

**Creation & Christology:**  
**The Ecological Crisis and Eschatological Ethics**

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Daily, we are bombarded with images showing that all is not right with the planet we call 'home'. Giant oil-slicks in the Gulf of Mexico; white rhino in South Africa being poached to the point of extinction for the medicinal and ornamental value of their horns; or closer to home, the degradation of NZ's rivers and streams. It is hard to ignore the evidence that either through negligence or wilful destruction humanity is having a devastating effect on the Earth we inhabit. While contemporary humanity is perhaps no more or less guilty of ecological desecration than previous generations,<sup>1</sup> what is unique about our current context is the impact of humanity on the climate of the planet. The consensus of scientists is that we indeed appear to be creating a situation which threatens millions of living species with extinction and radically alters the very nature of life on Earth.<sup>2</sup>

In such a time of 'ecological crisis,' what is the response of the Christian church? Does the biblical narrative offer an alternative account of how humanity should live in relation with the Earth? Or rather, is it the biblical narrative itself which is the cause of our current ecological predicament?<sup>3</sup> Confronted by the constant stream of pessimism detailing the sheer enormity of global ecological devastation and the irreparable damage that will stem from human-induced climate change, is the Church's proclamation of the 'gospel' simply a case of blind optimism avoiding reality – an opium designed to numb us from the 'bad news' of a bleak future? To what extent does Christian faith offer genuine hope?

A usual approach employed when responding to such questions and seeking to offer a foundation for Christian ecological ethics is to turn to the opening chapters of Genesis. Such a strategy places its emphasis on the themes which emerge from the account of creation contained within these passages:

- Genesis 1:26-29 – What does the fact that humanity is made 'in the image' of God mean for the way in which we relate to the rest of the created order? How are we to interpret and apply God's instruction to humanity to fill the earth and subdue (*kābaš*) and rule over (*rādâ*) every living creature? Does humanity's 'dominion' necessarily mean 'domination' (as is often assumed by detractors of Christianity, and unfortunately sometimes by Christians themselves)?
- Genesis 2:5 speaks of the earth creature (*'ādām*) serving (*'ābad*) the earth (*'ādāmâ*) from which he has been formed (Gen 2:7) and in Genesis 2:15 the earth creature is placed by God into the garden to serve (*'ābad*) and protect (*šāmar*). So, what if 'dominion', far from being understood as 'domination', was rather a call to faithful 'service' and care?<sup>4</sup> Likewise, what if the action of the earth creature in 'naming' each living creature (Gen 2:19-20), rather than being interpreted

as an exercise of control and 'power-over', was evidence of a deep relational intimacy? Could it be that the ability to truly 'know' and thus appropriately 'name' is not the result of one's hierarchical standing 'above' the *other* but rather stems from time spent in close proximity, observing attentively, and thus developing an appreciation and love of the particular characteristics of this *other*?

- Genesis 3 – Is the curse of the ground that follows the disobedience of the Adam and Eve prescriptive or descriptive? That is, is the curse of the land a punishment from God, or the inevitable consequence of a self-seeking humanity who has become estranged from their Creator, from one another, and from the soil from which they were formed? And, subsequently, is the expulsion from the garden a penalty for sin, or an action of 'grace' motivated by God's concern to protect both humanity and the garden from the further catastrophic effects of human transgressions?

While undoubtedly there is much to be gleaned from these opening chapters of Genesis, this tendency to always gravitate back to this same section of Scripture when seeking illumination on ecological-environmental themes has two potential drawbacks. Firstly, in focussing almost primarily on the creation accounts within Genesis 1-3, Christians are often therefore ignorant of the many other Scriptural passages which provide material for the construction of Christian ecological ethics. And secondly, this emphasis upon the Genesis narratives often means that the doctrines of Christology and eschatology are seen as peripheral to the theme of creation.

