kingship.⁶⁹ Accordingly, in the Hebrew Scriptures’ vision of dominion is the element of divine likeness, providing no basis for unbridled exploitation of natural resources or the environment.⁷⁰ Rather, human dominion over the rest of creation is to be a caring role modelled on God’s rule.⁷¹ It also involves remembering that to share in the divine creative power is a free gift of the Creator – and not a ground for haughtiness.⁷²

⁶⁵ Pawlikowski, “Theological Dimensions of an Ecological Ethic”, 43.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 44; *NIV Study Bible*, 12. Genesis 2:15 states that “[t]he LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *work* it and *take care* of it [emphasis mine].”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. See for example: 1 Kings 5:4; Psalm 72:8; and Ezekiel 34:4.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 45.

⁷² Ibid.

Related to co-creatorship is the *stewardship* model, frequently proposed by Christian theologians and ethicists.⁷³ Notwithstanding, this model has limitations. First, it implies management of the household on behalf of an absentee landlord.⁷⁴ Second, the stewardship model can overlook the crucial aspect of human dependence on that which is stewarded.⁷⁵ Finally, it is linked to the dominion model, derived from Genesis 1:26-28.⁷⁶ This passage has been seen as anthropocentric, and devalues the Earth.⁷⁷

By contrast, needed are models that will capture the Christian mind and guide Christian ethics toward revering Earth as kin with humans and God.⁷⁸ Three models may be offered: first, the model of *mutual custodianship* presents one option that is consistent with respecting the ecology; second, the model of *companionship*, following the lead of St Francis of Assisi, is another option; third, Boff calls for a new society with an *ecocentric consciousness*.⁷⁹ (Appendix B, entitled “A Liturgical Ecological Ethos”, presents a unique and authentic fourth model for an ecological ethos that the Christian community offers through its Eucharistic liturgy and spirituality.)

⁷³ Habel, “The Challenge of Ecojustice Readings”, 138.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; *NIV Study Bible*, 10. Genesis 1:26-28 states: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 139-140. Habel raises some further issues for theological reflection: The verb “subdue” (*kabash*) is harsh and forceful; the term for “rule” (*rada*) implies force and power, not justice and mercy. In Psalm 8, humans are a little less than God, crowned with glory; the works of creation are located “under the feet” of humans and the subjugation of Earth is total.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 140, 138. Habel further describes *mutual custodianship* as follows: A custodian sustains life forces and maintains kinship. Earth has been our custodian, looking after our needs – whether we were conscious of the fact or not. Earth has remained the silent provider, the quiet custodian, the unseen guest. Now it is time for humanity to become a custodian. In sum, Earth has long been a custodian for humans; now humans need to see their role in similar terms.

Needed: Praxis in the Spirit

A radical reorientation of heart and thought toward the creation, both human and non-human, must lead into *action*.⁸⁰ Such action, motivated and led by the Spirit of God, ought to occur at personal, political, and ecclesial levels.⁸¹ Berry describes this engagement at the beginning of the twenty-first century in terms of the “Great Work”.⁸² This Great Work, summarizes Edwards, “is to carry out the transition from ‘a period of human devastation of the Earth’ to a period when humans will ‘be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner’”.⁸³

A threat to ecological responsibility involving praxis in the Spirit is apocalypticism.⁸⁴ This type of thinking undermines responsible concern about the ecology and preservation of natural resources.⁸⁵ The premise of apocalypticism is that the world is going to end soon and catastrophically at that.⁸⁶ It includes the popular understanding that the Book of Revelation and other apocalyptic writings predict the engulfing of the world in fire and brimstone.⁸⁷ However, reputable biblical scholarship attests that fiery destruction is not the actual vision of the apocalyptic texts in the Bible.⁸⁸ In fact, the apocalyptic texts affirm, albeit through the use of profound symbolism, a transcendent world, even in the midst of political and cultural upheaval.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 112.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* According to Edwards, this “Spirit of God is always the Spirit of communion, communion with our human sisters and brothers and communion with the whole of creation.”

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Pawlikowski, “Theological Dimensions of an Ecological Ethic”, 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Habel, “The Challenge of Ecojustice Readings”, 136. Habel graphically depicts his experience: “Earth, therefore, became disposable matter, cosmic waste. Earth would come to an end and it did not matter. Earth was viewed as the scene of spectacular apocalyptic fireworks to be viewed en route to a higher domain.”

⁸⁷ Pawlikowski, “Theological Dimensions of an Ecological Ethic”, 48.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 48, 50 Pawlikowski adds that “the *hopeful imagination* of the apocalyptic imagination, freed from its destructive misinterpretations, can serve us well [emphasis mine].”

