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Ecological Christianity



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Ecological Christianity

Bob Eyles, Central Presbytery

The word ecology has in the past generation become almost common in the titles of theological books. For example, we might note Sally McFague's *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987); *Voices of Hope in a Suffering World: Reflections on Ecologically Sustainable Lifestyles* (1991) by Bob Eyles; *Christ and the Good Earth: An Introduction to Ecological Theology* (1993) by Ray Galvin; *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1995) by David Kinsley; *Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos, an Ecological Christianity* (2007) by Bruce Sanguin.

The word ecology is derived from two Greek words: *oikos*, meaning "house" or "place to live", and *logos*, meaning "word" or "study of". Ecology is therefore "the study of relationships of living organisms with one another and their environment". Ecology began as a branch of biology, but is now used to refer to any organism or species, so, for example, we have human ecology, which was traditionally known as geography. The area or location in which such interactions take place is known as an ecosystem and can range from a single tree to the gut of an individual animal; from a coral reef or a discrete area of land right up to the whole earth as the planetary ecosystem in which we live.

The Greek *oikos* is also the root of two other common words - economy and ecumenical. These words, along with ecology, therefore belong together!

The basic philosophy of ecology is contrary to Newtonian science in which reality is broken into constituent parts to be classified, studied and, if appropriate, reassembled. Ecology, with its core study of relationships, is, rather, a good example of what can be called post-modern science.

More than forty years ago Barry Commoner in his book *The Closing Circle*¹ formulated four laws of ecology:

1. Everything is connected to everything else
2. Everything must go somewhere
3. Nature knows best
4. There is no such thing as a "free lunch"

The Newtonian or mechanistic and reductionist model conceives reality as an edifice of bricks and mortar or as an intricate machine; in an ecological model, things are not just built into more complex structures, but new relationships among the units influence the properties of the structures or organisms that evolve. The "whole", in other words, becomes more than simply "the sum of the parts". As one scientist put it: "The parts are themselves redefined and recreated in the process of evolution from one level to another"².

A passage that had a profound influence on me as I developed an ecological awareness and as I changed from being an earth scientist to a Christian minister, is the following:

*"One cannot draw hard and fast boundaries between oneself, either physically or spiritually, and the environment. For me, this realisation took concrete form, as I stood two decades and an ecological education later, on the banks of the Mississippi River, where I had roamed as a boy. As I gazed at the brown silt-choked waters absorbing a black plume of industrial and municipal sewage from Memphis and followed bits of some unknown beige floating continually down from Cincinnati, Louisville or St. Louis, I experienced a palpable pain. It was not located in any of my extremities, nor was it like a headache or nausea. Still, it was very real. I had no plans to swim in the river, no need to drink from it, no intention of buying real estate on its shores. My narrowly personal interests were not affected, and yet somehow I was personally injured. It occurred to me then, in a flash of self-discovery, that the river was part of me."*³

1 Commoner B, 1971, 'The Closing Circle' Knopf, New York, p41

2 Birch C, 1988, 'The Postmodern Challenge to Biology' pp 69 - 78 in Griffin D R [Ed] 'The Reenchantment of Science' State University of New York Press, p71

3 Callicot J B, 1986 'The Metaphysical Implications of Ecology' *Environmental Ethics* 8[4] p315

A key challenge of ecological Christianity is to realise, at an emotional as well as intellectual level, that we humans are part of nature and do not stand aside from or above other species of life and the physical environment.

One challenge that this raises for us, therefore, is to go beyond merely managing ecosystems in an efficient but detached manner and even beyond stewardship for nature or creation itself. In a classic study Aldo Leopold describes the extermination of wolves in many parts of the USA and the degradation of mountain slopes subsequently overgrazed by exploding deer populations. He concludes: "I now suspect that just as a deer lives in mortal fear of its wolves so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer."⁴ Ecological Christianity involves developing "I-thou" relationships and compassion for the non-human elements of an ecosystem.

A sense of compassion is only possible when intellectual knowledge about something is replaced by experience – ie. by heart knowledge. Few of us have the capacity to feel the pain of our planetary ecosystem – perhaps that is possible for God alone. We can begin to move in this direction, however, by starting with our family, our garden, our bush, our district..., by gradually learning to observe and appreciate its web of life, not from the outside as an observer, but from the inside, as a participant.

A second challenge for ecological Christianity is to deepen understanding of the immanence of God. Masculine images of God have historically tended to support cultures of colonialisation, domination, competitiveness, exploitation and suppression. Feminine images of God are needed to support ecology and its principles of interdependence and compassion: one such is the scriptural image of "Lady Wisdom" (Greek: Sophia) that is best expressed in Proverbs 8 and further developed in the inter-testamental literature of The Wisdom of Solomon and Baruch. Sophia is not just an interesting illustration or expression of God but is, as one has put it, "the feminine personification of God's own being".⁵

The Church has always found difficulty in matching up the Jesus of the gospels with the picture of God as the transcendent cosmic judge. The image of God as Sophia – creative, warm, graceful, compassionate and forgiving - fits better with the gospel Jesus taught us to respond to. Some scholars, such as Elizabeth Johnson (1992), who are discovering the importance of Sophia, are convinced that Jesus understood himself to have been anointed by Spirit-Sophia in preparation for his earthly mission. Bruce Sanguin⁶ lists some of the dozens of parallels between the words of Jesus and the words of Sophia in Proverbs and The Wisdom of Solomon. He concludes that Sophia – the Wisdom of God – was the template that the gospel writers used to tell the story of Jesus.

It seems to me that a Church enlivened by the vision of God as Sophia-Mother, Sophia Christ and Sophia-Spirit, would help the human species establish loving and nurturing relationships with our planet and its complex of life. Ecological Christianity is not just an optional extra for the Church but must be at the heart of our struggle to be agents of God's love.

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⁴ Leopold A, 1966, 'A Sand Country Almanac' [First Edition 1949] OUP, New York, p132

⁵ Sanguin B, 2007, 'Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos: an Ecological Christianity' Copper House, Woodlake Publishing, British Columbia, p143

⁶ Ibid, p144

Witnessing Christ in the Care of Creation

Selwyn Yeoman, Southern Presbytery

In the late 1980s care of creation was identified by the Presbyterian Church as one of five ways in which the Church bears witness to Jesus Christ. It has been described as one of the five faces of mission. Other Christian traditions have picked up a similar concern, as have the World Council of Churches and the more conservatively orientated Lausanne movement, through its *Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*.

But still others believe this is a distraction from witness and from the heart of the Gospel, wondering what these things have to do with telling the story of Jesus and inviting people into the new life held out to us in his life, death and resurrection. Even among those who sign up to such convictions it is not at all clear that we have worked out what they mean. Although some congregations have initiated a local stream-care or planting project, or a community garden, for the most part care of creation does not feature in our parish life, our review documents or the missional projects which our funding agencies may choose to support.

If a congregation decided it could abandon preaching, teaching, or loving service there would pretty quickly be presbytery intervention, but not, it seems, in regard to care of creation. From the anecdotal evidence I gather, it does not even feature much in our preaching or Baptismal and formation groups, yet that at least is something that we as Ministers of the Word do have control over.

In this article I want to suggest that care of creation is not simply something we do in order to bear witness to something or someone else, that is, as a tactic to be abandoned if it's not working. Rather, care of creation is the mission of Christ and we are called to bear witness to Christ by participation in that mission.

It is the heart of our faith that Jesus Christ is the true image of God, and as the Word of God embodied in the materiality of creation he is also the authentic human being. By his resurrection, understood as God's vindication of his life, Jesus is now declared to be Lord and the inaugurator of the renewed creation. These three confessions concerning Jesus articulate the gospel. All three have significance in relation to the care of creation, but in this article I want to focus upon the confession of Jesus' Lordship.