In what follows, I will argue that a Christian account of creation and the ethical implications that stem from such an account are inextricably Christological and eschatological by nature. That is, any Christian response to the 'ecological crisis' and an account of Christian ecological ethics must be grounded upon Christological and eschatological considerations. In seeking to outline such a case, my approach will be to offer a close reading of the well-known Pauline hymn found in Colossians 1:15-20. Christian faith, I will posit, makes four assertions about Christ's relationship with Creation. Correspondingly, flowing from these Christological claims are four implications about the nature of the world itself. Having outlined a Christological and eschatological account of creation, I will then briefly make some comments on the nature of Christian ecological ethics, suggesting that Christian behaviour shaped by Christological and eschatological dimensions will be characterised by two defining traits: suffering and joy.

## The Cosmic Christ

Paul, writing to a small gathering of Christians in Colossae prays for the Colossians, 'asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God' (1:9-10). Common to all Pauline epistles, and to the New Testament in general, there is a clear connection outlined here between 'knowledge and understanding' and ethical actions and lifestyle. Reception of the 'good news' and growth in spiritual wisdom and understanding is inevitably accompanied by new actions. What is this 'good news' that Paul wants the Colossians to know? Paul elaborates by encouraging the Colossians to give thanks joyfully for the redemptive actions of the Father, who 'has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son' (1:13). But who is this Son, Jesus Christ, and what is the nature of his redemptive actions? Paul gives a further response to these questions through the use of a poem:

### **Colossians 1:15-23**

He is the image  
of the invisible God,  
the firstborn of all creation,  
for in him were created *all things*  
in heaven and on earth,  
things visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions,  
whether rulers or powers,  
*all things* have been created  
through him and for him.

He is before *all things*,  
and *all things* hold together in him.

And he is the head  
of the body, the church.

He is the beginning,  
the firstborn from the dead,  
so that he might become in *all things* himself preeminent,  
for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell

and through him to reconcile *all things* to him,  
whether things on earth or things in heaven,  
by making peace through the blood of his cross.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>21</sup>And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him— <sup>23</sup>provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the *hope promised by the gospel* that you heard, which has been *proclaimed to every creature under heaven*. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. (NRSV)

Within the hymn Paul makes four statements about Christ from which implications about the nature of the world can be drawn.

### **1. Christ is the Creator.**

Firstly, Paul makes clear that it is Christ who is the Creator of the world. Christ, Paul declares, is the *firstborn* of all creation, through whom *all things (ta panta)* have been created. The title *firstborn of creation (prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs)* in no way implies that Christ is secondary to the Father, but rather is a term of pre-eminence and authority. Arian theologies of the fourth century argued that the Son of God was not always existent, but was rather a created being and therefore inferior to the Father. In contrast to such thought, Athanasian Christology endorsed at the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), maintained that Christ was *homoousios* “of the same substance” as the Father.

In Orthodox Trinitarian Christianity, Christ is no mere ‘created being’ – as in the Arian thought expounded by Jehovah’s Witnesses today – but rather, is the *Creator of all*. Christian faith speaks of the Father, Son and Spirit, the Divine Communion, who work together in the act of creating the world. This Trinitarian understanding of the act of creation is perhaps most keenly expressed in Irenaeus’ polemical writings against Gnostic interpretations of creation in his *Adversus Haereses (Against Heresies)*, where Irenaeus (ca. 120-202) follows Theophilus of Antioch in arguing that creation was a Trinitarian action involving the two hands of the Father: Logos (the Son) and Sophia (the Spirit).