The challenge, states Edwards, is to allow the love of God in Christ Jesus “so to pour into our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that it overflows abundantly, not only to persons, especially to those in great need, but also to the other creatures of nature.”⁹⁰ This means accepting, for example, that Earth’s resources are finite, that Western consumption patterns cannot be sustained, and that they bring death and destruction to other species.⁹¹ This in turn may necessitate involvement in political action through activist and lobbying groups.⁹² Equally needed is the essential witness of personal lifestyle in workplaces, in neighbourhoods, and in homes.⁹³

Finally, praxis in the Spirit includes developing the inner freedom to be liberated from greed and the insatiable desire to accumulate and thus to be more in harmony with all of creation.⁹⁴ It calls for a restraint in the use of material goods, resulting in a greater simplicity of life.⁹⁵ In short, it means taking responsibility for the creatures of Earth, as well as for the land, seas, rivers, and atmosphere, without exploiting or endangering them.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 113-114.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

⁹⁴ McDonagh, “Eco-Centered Ethic and Christian Hope”, 141.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 115.

Conclusion

More than arguments based on sound, logical reasoning are indeed needed for solving mankind's current ecological crisis. Despite the best, most well-intentioned pleas, no significant and coordinated global effort is presently underway for alleviating the crisis. (Consider the failings of the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference.)

Needed is a radically new underlying ecological ethos, acting as a catalyst for wholehearted praxis. This paper has proposed that such an ethos can be built upon experiencing a radical change of heart, having a vision of Trinitarian communion, combining a sacramental and covenantal ecotheology, seeking solidarity with victims, forging a new ecological ethic, and pursuing praxis in the Spirit.

In closing, while the ecological predicament reflects *a crisis of Spirit*, the six needs presented must be met in a manner that recognizes the assets and liabilities of different approaches to developing an ethos of creation care. Three approaches, reflected in the paper, may be critiqued as follows.⁹⁷

An *anthropocentric* utilitarian approach, based on the premise that land, water, air, and other living creatures have worth only according to their utilitarian value for humans, does not adequately address dimensions of the ecological crisis such as resource depletion, global warming, environmental racism, and maldistribution of goods and services.

Nonetheless, some claim that because humans are intrinsically connected with the rest of

⁹⁷ Stassen and Gushee, "Care of the Creation", 435-440. Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee group different approaches to an ethic of creation care under three headings: (1) anthropocentric approaches, (2) biocentric approaches, and (3) theocentric approaches. In this section, their comments in the article are drawn on in this critique.

the natural order, even anthropocentric approaches can be concerned about the ecological crisis because of its negative impact on humanity, especially the poor.

A Christian *biocentric* approach can risk downplaying (1) the transcendence God, (2) the sense of humans as the only creatures “in the image and likeness of God”⁹⁸, as well as (3) sin and the need for redemption. On the other hand, emphasized are (1) creation’s original blessing, (2) human goodness, (3) divine immanence, and (4) a spiritual equality of all creatures.⁹⁹

Finally, a *theocentric* approach rejects the anthropocentric utilitarian and “wise management” approaches in which only humans have intrinsic worth, as well as the radical egalitarianism of the various biocentric approaches. It emphasizes that God is the centre of value, and that God’s creatures, including humans, have value within God’s created community. Also, God is not disconnected from creation; rather, God is continuously, dynamically involved in caring for the creation.

With the hope of yet witnessing humanity’s positive response to the ecological crisis, I would like to one day re-visit Pasadena and from our former home view the majestic San Gabriel Mountain Range day after day, especially in winter when the snow-capped peaks glisten in the sun against a blue sky.

⁹⁸ See Genesis 1:26-27.

⁹⁹ Two references written from a Christian biocentric view are Thomas Berry’s *The Dream of the Earth* (2006) and Matthew Fox’s *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, Twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions* (1983).

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Appendix A

Six Prophetic Voices about the Ecological Crisis

Prophetic voices addressing the ecological crisis clearly have their place.¹⁰⁰ Particularly since the 1970s, many such voices have arisen.¹⁰¹ Six representative ones are as follows:

First, theologian Sallie McFague¹⁰² raises critical questions: *Is the consumer life the good life?* (Do many possessions bring happiness, and is happiness the proper goal of life?) *Can the “good life” be had by all?* (The planet cannot support six billion or more people living a Western lifestyle; issues of justice, fairness, and obligation must be addressed.) *Is the “good life” good for planet Earth?* (The loss of non-renewable resources is now of less importance than two other related problems: the rate of loss and decay of *renewable* resources and the manner in which these losses overlap and support further deterioration.)

Second, as Sean McDonagh points out, no other generation has had to accept responsibility for the survival of the biodiversity of the planet:

The task quite simply is to take decisive action to stave off the extinction of species which could sterilize the planet. If this generation does not act, no future generation will be able to undo the damage that this generation has caused to the planet. It is an extraordinary and awesome moment that the behaviour of a single generation of humans can have such a profound and irreversible impact, not just on human history, but on the life of the planet as well.¹⁰³

Third, biologist Thomas Lovejoy (1988) has said that:

I am utterly convinced that most of the great environmental struggles will either be won or lost in the 1990s. By the next century it will be too late.¹⁰⁴

Fourth, Ferkiss' work, *The Future of Technological Civilization* (1974), put the late twentieth-century challenge to humankind in these words:

Man has . . . achieved virtually godlike powers over himself, his society, and his physical environment. As a result of his scientific and technological achievements, he has the power to alter or destroy both the human race and its physical habitat.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 100.