In Acts we observe that the earliest Christian confession was "Jesus is Lord." In the classical formulation, this is Christ's office of Kingship. To Jesus is attributed the dominion in creation that

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Genesis 1 attributes to human beings. To properly understand our place within the ecology of creation we must learn from the humanity of Jesus. To exercise our power rightly we must learn his exercise of power. Jesus is consistently portrayed as showing this Lordship to be of a servant nature.

At the culmination of his ministry, at the Last Supper, both Luke and John have Jesus explicitly teaching (Luke 22:27), or enacting (John 13:1-15), that his Lordship is one of service, and his followers are to exercise whatever power they have in the same way (see also Matt. 20:24-28, 23:11; Mark 9:35 and 10:42-45). The Johannine story of the foot-washing (John 13:1-17) begins with an extended reflection upon Jesus' identity and self knowledge (John 13:1-5), suggesting that such service is in no way to be regarded as servile, but as a free gift expressive of both Jesus' deepest identity with the Father and his loving purpose for the restoration of all things. A similar movement unfolds in the Philippian Hymn (Phil 2:6-11). Servanthood is the essence of the nature of God.¹

This practice of servanthood is intimately associated with the practice of hospitality, and by these actions Jesus extends his Father's divine hospitality to the disciples. The image is anticipated at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11) and is taken up again in John 14:1-5, and 21:9-14. Murray Rae locates the feeding of the crowd in John 6 as being central to the structure of the gospel and in it we see:

"Jesus' bountiful replenishment of the fruits of land and sea, a renewal, that is, of God's blessing of the earth...the recreation of the conditions of abundant blessing that were evident at the completion of God's work in creation. There is also the suggestion of the heavenly feast hosted by the Lord himself and marking the fulfillment of the purposes of God."²

Genesis 1 portrays an offer of divine hospitality in which deliberate provision is made for all creatures, not only the human ones. Isaiah's visions of the new creation are couched in terms of God's hospitality (Isaiah 25:6, 55:1, 58:14) – including towards all the animal kingdom (Isaiah 65:17-25). Colossians 1, 1 Corinthians 15, Ephesians 1, Romans 8 or Revelation 5 are also passages that anticipate all creatures and all creation together at the table of God.

What Jesus enacts as servant for the disciples is indicative of something done for the whole creation. By the ordering Word and enlivening Spirit, God is always in a disposition of self-giving towards creation, always acting for the creation's well-being and adornment, even to death on the cross, and yet always leaving the creation with sufficient freedom that this sustenance can be abused or ignored. "He came to his own realm, but was not welcomed (John 1:11)" He restores ten, and only one returns in thankfulness (Luke 17:11-19). Judas the betrayer and Peter the denier were both beneficiaries of the Lord's service.

This Lordship expressed as table-service is good news about God and for the troubled world in which we live. It is also a reminder to us that we too are guests, sharing the table of God's bounty with many creatures other than ourselves. What is not appropriate, even for those who may find themselves fearful of the strange company with whom they share the table, is that they trash the place of welcome or abuse the other guests!

And, as those who are empowered by the Spirit to share in this ministry of Christ - this exercise of servant lordship/dominion - we are also called to witness Christ by caring for the whole house and serving the well-being of all these other creatures. In doing that, we also witness to the nature of true humanity.

The second creation story is explicit that the human task is "to serve and to guard" the garden (Gen 2:15). James Lovelock, deviser of the Gaia hypothesis that the whole Earth is one integrated, self-regulating organism, has suggested that we need to see ourselves and all our economic and cultural activities directed towards the role of being "planetary physicians".³ If we are uneasy with the Gaia hypothesis we might note Origen's suggestion that "the whole world should be regarded as some

1 Ridderbos, Herman. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans, 1997. 460. Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John Revised*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B.

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2 Murray Rae, "The Testimony of Works in the Christology of John's Gospel," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, eds. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 303 - 304.

3 Lovelock, James. "The Fallible Concept of Stewardship of the Earth," in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*, ed. R.J. Berry, 106-111. London/ New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006.

To properly understand our place within the ecology of Creation we must learn from the humanity of Jesus.

huge and immense animal, which is kept together by the power and reason of God as by one soul,”⁴ or Athanasius’ “that humanity is to the universe as a toe is to the body”,⁵ and Augustine’s “that God is the soul of the world”.

To serve the well-being of other creatures – our fellow guests – may seem somewhat puzzling, given that some of them seem quite unsympathetic to our well-being. One could think of malarial bugs or guinea worms. Yet Paul reminded his Colossian readers that through Christ all things are held together and have their proper place (Col 2:15ff). Paul does not use the word “ecology”, but the sense of utter inter-relatedness is totally in keeping with the concept. This is the current condition of creation. If it were not true all things would instantly dissolve into nothingness.

This dependence upon Christ is confessed, despite creation being a puzzle. Life here is sustained only because of death. Even Adam and Eve in the garden had vegetables to eat. Not all of dying is a bad thing – witness autumnal leaves or parents passing at a great age in celebratory funeral services. Most patristic theologians regard even animal death as necessary for the continuance of life and simply integral to the way God has made the world. Predatory deaths appear to us as cruel and heartless, yet for the writer of Psalm 104, celebrating the young lions coming out for the hunt and receiving their food from the Lord, even this kind of death does not constitute an insurmountable theological problem.

We who know only the necessary recycling of a carbon-based life cannot imagine life any other way, and are at risk therefore of banishing Christ from creation, which is precisely the early Gnosticism that Paul was confronting in the Colossian letter. But failure of imagination is not a good enough reason to give up on creation. Neither can we imagine the transformation of creation involved in the resurrection of Jesus, but that has become the heart of our proclamation.

The service to which Christ calls us is conditioned by the vision of the Kingdom of God. This vision, with its orientation to God’s eschatological future, saves us on the one hand from concluding that the world as it is, is the best of all possible worlds and we have no call to be involved in any kind of transformation. On the other hand, and far more necessary in our times, it saves us from the conceit that any new scheme for taking more power in the world is always a good thing. The vision is captured in a beautiful expression I once heard attributed to Hans Kung, “The Kingdom of God is creation healed”.

Perhaps the best way to think about serving the well-being of other creatures is not to think about the preservation of individual species – like malarial bugs or Guinea worms - but the preservation of eco-systems. This enlarges the discussion to critical issues associated with resource use and global warming. It is much more in keeping with the holistic vision of passages like Colossians 2, and it is the means by which all things find their proper place. From our cellular mitochondria to the vital bugs in our guts, we too are ecosystems. In fact ecologically rich and diverse environments are healthier, less susceptible to collapse, and support healthier people.⁶ Such people are in turn much less susceptible to many illnesses. For this reason, despite the promises of increased production, we

⁴ Origen, *De Principiis* (2.3)

⁵ Athanasius, *On The Incarnation* (7.42)

⁶ Wibberley, John. “A Framework for Sustainable Agriculture,” in *When Enough is Enough: A Christian Framework for Environmental Sustainability*, ed. R.J. Berry 125-136. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press/Apollos, 2007.

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should not be seduced by the siren-song of multinational seed and chemical corporations whose operations presume vast areas of the Earth under one crop. Quite apart from their ecological fragility, such situations invariably marginalise local people and result in declining health outcomes.⁷ They deprive us of the inspiration to praise that creation has usually engendered in the faithful heart and they deprive both ourselves and God of the other members of the choir, by which the whole creation is joined in worship.