The belief that Christ is the origin and agent of *all* creation is drummed home by the repetition throughout the hymn of the phrase: ‘all things’. Sketching a schema of the created world, Paul asserts that *all things* in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, are created through and for

Christ. *All things* in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible... everything you see: galaxies, stars, planets, moons, mountains, oceans, rivers, streams, kiwi, kakapo, whales, dolphins, weta, tuatara; and, everything you do not or cannot see with the naked eye: black-holes, deep-sea volcanoes, giant squid, amoeba, bacteria, electrons, neutrons, sub-atomic particles.... *all things* were created through Christ and for Christ. Such an understanding that 'all things' have been created through Christ has an important implication regarding the nature of creation. **Earth, and life itself, is not therefore a random chance happening occurring in a meaningless cosmos. Rather, the whole of the cosmos is a planned and ordered marvel – a miraculous gift of love and joy stemming from the creative overflow of love shared between Father, Son and Spirit.**

## 2. Christ is the Sustainer

Secondly, the hymn claims that Christ is not only the Creator, but is also the *Sustainer* of the world:

*He is before all things,  
and all things hold together in him.*

'All things', Paul claims, hang together in Christ. Christ is the fulcrum upon which the universe is supported, the axle around which the cosmos moves. Christ, not man (anthropocentrism) and not life (bio-centrism) is at the centre of all being. Paul is not indulging here in a theological novelty, but rather is reiterating the well-held Hebrew belief that the ebb and flow of the universe is not controlled by fate, but is sustained by God's active involvement. Such thought is expressed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>6</sup> Scripture paints a radically different picture of God from the deist Creator so prominent in Western thought since the Enlightenment. Unlike the 'Supreme Architect' of deism who having fashioned the universe now stands aside watching from a distance, a watchmaker who having designed and assembled a clock now simply lets it wind-down without any further involvement, Scripture speaks of a God who, having created, continues an active involvement in the creation. The sheer extravagance and wonder of creation, and the dependence of it on the life-giving breath of God for its continued existence, is captured well in the amplification of the creation narratives offered in Psalm 104.

What a wildly wonderful world, GOD!  
You made it all, with Wisdom at your side,  
made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.  
Oh, look—the deep, wide sea,  
brimming with fish past counting,  
sardines and sharks and salmon.

Ships plow those waters,  
and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them.  
*All the creatures look expectantly to you  
to give them their meals on time.*  
*You come, and they gather around;  
you open your hand and they eat from it.*  
*If you turned your back,  
they'd die in a minute—*  
*Take back your Spirit and they die,  
revert to original mud;*  
*Send out your Spirit and they spring to life—  
the whole countryside in bloom and blossom.*<sup>7</sup>

Christian faith therefore neither posits a deist view of God – distant and remote from creation – nor subscribes to the philosophies of Deep Ecology or pantheistic theologies where the lines between God and creation become blurred – with nature itself being the Divine. **Rather, orthodox biblical Christianity asserts that Creation is *other* than God but still depends on God for its ongoing existence.**

### **3. Christ is the Telos / the Consummation of Creation**

Thirdly, the hymn declares that as well the origin and agent of creation, Christ is the *telos* of creation. Creation is brought into existence *through* Christ, but Christ is also the purpose for which creation exists, the goal to which it is drawn. In contemporary Western culture, utterly anthropocentric in its outlook, this is perhaps the most difficult truth for us to grasp. In Christian thought, **creation does not exist for humanity, but rather, creation is from Christ and is for Christ.**

Despite what one often hears preached, the high point of the creation account in Genesis 1 is not the arrival of humanity on day six. Rather, it is day seven, the Sabbath, which is the climax. While undoubtedly there is something different and unique about humanity (this is both a theological statement but also a statement of evolutionary-biological fact), nevertheless humanity is still only part of creation: *'ādām* from *'ādāmâ*. There is no denying that humanity does live in a relationship with the world in which elements of the natural world are utilised for our benefit, but of critical importance is the recognition that the world does not exist primarily *for* the sake of humanity. Christian thought posits that humanity's utilisation of the natural world must be in keeping with the fulfilment of our role as image-bearers and stewards caring for the whole of creation. In Christian thought, creation cannot be categorised and divided into *resources*, and therefore reduced merely to a commodity. The

value of creation does not stem from the utilitarian value denoted to it by humanity, but stems from the fact that it has been lovingly created as a gift of love *by, through* and *for* Christ. **Creation has intrinsic value in and of itself.**<sup>8</sup>

That creation is not created *for* humanity, but rather is created *for* Christ is beautifully expressed in Psalm 96 in which creation is seen as part of a cosmic symphony giving worship back to their Creator.

<sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, 'The Lord is king!  
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.  
He will judge the peoples with equity.'

<sup>11</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;  
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

<sup>12</sup> let the field exult, and everything in it.  
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

<sup>13</sup> before the Lord; for he is coming,  
for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with his truth.

There is, however, a further dimension to the statement that creation exists *for Christ*. Returning to the familiar creation narrative of Genesis 1, one notes that at the end of each day what God has made is affirmed as 'good'. Then, at the end of day six: 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good' (Gen 1:31). This understanding that creation, the material world, is 'good' is critical to a genuinely Christian theology of creation. There is no room in orthodox Christian belief for a world-denying Gnosticism. The created world of matter – physical stuff – is not evil. The Incarnation itself is evidence of this, with God coming in human form, taking on physicality and entering the world of matter.<sup>9</sup>

But while creation is 'very good', creation is not yet *perfected*. This understanding that creation while 'good' has not yet reached its 'perfection' is a central aspect of the thought of Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c.200). Irenaeus argued that salvation (and the incarnation), is not a consequence of the fall of creation. For Irenaeus, creation is inextricably part of God's project of salvation, and Christ's incarnation would have taken place regardless of the fall, so that all of creation can be brought to its 'perfection' and fullness (*pleroma*) in Christ. As Irenaeus states in his *Against Heresies*:



There is one God the father... and one Christ our lord who comes through the whole economy *to sum up the universe in himself...* and as the head of the church he draws all things to himself at the proper time. (3.16.6) (Emphasis added).

While within Western theologies primary attention is given to the efficacious nature of Christ's death on the Cross, in Orthodox thought significant emphasis is placed on Christ's incarnation. In Orthodox theology it is not merely the Cross, but the incarnation itself which has salvific function. In the Orthodox tradition Christ comes into the world and takes on created human form to consummate creation and to bring it to its *perfection* in Christ. **Creation therefore is not some obsolescent stage-backdrop from the early part of a drama that, once used, will be discarded, but rather is part and parcel of the whole salvation-drama. God is not in the business of destroying the world, but of perfecting it and bringing it to its fullness in Christ.**

#### 4. Christ is the Reconciler

Fourthly, and finally, the hymn declares that as well as being Creator, Sustainer and Consummator of creation, Christ is also the Reconciler of creation. While in the incarnation Christ enters creation to bring it into its *fullness*, the effects of human sin require that Christ surmounts the obstacle to 'perfection'. While many contemporary Christians understand reconciliation as involving human relationships with God, and then extending through to inter-human relationships, the all-encompassing cosmic reach of Christ's work of reconciliation appears largely to have been forgotten. Yet Paul proclaims in his hymn:

*for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell  
and through him to reconcile all things to him,  
whether things on earth or things in heaven,  
by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

In Paul's vision, Christ is both the consummator and reconciler of *all things*. It is not merely humanity, but *all of creation*, which is caught up in Christ's reconciling work. Sin, perhaps best understood as broken relationships – between humanity and God, amongst humanity, and between humanity and creation – is overcome through Christ's physical death on the cross. In Christ, the new Adam, the violence that typifies humanity – a violence towards their Creator, other humans and creation itself – is defeated. The dysfunctional nature of humanity's relationships with God, fellow-humans, and the planet, is overcome as those inhabited by the Spirit of the resurrected Christ are gradually transformed.