¹⁰¹ Stassen and Gushee, “Care of the Creation”, 428.

¹⁰² Sallie McFague, “The Contemporary Economic Model and Worldview”, in *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 75-93. Sallie McFague also argues that two values predominate the neo-classical economic worldview – the *individual* and *growth*. Or, more accurately, one value: the satisfaction of the desires of individuals through the means of constant growth, where no limits, neither for individuals nor the planet's resources, are recognized. By contrast, two key values are clearly not part of neo-classical economics: the just distribution of profits from Earth's resources, and the ability of the planet to sustain the use of its resources.

¹⁰³ Edwards, “Worship and Practice”, 108.

¹⁰⁴ McDonagh, “Eco-Centered Ethic and Christian Hope”, 145. This statement was made in an address to the American Institute of Biological Sciences in August 1988. This quotation states the challenge and underscores the present *kairos* moment. Responding to it demands concrete actions both for individuals and institutions.

¹⁰⁵ Pawlikowski, “Theological Dimensions of an Ecological Ethic”, 39.

Fifth, Hans Jonas, speaking in 1972 to a gathering of societies of religion in Los Angeles, conveyed essentially the same message of heartfelt concern. Ours is the first generation facing the question of basic creational survival. In the past, no form of human destructive behaviour existed from which nature could not recover using its recuperative powers. Today, humankind is capable of inflicting terminal damage on the natural world.¹⁰⁶

Finally, author and compiler Jessica Gribetz (1997) writes that:

Concern for the natural world and compassion for all its creatures began centuries before Greenpeace and PETA.¹⁰⁷ There are numerous passages in the Bible, as well as Talmudic rulings, that deal with the way we interact with nature and the appreciation we must have for all living things. There are ancient texts that deal explicitly with environmental pollution, wasteful destruction, and cruelty to animals. Protection of the bountiful and beautiful Earth was not merely a matter of primitive survival – then as now, it offered a glimpse of God’s majesty. That reverence and awe lies deep in so much of our literature and poetry. It is one of the oldest messages in history: an homage and a warning that resound through the ages. And it is one that has yet to be learned.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 39-40.

¹⁰⁷ PETA is the acronym for “People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals” and is the largest animal rights organization in the world, with more than 2 million members and supporters. Their website is: <http://www.peta.org/> (accessed 30 October 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Jessica Gribetz, comp., *Wise Words: Jewish Thoughts and Stories Through the Ages* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 143.

Appendix B

A Liturgical Ecological Ethos

The following is a unique and authentic fourth model for an ecological ethos that the Catholic Christian community offers through its Eucharistic liturgy and spirituality.

Every Eucharist is a thanksgiving memorial for God at work in creation (as well as in redemption). Historically, the early Christian Eucharistic prayers had their origins and models in Jewish prayer forms. These prayers began with a blessing of the gifts of creation. They are based on the memory of and thanksgiving for God's work, which involves both creation and salvation.

Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, makes the same point, insisting that all the ancient Eucharistic liturgies began with thanksgiving for *creation* and then continued with thanksgiving for redemption in Christ, and all of them were centred on the lifting up of the gifts of creation to the Creator.

The ancient theology that Zizioulas refers to is still found in current liturgical texts. When the members of the Body of Christ come to the Eucharist, they bring in some way the whole creation, including the creatures of Earth, with them. In the Eucharist, creation is then *lifted up* to God in offering and thanksgiving. Every living creature on earth has a profound relationship with the resurrected Lord.

Edwards provides background for the current liturgical texts. Four Eucharistic prayers are involved as follows: (1) bringing creation to the table (the bread and wine): "fruit of the Earth and the work of human hands"; (2) the relationship between God's action in creation and redemption: "He is the Word through whom you made the universe, the Saviour you sent to redeem us"; (3) praising God on behalf of all of Earth's creatures: "All creation rightly gives you praise"; (4) further praise: "In the name of every creature under heaven, we too praise your glory".

Consequently, in the Eucharist, God's good creation in all its diversity and beauty is remembered. The earth is seen more as the source of life, and nature is sacred, purposeful, and full of meaning'. In the Christian tradition, believers affirm that we all come from the earth – God made us from the dust of the earth.

Additionally, one remembers in the Eucharist the God who loves each one of the creatures of Earth. The creation was entrusted to humans, not to exploit and destroy, but to rule with mercy, love, and concern for the welfare of all (Psalm 72). Interestingly, in Genesis 2:15, Yahweh "took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it (*abad*) and take care of it (*shamar*)" (NIV). *Abad* has overtones of service, while *shamar* has overtones of preserving and defending from harm. Damage to the Earth and its creatures is grieved for as one feels for them. In fact, to wantonly destroy any aspect of creation, or to banish species for ever from their place in the community of life, is to deface the image of Christ which is radiated throughout our world. All this forms part of a unique liturgical ecological ethos.

Source: Notes excerpted from and based on:

Denis Edwards, "Worship and Practice", in *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), 99-118.

Sean McDonagh, "Eco-Centered Ethic and Christian Hope", in *Passion for the Earth* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 124-146.