Our congregations are a foretaste of the Kingdom, colonies of Heaven, models of the world to come. We cannot save the world – that is the work of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. But we can witness to the kind of God who is doing this and we can witness to another order than those which frequently abuse power in the earth. We can integrate discipleship with life in the world. Community gardens provide some experience of what reconciliation with each other and the earth might look like. Conservation projects heal wounded places, restore ecological diversity and renew the song of creation. They provide amazing opportunities to connect with communities, involve families and share wisdom inter-generationally. In an environmentally decaying world we have a means to confront fear with hope and mean-ness and menace with love.⁸

In Dunedin the International Christian Conservation movement, A Rocha,⁹ has entered into a partnership with Tirohanga Presbyterian Camp. Together we will bear witness to every school, church and community group which passes through, inviting them to share in conservation planting, riparian repair, lessons in sustainable gardening and encounter with the contemplative life. In the grander scheme we hope to model energy efficient and sustainable buildings. It is early days. We make no bold claims. But such initiatives could, I suggest, transform every church campsite and new building project and many plots of vacant land and the lives of dislocated people. By such care of creation we both witness to and encounter Christ the servant lord of creation.

The second creation story is explicit that the human task is “to serve and to guard” the garden (Gen 2:15)

Author's recommended reading:

If I had money for only one book to help me get into these issues, it would be: Berry, R. J. ed. Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present. London, New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006.

With more money, that is the ministers' book allowance, I would add: Bouma-Prediger, Steve, *For The Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001; McGrath, Alister, *The Re-enchantment of Nature: Science, Religion and the Human Sense of Wonder*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002.

Then I would contact the Hewitson Library for copies of Athanasius Against the Pagans, Augustine on Genesis, and Irenaeus Against the Heresies.

⁷ Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett. *The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. London: Allen Lane / Penguin, 2009.

⁸ Wirzba, Norman. "Mark 10: Care for the Plot of God's Earth Given to Us Along with Support of Our Local Economies," in *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, ed. The Rutba House, 137-148. Eugene, OR: Cascade/Wipf and Stock, 2005.

⁹ Harris, Peter. *Kingfisher's Fire*. Oxford and Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2008.

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Climate Change - Our Greatest Moral Challenge?

Kevin Tate [FRSNZ], Central Presbytery

"Natural" Climatic Change

Life has existed on Earth for about 4.5 billion years, and during this time the earth's climate has changed many times due to a complex interplay of many natural processes such as changes in the earth's orbit and tilt in relation to the sun; solar and volcanic activity; and natural releases of greenhouse gases (trace gases in the atmosphere like carbon dioxide and methane that absorb heat).

There have been times when the earth has been very much hotter than today and other periods when ice covered much of the earth (glacial periods, or ice ages). During these switches between glacial and inter-glacials (warm periods), temperatures and the concentrations of atmospheric trace gases like carbon dioxide (a potent greenhouse gas) have fluctuated in close synchrony. It is now clear that these natural changes in climate largely drove successive human migrations across the globe during the past 120,000 years.

Over the past 10,000 years, human civilisations developed as the climate warmed after the ice retreated. The work of 19th century scientists including Sven Arrhenius showed that carbon dioxide gas absorbs heat (hence the term greenhouse gas). During the past 10,000 years, carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (eg. methane, nitrous oxide, water) have helped to keep the earth's temperature about 30 degrees warmer than it would have been if they were absent from the atmosphere. In fact, without them the earth would have been covered in ice, severely limiting the development of life.

Even during this so called Goldilocks Period, natural climate change between 1500-1800bp (before present) was the main driver of large scale human crises including economic downturns and conflicts.

Humanly Induced Climatic Change

So, if the climate has always been changing, why do we need to be concerned today? The answer to this question is complex, but put simply, during the period up to about 1800bp, concentrations of greenhouse gases remained quite stable, and were very much lower than they are today.

The onset of the industrial revolution about 1750bp marked a major expansion in human populations around the globe, and the associated expansion in agriculture and deforestation began to increase the atmospheric concentrations of these gases. This effect of humans on the atmosphere is sometimes called the "enhanced greenhouse effect". These increases were rapidly accelerated when new energy sources – coal, followed later by oil – began to power industry, unlocking carbon stored for millennia to fuel even more rapid human population as well as economic growth.

These developments have brought many millions of people out of poverty, but in the process, have raised greenhouse gas concentrations to levels not seen on earth for about 3-5 million years. For example the last time atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations reached the current level of 400 ppm (parts per million), forests extended to the arctic ocean which was almost ice free, and sea levels were many metres above what they are today.

At both poles ice is now melting at an unprecedented rate, and most glaciers around the world are in rapid retreat. Globally, human activity has now overtaken natural processes to become the major driver of environmental change, and so the current epoch has become known as "the Anthropocene".

Extreme Weather Events

There are many other ominous signs including depleted fish stocks, deforestation, loss of productive soils and clean water, which together show how much we have pushed the earth's systems beyond sustainable limits. Our burgeoning greenhouse gas emissions have trapped so much heat in the oceans and land that we are now experiencing major changes in weather around the globe.

These changes come at a cost, both economically and in human terms. For example, the heat wave in Europe in 2003 resulted in 70,000 deaths. Last year, the economic cost of the major drought in the USA alone cost over \$US 80b. The recent numerous hurricanes in the mid-west USA have also caused death and widespread destruction, as has the recent widespread flooding in Europe and Asia. Even our drought last summer has been costly in terms of farmers' lives and livelihoods. The overall economic costs are ongoing but will probably exceed \$NZ 1b.

Impact on Human Societies

These events are increasing in both intensity and frequency, causing the global insurance industry to state in late 2010 that "the data is clear: weather-related disasters have become significantly more frequent and more extreme in recent decades and this trend will not cease anywhere in the mid-term future. Ambitious action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions remains critical in order to keep climate change within boundaries not dangerous for human development". They also demanded public-private action on climate change adaptation in developing countries. This is because these countries are being most affected and are least able to adapt.

In our own region, the island states of Tuvalu and Kiribati are two examples where sea level rise and associated storm surges are causing increasingly seriously affects on infrastructure and food production. Wealthy countries by contrast are spending millions to meet these changes. Examples are the Thames barrage in the UK, and huge investment in the Netherlands to shore up sea defences.

So, we are now over a decade into the new millennium, and the irrefutable scientific evidence compels us to ask not whether the climate is changing due to increasing greenhouse gas emissions but rather, what can we do about it and whether we should bear the costs now or later. It is now inevitable that future generations will have to deal with global warming and other consequences of our unwillingness to "care for creation". This is why leading climate change scientists like James Hansen consider climate change to be the biggest moral challenge we face this century.

A recent conference in Europe concluded that it is inevitable that in one or two generations most people on earth will experience water shortages. And yet we frequently hear scorn being poured on those who plead for action for environmental protection. This flies in the face of what the science is telling us about the destructive path we are on, and devalues the environment in the name of progress and economic growth. Indeed, around the world governments actually subsidise fossil fuels and their damaging environmental effects by about US\$400-500 billion each year. Why? So those of us fortunate enough to live in developed (rich) countries can continue to support our profligate lifestyles. If all 7 billion of us enjoyed similar lifestyles, we would need the resources of more than three earths!

Practical Responses

So, in the absence of political leadership, "*what can we do as individuals to avert the coming crisis?*" And, secondly, "*what role can the church have?*" Framing the first question more succinctly. Is there a better way to be better off? We can begin by consuming less and becoming more careful about what we consume. David Robinson, in a recent book entitled *The Poised Century*, answers this first question with a firm "Yes" – provided we develop a new economic system that values who we are, over what we have, and that values being, over accumulation of goods. He goes on to insist we must establish a new prosperity that meets the needs of all citizens, not just the wealthy minority.