The implication of this belief that Christ is reconciling all things is profound. **Creation has a future!** Paul's understanding of the 'gospel' could not be further removed from the appalling belief held by many Christians that creation will be destroyed by God and that our eternal future consists of some sort of disembodied state with other souls in a place called 'heaven'. For Paul, it is the fact that Christ is firstborn from the dead which is the evidence that death does not have the final word. The physical resurrection of Christ is the verification that death has been defeated. The cycle of death which seems part and parcel of creation has, in Christ, been triumphed over. **For Paul this is the 'hope held out in the gospel' and accordingly is to be 'proclaimed to every creature under heaven' [Col 1:23]. For Paul, the gospel provides ecological hope!**

Thus far, with particular focus on Colossians 1:15-23, we have outlined four Christological affirmations: Christ is the Creator, Sustainer, Telos/Consummation and Reconciler of Creation. Flowing from these affirmations we have also suggested there are four accompanying ecological assertions: (1) The World is not the result of random chance, (2) Creation is other than God but depends on God for its ongoing existence, (3) Creation has intrinsic worth, and (4) Creation has a future. But what do these Christological affirmations and the accompanying implications regarding the created world mean for our actions and lifestyle? To return to where we started, what should the fruit of this 'knowledge of God's will' look like? What shape should our lives take if we really do believe that creation – created, sustained, consummated and reconciled by Christ – has a future?

In many ways, the Church (Christians) is quite belated in recognising the 'ecological crisis' which we face. Accordingly, perhaps the most appropriate initial response is one of 'repentance' – an owning-up and acknowledgement of our failure to proclaim and enact the good news of Christ that embraces all of creation. Alongside this contrition we should also, in humility, give thanks that God's care for the world has already been understood and acted upon by many others.

Repentance involves a 180-degree change, a call to a new behaviour, and accordingly, an acceptance of Christ's reign over all of creation and over our lives will mean a new 'way of living'. But what will be the nature of the 'good works' that stem from the inward transformation? Firstly, it is important to note that practically how Christians pull weeds, plant trees, or care for endangered species will, to a large extent, be no different from the methods employed by others who are involved in the same activities but who do not share Christian faith. Similarly too, the urgent need for wealthy Christians in the West to change their lifestyle – reduce their carbon footprint, use less of the world's resources, live simpler – is no different from that required of the sizeable minority of the world's population (Christian or not) who live unsustainably. However, while at a practical level there may be little difference between Christian ecological action and the actions of those who do not espouse Christian

beliefs, in light of the Christological and eschatological dimensions of creation we have outlined, there are, I suggest, two distinctive characteristics that should define Christian ecological living.

### **(a) The Cruciform Shape of Christian Action**

Much of the attention in the current stress on ecological living has been around the term 'sustainability'. Emphasis, quite rightly, has been placed on the need for wealthy Westerners to relinquish our unsustainable and profligate standard of living. This accent on 'sustainability' and the accompanying changes to 'lifestyle' – driving less, buying a smaller house, growing one's vegetables rather than eating unsustainable and ecologically-damaging food products – will ultimately not only be better for the environment, but also will have a positive effect on one's own health and well-being, and, in the long-run, often be more economic. But, to genuinely walk the path of Christian discipleship – the way of the cross – will not merely involve tinkering with and "greening our lifestyles". Indeed, much of what is endorsed as appropriate ecological action – replacing light bulbs, buying energy-efficient appliances, purchasing carbon-credits to off-set air-travel – while perhaps costing us a little more, essentially is a fairly painless experience. Indeed, ethical actions such as carbon off-setting, which allow one to pay to have trees planted on one's behalf and then continue with 'life as usual', as well as unlikely to make much change to the state of the planet, are, arguably, simply a modern form of the medieval practice of 'indulgences'. Instead, I would contend that the evidence of our new lives, the proof of our being reconciled to God, will be a preparedness to be reconciled with both creation itself and with the poor who disproportionately suffer the effects of ecological destruction and pollution.