Here I refer to Ian Harris's thought-provoking article¹: "A World on the Brink-and God?" in which he asks whether in the midst of hope and fear, peril and opportunity, our Christian heritage has anything useful or distinctive to offer us? He argues that it does, so long as we are willing to expand our understanding of religion to encompass a new story of creation, and accept the challenges we face, and the new responsibilities that this century presents.

Caring for creation demands that we live today as if tomorrow mattered. A modern understanding of God within our new story of creation, coupled with a resolve to live lightly in partnership with nature, has much to offer to a world on the brink.

¹ Harris, Ian, (2013), Music in the Air, Summer / Autumn 2013. Publisher: John Thornley, 15 Oriana Place, Palmerston North)

Caring for creation demands that we live today as if tomorrow mattered.”

Two Key Non-Governmental Organisations

Two organisations leading the way are *A Rocha*, and the *World Wildlife Fund's* (WWF) Sacred Earth programme. Firstly, *A Rocha* is an international environmental program with a Christian ethos. *A Rocha*, meaning “the rock” in Portuguese, was founded in 1983 by Anglican minister Peter Harris and his wife Miranda. It is interdenominational, governed by a board of trustees with wide qualifications in life sciences, sustainable development, and financial and risk management. *A Rocha* aims to protect the environment through local, community-based conservation, scientific research, and environmental education, and they have “a track record of successes”. *A Rocha* is now working in 19 countries, including New Zealand, and has a strong branch in Palmerston North.

In the second example, the WWF’s “Sacred Earth program” is building a global dialogue with religious leaders and faith institutions on ways to develop and enrich societal aspirations, values, and lifestyles that are ecologically sustainable and spiritually principled. They support the work of faithful Christian congregations that seek to become better stewards of creation, of Buddhist monasteries that practice compassion toward the Earth as part of their Bodhisattva vow, and of Muslim imams who see the protection of nature as a trust from Allah.

What these organisations are doing in the 21st century would have been very familiar to the ancients millennia ago, who understood how much their lives depended on being good stewards of the land. This is clearly evident in the following writing in Sanskrit from over 4000 years ago: “Upon this handful of soil our survival depends. Husband it and it will grow our food, our fuel, and our shelter and surround us with beauty. Abuse it and the soil will collapse and die, taking man with it”.

The need to urgently develop a universally accepted strategy to sustain Earth’s life support system against the stresses imposed by us is one of the greatest research, policy and personal challenges we have ever faced. Time is running out, so will we respond to the challenge?

Knox Dunedin seeks a new minister

KNOX CHURCH is an inclusive church in the heart of the city of Dunedin, New Zealand with a long tradition of astute preaching and liturgically based worship, and a strong desire to serve the city. Choral music is a strong and integral part of our worship and ministry.

It seeks a minister who is energetic and able to relate to a wide cross-section of people, including children. This position would suit an experienced Minister of Word and Sacrament who is able to lead and inspire the people of God.

**Expressions of interest should be sent by 30th August 2013 to the Convener,
the Rev Graeme Munro, Telephone (03) 473 8911 or Email graemedmunro@xtra.co.nz.**

A Creation Liturgy

Graham Redding, Southern Presbytery

Scripture Sentence: Psalm 150:1, 6

Leader: Praise the Lord!
Praise God in the sanctuary;
praise God in the open spaces.

All: **Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!**

Opening Hymn/Song:

Recommended: Either "All you works of God" (*Church Hymnary 4*, #151)
or "All the ends of the earth" (*As One Voice, Vol. 1*, #76)

Prayer of Praise and Confession:

Almighty God, Creator, the morning is yours, rising into the fullness of the day;
the day is yours, dipping into evening;
The vibrant tussock, the scent of pohutukawa, the tang of seaweed, all are yours.
Gladly we live in this garden of your creating.
But creation is not enough.
Always in the beauty:
lurking violence and the foreshadowing of decay.
Spring lambs, so soon to be led off to slaughter;
stoats and possums devouring baby kiwi and kea.
Nature lush and green, but also red and scarred,
subject to tooth and claw,
groaning under the weight of human greed and exploitation.
In the garden also, always the thorn.
Creation is not enough.
Almighty God, Redeemer,
the sap of life in our bones and being is yours,
instilling in us a reverence for life,
drawing us towards a life of praise.
But always in the beauty, the tang of sin,
corrupting our relationships with one another,
with the environment and with you.
In the garden that is each of us, always the thorn.
Yet all are yours as we yield them again to you.
Not only this wondrous universe and the God-given dignity of human life,
but also our sin, even our livid rebellions and putrid sins.
You have taken them all away and nailed them to the Cross!
Our redemption is enough; and we are free.
Holy Spirit, Enlivener,
breathe on us, fill us with life anew.
In your new creation, already upon us,
breaking through, groaning and travailing,
Till that day when the wolf lies down with the lamb,
and even the thorn shall fade,
and the whole earth shall cry "Glory" at the marriage feast of the Lamb of God.
In this new creation, already upon us,
fill us with life anew.
We pray in the name of the One whom the scriptures declare
to be the firstborn of all creation,
in whom all things hold together,
and through whom all things have been reconciled:
Jesus Christ the Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn/Song:

Recommended: Either "There shall be life and love" (*Hope is our Song* 134)
or "Spirit blowing through creation" (*As One Voice*, Vol. 2, 51)

Bible Readings**Sermon****Profession of Faith** (Based on Colossians 1:15-20):

We believe in Jesus Christ,
the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.
In him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
things visible and invisible.
He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.
In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through his blood on the cross
all things have been reconciled,
whether on earth or in heaven.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
wind of God, breathe of life:
active in creation,
active in the renewal of creation,
transforming us into the image of Christ,
shaping us for life with Christ
enabling us to follow in the way of Christ.
In the power of the Holy Spirit,
we commit ourselves afresh to proclaiming Christ crucified and risen,
striving for reconciliation, justice and peace,
and caring for his creation. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession (from the NZ Prayer Book):

Triune God of grace,
creator and reconciler of all things,
we thank you for your gifts in creation:
for our world:
the heavens tell of your glory;
for our land, its beauty and its resources,
for the rich heritage we enjoy.

We pray:
for those who make decisions about the resources of the earth,
that we may use your gifts responsibly;
for those who work on the land and sea, in city and in industry,
that all may enjoy the fruits of their labours and marvel at your creation;
for artists, scientists and visionaries,
that through their work we may see creation afresh.

Silence

We thank you for giving us life;
and for the rich diversity of life on this planet.

We pray:
for all who through their own or others' actions
are deprived of fullness of life,

for prisoners, refugees, the handicapped, and all who are sick;
for those in politics, medical science, social and relief work, and for your church,
for all who seek to bring life to others.

We thank you that you have called us to celebrate your creation.
Give us reverence for life in your world.

We thank you for your redeeming love;
may your word and sacrament
strengthen us to love as you love us.
 In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

Communion Liturgy:

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,
the Lord's glory covers the earth
as the waters cover the sea.
 The trees of the field clap their hands,
 the birds of the air sing songs of praise,
and if we should fail to voice creation's praise,
even the rocks and stones would cry out!
 And so, we lift up our hearts, and we lift up our voices
to offer thanksgiving and adoration to the Lord,
the Creator of all.

Blessed are you, Sovereign of the Universe,
 for from seeds sown into the earth
 you have given us the gift of bread to nourish us.
 At Jesus' last meal with his friends, before facing the cross,
 our Lord took bread, blessed it and broke it.
 Then he passed it among them saying:
This is my body, broken for you.
Take and eat, and do this to remember me.

The bread is broken in the sight of the people.

Blessed are you, Sovereign of the Universe,
 for from grapes which grow ripe on the vine,
 you have given us the gift of wine to refresh and heal us.
 At Jesus' last meal with his friends before facing the cross,
 our Lord took the cup of wine and blessed it.
 Then he passed it among them saying:
This is my blood shed for you.
Take and drink, and do this to remember me.

The cup of wine is held up in the sight of the people.

And now we come to your table again, Jesus,
 mindful of how you laid your life down
 so that we and creation could be born anew;
 mindful of how you took your life up again,
 so that we and creation could be filled with life abundant;
 mindful that we cannot earn this privilege,
 but that it is your grace which beckons us,
 and your grace which ensures that all creation may be one and whole.
 May your Spirit work in these fruits of earth,
 so that they may become for us a sharing in Christ's body and blood.
 May your Spirit work in we, who are children of earth,
 so that we may be transformed into Christ's body,
 carrying his life, his care, and his salvation to all creation. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

The sacrament is shared

Thanksgiving and Sending Out:

In this meal, we have remembered
 that the whole creation is held in the hand of God,
that the whole creation is filled with the life of God;
 the whole creation will be renewed according to the promise of God
and that the whole creation reflects the glory of God
from eternity to eternity.

So now we go from this place back into the world,
to proclaim the saving message of God,
in word and action, in challenge and compassion, to all creation.
 And we go in the confidence that comes from knowing that God's infinite love, **Christ's limitless grace, and the Holy Spirit's relentless companionship, always encompass us, Amen.**

Hymn/Song:

Recommended: Either "Love divine all loves excelling" (Charles Wesley)
 or "Let all creation dance" (CH4 149)

A Celtic Blessing:

Deep peace of the running wave to you,
 deep peace of the flowing air to you,
 deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
 deep peace of the shining stars to you,
 deep peace of the Son of Peace to you. **Amen.**

Commentary:

The liturgy begins with two verses from Psalm 150, which is a call to praise God. There is a sense here of the whole of creation being called to join in a cacophony of praise to its Creator, in much the same manner as Psalm 148, which depicts sun and moon, mountains and hills, wild animals and cattle, men and women, all joining together to praise the name of the Lord. There is something hugely expansive about this vision of worship. It suggests that a key aspect of worship is to give voice to creation's praise.

This is reinforced by the opening hymn or song. Two options are recommended. The first option, "All you works of God", is a modern rendition of Psalm 148 and the second option, "All the ends of the earth", is a lively song based on Psalm 98,

The opening prayer of praise and confession is an adaptation of a prayer originally penned by George McLeod, the founder of the Iona Community in Scotland. At the same time as it celebrates the beauty of creation, the prayer acknowledges that creation itself is not enough, for creation is fallen and in need of redemption. It yearns for the day when all creation will share fully in the redemption that has been wrought in and through the Cross at Calvary. The prayer expresses the Christian conviction that creation and redemption are two sides of the one coin. We cannot talk about one without referring to the other, and both are grounded in the person and work of Christ.

The prayer is brought to a natural conclusion through the singing of another hymn or song. Again, there are two recommended options. The first, "There shall be life and love", is a modern New Zealand hymn by Bill Wallace. It gives vivid expression to the hope for the restoration and healing of creation, with the cross being "the sign of the death that brings new birth." The second option, "Spirit blowing through creation", constitutes a prayer for us to share in the Holy Spirit's renewal of creation.

The Profession of Faith, which follows the sermon, is based primarily on Colossians 1:15-20. The significance of this text is that it places Christ at the heart of creation. As we talk about Christ, though, we are bound also to talk about the work of the Spirit. The second clause of the Profession of Faith does precisely this, drawing on a number of biblical passages, including Genesis 1, Romans 8 and Galatians 5. The Profession of Faith concludes with a brief pledge to strive for justice, reconciliation and peace, and to care for God's creation.

The communion liturgy seeks to pull all the threads of the service together into an act of participation in the messianic banquet that God intends for all creation. It is a banquet at which Christ is simultaneously the Host and the One upon whom we feed, the Lamb of God. It is a sign of God's new creation unfolding in the midst of the old, with transformative effect.

The communion concludes with a hymn. Again, two options are recommended. The first, "Love divine all loves excelling", is a well-known hymn by Charles Wesley, the last verse of which yearns for God's new creation to be completed. The second option, "Let all creation dance", is a modern hymn by Brian Wren. It constitutes a celebration both of creation's diversity and of its unity in Christ:

The service concludes with a lovely Celtic blessing, often used by the Iona Community. It is suggestive of the deep and abiding harmony of creation with the One whom we know as the Son of Peace.

Ecological Christianity: A Biblical and Theological Perspective¹

Graham Redding, Principal, Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership

In Genesis 1, God pronounces the goodness of creation prior to the creation of humankind, which means that its goodness is not related to its usefulness for human beings. It has an intrinsic goodness. The question is: what is it good for? What is its purpose?

The answer is found in the creation of the Sabbath (Genesis. 2:2-3). Creation is meant to show forth its Creator's glory.

Within this purpose, human beings have a two-fold responsibility:

1. As priests of creation: Psalm 98 presents a poetic image of rivers and mountains clapping their hands and singing for joy before the Lord. There is sense in this and other psalms of creation sharing in the act of praise which is ascribed to human beings. By implication, it can be said that we who are made only "a little lower than God" and "crowned with honour and glory" (Psalm 8) are called to give voice to creation's praise of its Creator.
2. As stewards of creation: We are given dominion over creation (Genesis. 1:26; Psalm. 8:6). Dominion does not mean domination. From a Christian perspective, dominion is defined by the lordship of Christ, which is that of servanthood and humility as opposed to self-assertion and coercion. Usefulness must always be tempered by stewardship.

Biblically, the roots of the ecological crisis lie in the act of primordial disobedience of Adam and Eve. The consequence of disordered relations in the Genesis narrative is expulsion from the garden. This suggests two things:

1. Thereafter, the backdrop for human conduct is an earth – that for all its intrinsic goodness and possibility – is cursed, and the nature of human work is no longer described in terms of vocation but rather of toil (Genesis. 3:17). As such, the solution to the ecological crisis is found not merely in a series of practical steps to solve certain problems, but rather in the healing of those disordered relations. This will involve the recovery of a Sabbath theology, with its emphasis on rest from work and use of land, harmony and worship.
2. We cannot return to the Garden. The primary image of the Book of Revelation is not of a garden but of a city – a new Jerusalem. A biblical ecological ethic does not regard science and industrial development as evil because they tamper with the natural order which the garden-image represents. The biblical emphasis is not on a return to a mythical paradise, but rather sustainable development and the serving of God's vision.

The Apostle Paul, talks about creation groaning in labour pains. The image here is not merely that of pain associated with suffering, but rather of pain associated with birth. The question is: what is being born?

For Paul, it is a new creation. For John (author of Revelation), it is a new heaven and a new earth. Whatever the terminology, the impression is of a new reality emerging from the old – related but distinct. As far as the New Testament is concerned, this new reality has begun in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:15-20 refers to Jesus as the firstborn of all creation – all things on heaven and on earth have been created through him and for him. In him, all things have been reconciled and hold together. This is a remarkable claim, which prompts certain questions:

1. What does it mean to think about Jesus not simply as the Saviour of human beings, but as one in whom creation finds both its purpose and its restoration?
2. If, in Jesus Christ, a new creation has begun, how are we to understand this new creation, and its relationship to the old creation?
3. How are, or should, our responses to the above questions be embodied and expressed in the life and mission of the Church?

The extent to which Christianity is truly ecological in character will depend on the responses that are made (and not made) to the above questions.