In the end, to live as disciples of Christ requires a preparedness to come into *close proximity* to both the planet and the poor. One does not hear the cries of the planet or of the poor from a distance and thus to be ecological disciples will involve being 'dislocated' from our lives of comfort and becoming intimate with the suffering and tortured aspects of creation. It is common nowadays to hear endorsement of the missiological incarnational principle – the call of Christ for Christians to engage in downward mobility and intentionally come alongside and accompany those termed 'the poor'. But what might this principle of proximity mean for ecological action? When was the last time you took a long walk around your neighbourhood and opened your eyes and ears to the cry of the earth (Gen 4:10)? To walk in the steps of the suffering Saviour will surely involve coming face to face with degradation and pollution, taking the time to get to know your local neighbourhood – the polluted stream, the toxic waste-dump, the rubbish-filled gully, the harbour no longer able to be fished. Inevitably, these places of environmental destruction will often be the places where those less

fortunate, those 'blessed by God', also reside. **A characteristic mark therefore of Christian ecological living will be an acceptance of and experiencing of suffering and pain.**

### **(b) The Life of Resurrection-Joy**

While a lived response to the ecological crisis will involve pain and suffering the second distinctive of Christian ecological living will be lives which exhibit a deep joy. Yes, the world is groaning in pain and distress, but nevertheless, it is still God's 'good world' which on closer inspection reveals the fingerprints of God's loving design and care. Christian theology has always affirmed that while the fullest revelation of God comes through Christ, 'ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made' (Rom 1:20). Living in a 'world of wonders', created intricately by Christ in love, and with the eschatological vision that through Christ the world is being brought into perfection, the Church's life should be characterised by a wonder and hope. The sense of joy and pleasure experienced in adventuring in the natural world, in relating with animals, in viewing scenery, or in feasting and celebrating with fruits gathered from creation, should be embraced as a normal part of the Christian life.

Ultimately, divorced from an account of the hope that stems from the belief that hostility and death have been overcome in Christ's reconciling work, Christian ecological living risks degenerating into a form of 'ecological pharisaism'. Christian ethical imperatives divorced from hope inevitably become distorted, reverting to a human ethic of law and duty emptied of its liberating and life-giving dynamic. When ecological consciousness becomes reduced to a set of regulations and declarations on how one should live – what one should drive, when one should drive, when one is allowed to fly, whether one is allowed air-conditioners – then the joy and creativity of *free* 'good works' has been stifled. As with all legalism such an endless list of such "dos" and "don'ts", rather than setting us free, runs the risk of bringing us into bondage. Ecological ethics that do not begin with a heart-change and actions/behaviour that do not stem as 'free' actions motivated by joy/worship and hope eventually become self-defeating. Such actions may last for a day, but as with all forms of legalism this eventually will lead to resentment, envy, jealousy, and finally, ethical paralysis. The Church will do well to remind itself of the dictum that ultimately: *'Ecological ethics / Care of creation will not save us'*.

Alongside the danger of ecological pharisaism, the second potential pitfall the Church must seek to avoid is that of developing a 'messianic complex'. As it seeks to live faithfully in a time of ecological crisis the Church runs the risk of believing that the salvation of the planet is utterly dependent upon its actions. However, on a practical level the sheer size of the ecological problem means that our

actions as Christians will not end ecological degradation and destruction. A second useful aphorism therefore for the Church to be reminded of is that *'Our ecological actions / Care of creation will not save the planet.* Fundamentally, **the Church is not called to 'save' the world. The 'salvation' and 'redemption' of the world is not our task, but is rather a task already achieved through Christ.** The Church is not tasked with solving the world's ecological problems, but rather is called to be a sign, a witness. The Church living as new people, 'reconciled to God' and living in communion with God, each other and creation is to be a sign of the future. Experiencing pain and suffering, nevertheless the Church should be characterised by a deep joy stemming from the belief that Christ will return and bring creation to perfection. In the end, the **Church's call is not to be 'successful' but rather to be 'faithful'.** Our calling as Christians is to allow the Spirit of Christ who breathes life into Creation and sustains it, to empower and embolden us so that we are open to participate in His redemptive purposes in the world.