¹ The following reflection was first published as an introduction to a Caring for Creation booklet published by the Presbyterian Church in 2012

Church in Recession

Ray Coster, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

How do you lead a church through a time of recession? This is a question that I have been challenging myself with and also asking some groups of ministers when I talk with them. How do we together lead a church through a time of recession? A recession in a church can leave us feeling rudderless, as if we are blindly groping for answers in a dark room. Let me use this *Candour* article to open the discussion wider amongst all ministers.

In my earlier days I studied maths. QED (*quod erat demonstrandum*) were the initials our teacher taught us put at the end of a maths problem, meaning we have shown what was to be demonstrated, or we have found the answer. The problem has been solved. How I wish I could do that to my opening question above!

When faced with a problem many people of my era want to find the answer. We feel God has led us and been with us when we find the solution. As I talk with younger generations it seems to me they are far more interested with asking the right questions than finding the right answer. They seem to be just as comfortable with ambiguity and believe they encounter God as they toss questions around and walk away without a definitive answer but an avenue to follow.

Is this where we are with our Church?

As I understand the ways of humanity, when any organisation is in decline or recession we do a number of things. We tend to constrict. We reduce the information we are prepared to accept. We reduce communication. We centralise – we form the wagons into a circle!

Let me throw a few thoughts into the discussion. I don't think they are necessarily answers about leadership in recession but, like my younger colleagues believe, may we all encounter God in the discussion.

1. **Telling the truth.** The first important thing about leadership is facing the facts. Telling the truth means being honest about our circumstances, no matter how difficult it may be. It means admitting and accepting the full gravity of reality. Being transparent and honest about our situation brings down our defences and allows God a window of opportunity in which to work.

As a church we have a little over 400 parish units. We have about 250 ministers serving these parishes and in chaplaincies. This number continues to drop each year. We have fewer parishes looking for full-time ordained ministry than probably at any time in the last century. A number of our provincial city churches are facing challenging times.

Many of the faithful people who have been giving sterling service to our church for decades are telling me, "I'm tired." They want rest but feel they have "no-one to pass the baton on to". In some areas of New Zealand it will be painful as these people step down and take their rest. As a leader in our church most of you will be well aware of these facts and could add to the list.

But, as I am finding in every part of the country, this is not the full story...

2. **Counting our blessings.** An important part of leadership in time of recession is to count and acknowledge our blessings. God has not walked away from the Presbyterian Church! I have yet to visit a town or city and not hear stories of God's wonderful and amazing work amongst us. I recently attended a two day resourcing event in our Northern Presbytery. I could write a small book with the different stories of what people, churches and other parts of our Presbyterian family are doing to advance the Kingdom. Each night I go to bed thanking God for all the good things I have heard in our Church around New Zealand. In a time of recession we need to encourage one another with these stories.

When we're faced with the list of all our blessings, we realise that most of the things we worry about never come to pass – they never even happen. And all those monsters in our minds start to shrink in comparison to the sheer greatness of the blessings and gifts we have been given.

3. **Blessing others.** My experience in the Kingdom of God is that there is no better way to produce fresh life than to bless someone else. When times are tough it is natural to turn inwards and

think about self-survival. While this may be the natural response I believe it is the counter-intuitive response of blessing others that helps more. If each church leadership asked, "how can we help another church in their time of need?" I wonder what would happen to our denomination. What would help them feel blessed, special, and give them the sense that everything is going to be okay? I'll freely admit I'm not always good on this point, but my goal is to grow better with time and practice.

4. **Vision.** When a church is facing decline its leaders must create a new vision around which followers can gather and adopt as their own values. This is classic discipleship. It's what Jesus did. It's what Nelson Mandela did. It's what Martin Luther King did. Under siege or in time of decline they created a vision around which the people could say, "I believe what the leader is saying". This creates a moral attribute. The leader should be the instigator of the vision, but the owner of the vision must be the people. Leaders cannot implement or outwork a vision by themselves, they must work with people.

When a church is in decline it will suffer from a form of institutional vision rather than having an entrepreneurial vision. We need the latter. If we as ministers don't do this then we are no more than a manager of the church. I believe that God has called us to be leaders who create a new future that the people can inherit.

5. **Releasing new life.** As a Church the main way we know how to place a person with a call of God and a life filled with passion for Jesus, is in a parish context. I wonder if we as a Church need to be thinking with a different mind-set. What would happen if we trained up some of these passionate, skilled people (who we have many of in the Church) and set them free into new forms of ministry. If you ask me what this will look like, my answer is, "I don't know!" But I have a vision of what could be.
6. **Have the courage to make hard decisions.** Somewhere, sometime, someone has to make some hard decisions. How this happens in our context I am not sure! But, it needs to be done in a way that people can support, even if they do not like the outcome. There must be a good vision around which they can gather, and for the greater cause I believe the majority of people will accept when these hard decisions are made.
7. **Prayer.** And finally (is seven the complete number!) prayer. Nothing of value in the economy of God's Kingdom will come about without prayer. My colleagues in ministry, I believe it's time for some concerted, united prayer for our church.

We cannot choose whether or not we will encounter times of recession, but we can choose how we respond in those periods.

Let me finish on a **word of hope**. As I look at the stories in the bible of God's people under siege or during a time of recession God raised up leaders – Daniel, Hezekiah ... - who turned to him and gave their people hope. This is my challenge to us as ministers of the Church. Let's start talking about it and trust God to lead us.

Challenging Mission for an Energetic Pastor

(Is God calling you to the Bay of Plenty?)

St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Te Puke is a warm-hearted, charismatic family church catering for a wide range of ages and ethnicities. We have a focus on mission both local and overseas. We are looking for a full-time minister who will be a team leader to encourage, facilitate and extend the gifting's and ministries already functioning in the church.

A parish profile and job description is available on request from the nominator
Rev Jim Wallace, Email wallacej@wave.co.nz or Phone 07 548 2458

What are You Afraid of?

Martin Baker, Assembly Executive Secretary

About two years ago a good family friend left a senior executive role in a large New Zealand company to develop a mentoring and coaching business focused on meeting the needs of people more or less like herself – middle aged, successful in their careers, but wondering “where to from here?”

Her new venture has gone really well. Some of her clients are sent to her from corporations wanting to provide the kind of support that will help their employees grow and develop in their organisations. Others are people who have plateaued in their jobs and want help in developing new career paths. Still others have been made redundant and want to gain clarity about their options.

Our friend has no particular barrow to push, nor would she describe herself as a “church-going Christian”. But she does tell me about how many of the people she sees feel a profound sense of loss or emptiness. How they look to a future that seems to have little in the way of challenge or excitement. How many say, one way or another, “is this all there is?”. She often asks that old question: “if money was no problem, what new choices would you make about your life?” She has found that most people she sees struggle to even imagine a different future for themselves, no matter what their financial circumstances, outside of some minor variation of their professionally successful, but, on their own admission, far too predictable lives.

I am no psychologist, nor do I find great benefit in drawing some triumphalist theological or moral conclusions from scenarios like this. However, after speaking with my friend, and then reflecting on many conversations I have been having over these last months, I wonder what is it that makes it so hard to imagine different futures for ourselves and our congregations and Church?

I love the affirmation that God’s very first act is one of creation. That as resurrection people we live lives not defined or dependent on past contingencies. That the newness in our Scriptures is not about improvements or progress from the past, but is really about something so extraordinarily transformative that it changes everything about how we view ourselves, the past, present and future.

No matter how well the Church was doing in the 1950s, whatever was happening contained the seeds that saw our Church’s support, influence and presence devastated in the following decades. A large national staff, presbyteries with many eager volunteers, and literally hundreds more ministers than we have today, could not address the factors that saw our church membership plummet by 70percent in the 60s through to the 90s.

Though it may be drawing too long a bow, my mentoring friend would say that in her experience those most inclined to blame other things or people for their current situation are often furthest from examining their own selves and the accuracy of their perceptions of the world around them.

Neither you nor I would be doing what we do now if we saw the future of our Church as hopeless or irrelevant. I would also always want to acknowledge the commitment and hope of our saints and those who have given, and give, so much of their lives to our Church’s mission and ministry.

But when I ask people how we can address the challenges we face, they often answer in ways to do with improving what we do now: better preaching, more effective discipleship programmes, greater organisational efficiencies and so on. Such views are born out in a quick survey of what churches are spending large amounts of money on right now: building strengthening, and things like new kitchens, foyers, toilet blocks, hall acoustics and flooring,. All things that may be necessary and practical, but behind much of this thinking is the feeling that, “if we do this, then somehow the future will be different from the past”.

Not so long ago I attended a course being run by a person whose job is to manage the human resource issues for organisations going through significant change. He had found from this experience in talking to groups of people most affected by change, that one of the questions most

likely to open up conversation and help address concerns, was to ask them: "what are you afraid of?". Sounds quite Biblical to me! At times when change leadership is so important, acknowledging and speaking to people's fears and anxieties might be a very good place to start.

I know how difficult it can be, especially given the economic models that support most of us in ministry, to both do the job you are doing for your congregation really well, and, at the same time, speak about some future which is different from how things are now. How do we make decisions now in anticipation of a congregation that may not even exist?

This *Candour* has an ecological theme. Perhaps the most important message we have to bring for our societies today is that fullness of life is not found in the increasing consumption or accumulations of resources. Fullness of life for us is found in relationship with the God revealed in Jesus. Resurrection life, if it is to mean anything, means that the future will look quite different from what the past has looked like for ourselves and our Church. It seems to me, that in our scriptures, at the most important times of revelation and change, things can be both fearful and hopeful at the same time.

East Taieri Church

Associate Pastor

East Taieri Church (Dunedin) is seeking an experienced Pastor to join its ministry leadership team. The Associate Pastor is a senior staff in a large and vibrant Presbyterian church, which actively engages with its surrounding communities in God's mission. The full-time role will have particular responsibility for building teams and teaching and equipping the body of Christ for pastoral care and discipleship. The role is open to both lay and ordained Pastors. Demonstrated experience in building and leading teams is desirable.

**For an application pack
please contact:**

ED Ablett-Hampson
Email: ed@etchurch.co.nz
Phone: 03 489 6308

Applications close Monday 22 July



The Theological Education of the Ministry: Soundings in the British Reformed and Dissenting Traditions

By Alan P. F. Sell

Reviewed by Graeme Ferguson, Northern Presbytery

Alan Sell, who served for a time as theological secretary of the WARC and who taught in Manchester and Wales, has indulged himself in retirement, writing a very readable account of the thinking of several theologians who helped form ministry in the reformed tradition in Great Britain and whose contribution should not be forgotten.

It may come as a surprise that the English dissenting tradition is as angular and stubborn today as it has been through the years in shaping the Church. Sell, as an unrepentant Congregationalist, knows the ins and outs of this history well. He has worked with the theologians who shaped ministry in the last fifty years. He has the patience to track through some of the more tortuous paths of dissent both in England and Scotland and celebrates several churchmen who are not widely remembered.

He begins with Caleb Ashworth and the dissenting academy he set up in Daventry. This sets the tone for remembering the costs involved in bearing witness to the faith outside the mainstream of English church life.

His chapter on Scottish religious philosophy in the later nineteenth century is a sharp reminder of how effectively and fully Scottish theologians engaged in the intellectual debates of the day. Theological professors such as A.C. Fraser, Robert Flint, A.B. Bruce, James Iverach, and others, came out of the realist tradition of the Scottish Enlightenment. They were committed apologists for the faith, developing forms of knowing that gave an assured intellectual basis for strong faith. Their books were found on the shelves of many New Zealand ministers who followed these debates closely.

His chapter on John Oman of Cambridge not only traces his formidable philosophical contribution to personalist modes of knowing God but also has a fascinating segment on Oman's church background in the secessionist groups of the islands of northern Scotland. Oman is an Orcadian who for all his life retained that mystical spirituality of the northern lights. I was glad to see that Sell added the story about Oman's portrait which hangs in the dining hall at Westminster College. One person asked the artist if the sitter's face was that of a fisherman; another suggested a philosopher, and a third that he had the face of a saint. The artist was content that he had captured Oman's heart.

In writing about N.H.G. Robinson and Geoffrey Nuttall, Sell speaks about people he knew and valued. Robinson was an ethicist in St Andrews, a careful scholar committed to clarity and precision in developing his ideas. Sell develops a set of theses to encapsulate Robinson's thinking. Nuttall was an angular and difficult church historian of English dissent who taught in London and with whom Sell had a long friendship. Not only did Nuttall not suffer fools, but he was also an authority on Puritanism and dissent. Both men influenced a generation of students to value sound scholarship and appreciate the richness and depth of lively faith.

This book needed some strong editing. In trying to ensure that each scholar could speak for himself, Sell quotes extensively. There are some personal interjections which may be endearing but which read as self-justifying. A good editor would have picked up infelicities of language and dates that wobbled into the wrong century. Also, the bibliographies are far too long. But the book is well worth persevering with as a fascinating study of people – with their foibles, personal loves and hates, and passion for sound scholarship – who influenced generations of people serving in ministry.

Alan P. F. Sell, The Theological Education of the Ministry: Soundings in the British Reformed and Dissenting Traditions (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick Publications, 2013). ISBN 13: 978-1-62032-593-3; 328pp

The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World

By Daniel M. Bell Jr

Reviewed by Bruce Hamill, Southern Presbytery

The Economy of Desire is basically a critique of capitalism. However, in many ways it breaks new ground in clear and compelling ways and therefore deserves a full account. Unlike most of this genre, it is a theological critique and in support of this critique it locates economic issues within the broader cultural patterns of desire formation. Bell draws on the work of two French Marxists, Foucault and Deleuze, in order to open our imagination to this broader location for today's capitalist economics of neo-liberalism.

In many ways the early chapters on Foucault and Deleuze are not essential to the argument of the book; however, they set the scene for a comparison that Bell wants to make between the implicit (and sometimes explicit) theology of the neo-liberal vision and the explicit theology of the Christian one. In so locating our economic practices, the Marxist thinkers also remind us of a blind-spot within capitalism; namely, the way in which our system not only responds to desire, but also forms it and (as Bell argues) distorts it in what is effectively a totalitarianism of the market.

The core of Bell's project turns on the way he locates his critique of the market. As he puts it, the core question is not "Does capitalism work?"(ie. Does it reduce poverty?) but, even if it does work "What work does it do?" At this point, Bell is not as clear as I would like him to be. He appears to be saying that in some sense capitalism does work and is productive. However, the debate on its success in alleviating poverty is inconclusive and possibly unavoidably so. What is clear is that no matter how successful it is, it ought, nevertheless, to be rejected on theological grounds.

Bell's account of the theology of capitalism comes in three parts. The first deals with theological anthropology, the second with theology proper, and the third with the nature of the good life.

In the first of these parts, capitalist anthropology is defined by six "marks", the first four of which deal with the kind of human being (*homo economicus*) produced by capitalist practices, and the final two describe the mode of relations in a capitalist society. *Homo economicus* is fundamentally (i) an individual (autonomous, self-creating and self-owning), (ii) whose freedom is "formal and negative" (freedom *from* rather than *for*), (iii) who is quintessentially driven to maximise self-interest, and (iv) whose desire is insatiable. Social relations for this capitalist individual are thus defined by (v) the "agony of competition" and therefore all cooperation is on the basis of contractual relations and obligations beyond the contract have no force. This reduction effects any purported moral obligation of neighbourliness between, for example, producer and consumer, and is reinforced in the globalised division of labour. Finally, (vi) justice is strictly "personal or commutative", serving the terms of the voluntary contracts which define social relations. In other words, beyond this there is no such thing as social justice.