Ultimately, rather than being 'ecological Pharisees' or 'ecological messiahs', ecologically-conscious Christians shaped by a Christological and eschatological account of creation will engage in actions of creation-care and seek to live sustainable lives as an offering of worship to their Creator. They will be motivated not by fear, duty or obligation but rather by love, joy and hope.

Such an account of the Christian life, living in the time between creation and consummation, is vividly portrayed in another of the Pauline epistles. In Romans 8:18-25, employing the graphic imagery of childbirth, Paul suggests that the world (like a woman with a beauty beyond description) is now enduring a time of labour. While this period is characterised by blood, sweat, tears, pain, and cries of anguish there is the certainty that this period will come to an end with the arrival of a new child. For Paul, a new world is being born. We cannot see this world in its totality; like the child in the womb, it is hidden from us. Nevertheless, we capture glimpses, as Paul puts it elsewhere, like 'a poor reflection as in a mirror' (1 Cor 13:12). Living intentionally close to creation, occasionally our eyes become focussed enough and our ears tuned to see and hear the signs of this new creation. As, Arundhati Roy so eloquently puts it: 'Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.'

Ecological action is an act of Christo-centric worship, a normal part of Christian discipleship which acknowledges through our behaviour that the world is not our own, but is created and sustained by Christ. However, more than this, fundamentally care of creation is a sign, a witness to Christ's work of consummation and reconciliation. Caring for the world in which we live is evidence of our new lives found in Christ and points prophetically to a new future, when all creation will find its *fullness* in Christ. Ultimately, our care for creation proleptically participates in God's good future.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of previous human civilisations that have collapsed due to humanity's ecological naivety and neglect, see: Jared M. Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (London: Penguin, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> While not a scientist by training, it does appear to me that the evidence for anthropogenic climate-change is overwhelming. Over 90 percent of scientists agree that climate-change is taking place, and even if partially a 'natural-cycle', is being exacerbated by human activity (in particular, the burning of fossil fuels).

<sup>3</sup> Lynn White's debatable thesis – that Judeo-Christian belief in laying the foundation for modern science and technology is the origin of the contemporary ecological crisis – is one that, unfortunately, has been widely accepted and is repeated by many others. See Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

<sup>4</sup> The words (*'ābad* and *šāmar*) which describe humanity's relationship with the creation are the same words used later to in the Exodus narrative and in the Sinai covenant to describe Israel's responsibility for observing of the Torah. Tilling and keeping the Garden – caring for creation is thus inextricably connected to our observing the Law and living faithfully in response to God's commandments. Ecological ethics are part and parcel of our desire to live according to God's good intentions.

<sup>5</sup> This poetic rendering of the passage offered by Brian Walsh & Sylvia Keesmat in *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 83, is taken from N.T. Wright's *Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 104. (Emphasis added).

<sup>6</sup> In particular, see Job 38-41.

<sup>7</sup> This is Eugene Peterson's paraphrasing of Psalm 104 from *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 799. (Emphasis added).

<sup>8</sup> The extent to which anthropocentrism shapes our view of natural world was reinforced to me recently while attending a lecture given by an energy engineer. Outlining the enormous energy resources – gas, oil and coal – still remaining to be utilised, and arguing that it would be uneconomic to explore other energy options, the speaker even asserted that to fail to utilise the fossil-fuel resources at our disposal would be a case of 'poor stewardship'. Undergirding the engineer's whole presentation was an anthropocentric and economic understanding of creation – the assumption that the world is simply a *resource-bank for humanity to utilise for its own benefit*. Likewise, in a recent Christian gathering organised to discuss questions of 'climate change' and 'ecological ethics', conversation commenced by stating the theological truth that the world exists for Christ, but much subsequent discussion then tended to be informed by the unstated assumptions: 1) that the world exists for humanity (*anthropocentrism*) and, 2) That any value in the world itself is primarily derived from its usefulness to humanity (*utilitarianism*).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed in the Colossians passage Paul stresses that God 'has now reconciled in his *fleshly body* through death,' [Col 1:22])