The second more properly theological foundation of capitalism has to do with creation. God did not create enough. Scarcity is God's providential ordering within which the battle and creativity of capitalism emerge. Scarcity conditions the fear which drives the insatiability of desire. Bell then goes on to argue that many theological defenders of capitalism make its implicit theology explicit when they describe the corporation (a despised and suffering servant) as mediator of the well-being of humanity and Adam Smith as the prophet of the new age.

Finally, Bell asks about the nature of a "life well lived" according to capitalism. Under the conditions of scarcity, argues Bell, it is a matter of survival by means of (i) distinguishing oneself from others and thus gaining recognition, and (ii) producing and consuming more. In these tasks the wealthy and the corporations play a leading role. Bell summarises the capitalist soteriology:

"The individual is saved by acquiring more. More income results in more choices, which leads to greater satisfaction... Together the wealthy and the corporation function as a kind of means of grace, generating and then spreading wealth."

The second crucial turning point in his argument is his defence, not of socialism but of church as the alternative to capitalism. He defines church, for these purposes as:

"A Spirit empowered economy of desire, one that functions as a kind of therapy, healing desire of its capitalist distortions and enacting the divine gift economy."

As in his earlier discussion of capitalism, the theological framework ends up changing the question. What other world might be possible is not a matter of answering the question as to "What we can do?" but rather the question, "What God is doing in the world?" The theological response hangs on the orthodox Christian conviction that God is indeed at work in the present redeeming the world. We live in the overlap between the "now" and the "not yet" of Christian salvation.

Before spelling out the shape of this alternative, Bell spends a chapter defending Christianity against its critics. Here he picks up again his engagement with atheist and Marxist theorists, Deleuze and Foucault, who see Christianity not so much as a source of healing for human desire as a form of desire-repression supportive of and akin to the state's attempt to control desire prior to the advent of capitalism.

Bell acknowledges that modern Christianity has indeed strayed into rationalistic modes of desire-repression. However, this is neither true of historic Christianity nor does it offer a balanced account of the history of the arrival of capitalism, when both church and state were defeated by the market. As a counter-example to the notion that Christianity is fundamentally repressive of desire Bell describes Cistercian practices and then goes on to engage critically with Deleuze in particular. Here he argues that Deleuze's unexplained and perhaps romantic (my word) optimism in believing that the anarchic excess of desire will overwhelm capitalism's constraints and bring harmonious joy, is probably misguided on at least two counts: firstly, Deleuze's notion of "univocity of being" means that individuals will need to separate themselves from others to defend their individuality and thus rivalry akin to the agonistic relations of capitalism is more likely to result; and, second, a lack of common goals and teleology would make such a positive outcome improbable.

Capitalism's God is not redeeming the world, as humans in this world are irredeemably self-interested.

In turning to the alternative economy of embodied Christian existence, Bell begins with its theological foundation in the action of God. In other words, he offers an account of the economy of salvation. Here he draws on the classic but controversial account of St Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*. Rather than reading it as a system in which divine action is subordinated to, and necessitated by, a transcendental exchange economy controlled by a retributive notion of justice (as I tend to do), he reads it as an account of a divine gift economy in which divine self-donation is the gift which empowers us to live life as the gift that it is.

Within this framework Bell then goes ahead and contrasts the Christian economy with the capitalist one he described earlier. Here the human being is conceived as creature before it is ever creator of anything. And as creature it is created for communion – it is a new creation (in the context of fallenness) which, in Christ by the Spirit, is reoriented to communion rather than competition. The person saved in and through the divine economy is therefore a person-in-relation. For this person freedom is a positive freedom "for" the will of God, seeking not a maximisation of individual interest but the common good. Indeed, this quest is expressed in terms of love rather than interest. It is a love in which love for others and self is encompassed within love for God. In such love, desire (in Augustinian terms) finds its rest and satisfaction. Worshipful existence heals the insatiability of capitalist desire. All this means that bonds are formed that extend beyond any merely contractual arrangements, and property, production and consumption all serve a common good for the communion of all. Justice is also reconceived as social and restorative.

The God of this economy is not “the invisible hand” of the market but the Trinity who transcends and locates (and also challenges) all markets with free giving, redemptive giving (contra deism), and abundant giving. Where scarcity functions to define the competitive nature of capitalist economy, divine abundance promotes communion. Abundance, Bell argues, is not to be confused with unlimited resources. God does not provide all that our insatiable desires demand, but enough for human flourishing. Actual scarcity is, on this view, a product of sin and exacerbated by capitalism. That corporations do not have the sacred and messianic status they do in capitalism need hardly be stated. However, Bell stresses that this does not imply that they are excluded or are irredeemable.

The struggle for distinction and survival in the rivalry of capitalism is therefore transformed by the Christian experience of justification by grace. In this grace the divine economy is in the business of creating a non-conflictual mode of existence in the vulnerability of giving and receiving. Under the conditions of our fallen human nature such an existence will be a risky one.

In his final section, Bell seeks to dispel potential confusion about the nature of the alternative to capitalism and then spell out some of its practices. As a gift from God in the “time between the times” the gift economy is by its very nature not a general human possibility or construction. It is nomadic and incomplete. This fragmentary economy is, however, also by its very nature bound up with the surrounding economies of the world. This, says Bell, is inherent in its missional character. To describe this situation Bell helpfully draws on St Augustine’s conception of the two intermingled cities. Like Augustine’s cities, the economy of God and the economy of the world are not distinct institutions or territories but intermingled and overlapping practices and patterns of desire.

Bell goes on to describe the practices of the household of God. He first engages in a fascinating discussion of the relationship between stewardship on the one hand and voluntary poverty on the other, suggesting that there might be a need for a renewed consideration of the possibility of voluntary poverty. He follows this up with an account of the once pervasive tradition of works of mercy, largely ignored in modernity. These he helpfully distinguishes from both philanthropy and welfare. In contrast to these, the works of mercy have the character of mutuality (contra philanthropy) and of the common good (contra welfare). Both of these modern substitutes fail to nurture communion. There is more of value in this discussion than I can summarise here, although his critique of the notion of basic needs is a useful one.

In a final section, Bell addresses the sense of despair in the face of an apparently all-dominating and all-pervasive capitalism. To this he responds that there are many signs of the fragmentary coming economy for those who have eyes to see. He lists some movements and institutions which embody some of what he is talking about. In a concluding mini-sermon, Bell encourages his readers to small steps and the business of making friends with dishonest wealth (Luke 16) – nurturing friendship, relations and communion.

I struggle to recommend this book highly enough. It is succinctly written with beautiful summaries at the beginning and end of each chapter. It transcends the standard leftist critiques of capitalism with its rigorous commitment to a theological critique and is incisive in its discernment of the theological pretensions and assumptions of capitalist theorists. It is a fine example of cross-disciplinary scholarly engagement. Much more could be said on the theological side of this debate and no doubt the same applies to economics. However, what is said is very accessible to non-specialist readers of both disciplines. It could well be the most practical piece of theology written this century, picking up where William Cavanaugh left off. It is, however, as profoundly challenging as it is enlightening and potentially life-changing.

Daniel M. Bell Jr., *The Economy of Desire: Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012). ISBN: 9781441240415; 224pp.

The person saved in and through the divine economy is thus a person-in-relation.