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The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* aims to stimulate the writing of theology by Melanesians for Melanesians. It is an organ for the regular discussion of theological topics at a scholarly level by staff and students of the member schools of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools (MATS), though contributions from non-members and non-Melanesians will be considered.

The *Melanesian Journal of Theology* is ecumenical, and it is committed to the dialogue of Christian faith with Melanesian cultures. The Editors will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard on matters of concern to Melanesian Christians, and of general theological interest. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, and in duplicate.

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Editorial: The Integrity of Creation

Revd Christopher Garland, Editor

Most of the articles in this issue were given as papers at the Study Institute of the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools on "The Integrity of Creation", held on September 12 and 13, 1990. At the Study Institute we welcomed new members to MATS, and we were very glad to have a paper from one of the Seventh-day Adventist representatives, who were with us for the first time.

There was a lively discussion throughout the Study Institute, which resulted in the statement on the integrity of creation, which is also included in this issue. Participants at the Institute had wished to combine a stress upon our responsible stewardship for God's creation with an offer of a personal relationship with Christ. There was also discussion on how God is related to His creation. Some thought that talk of God's indwelling in creation might be misunderstood as pantheism. Others argued that the Word had dwelt among us in Jesus Christ, and, so we can talk of His continuing indwelling presence among us by the Holy Spirit. By His dwelling among us, God is not enclosed within any of His creatures, yet He is involved with them all, so that anything we do for the least of God's creatures we do for Christ (see Matt 25:40). God's direct care for every creature gives us the greatest reason to care for them all.

During the Study Institute, we were glad to be given a description from the Melanesian Environmental Foundation, which is supported by the Melanesian Council of Churches, of the work it is doing to raise consciousness on environmental issues at a grassroots level, particularly through its video, *Brukim Bus*.

As the Study Institute continued, we became more and more aware that there were no women taking part, and that we were, therefore, unable to make first-hand use of the contribution that feminist theology is making to concern for the integrity of creation. In Papua New Guinea, women do much of the gardening, and, so, are in close touch with the earth. They have many valuable skills as mediators, and so can help in the human task of mediation between God and nature. A woman would be able to speak much better about the

contribution of women to ecological theology, and we must ensure that they are in a position to do so in the future.

The Study Institute was followed by the Annual General Meeting of MATS, at which Joshua Daimoi, Principal of the Christian Leaders' Training College, was elected as chairman of MATS, with Vasi Gadiki, Principal of Rarongo Seminary, as vice-chairman. Kasek Kautil agreed to remain secretary-treasurer for one more year. Dick Avi, our out-going president will act as representative of MATS at the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches in February, 1991. There were several changes to the editorial board of this Journal, and we hope that, among other things, this will lead to an improvement in the range of contributors to the book reviews.

We heard at the AGM that plans are well in hand for the appointment of a lecturer in theology at the University of Papua New Guinea, and we hope that, by the time this issue is published, his name should be known.

This issue reaches you late because the first issue of the typescript went missing after being posted. It was later learned that there was a mail robbery the day after the typescript was posted, so it may be assumed that it was stolen then.

Melanesian Journal of Theology 6-2 (1990)

God's Covenant and the Integrity of His Creation

Biblical, Historical, and Systematic-theological Aspects

Reinhard Boettcher

Integrity of Creation – what is that: a fact, a vision of a future yet to come, or a recollection of a past long gone by? Maybe all three of them, each one in its own way. That's what I would like to briefly meditate upon with you in the following presentation. A lot has been said and written about this topic already, and yet it is worth considering over and over anew, trying to identify the challenges, which the situation imperatively poses to our praxis and theoretical reflection, leaving no room for idleness.

The approach of the Melanesians among us might be a bit different from the one of us Westerners. And to make that clear right from the start, I say that without impatience and bitterness. Our different approaches are just a subjective reflection of our different objective situation. Coming from West Germany, I know what it means to live in an environment bearing witness to the broken integrity of creation: large areas of the soil are poisoned by agricultural chemicals, the air, in many regions, is polluted by industrial emissions, a number of large rivers are spoilt, to an extent, that it is not advisable even to take a swim in them. And I remember very well our flesh beginning to creep, when, in April, 1986, the atomic plant in the Soviet town of Chernobyl exploded. And everybody knows that a similar event might happen any day.

Things are still different, here in the South Pacific. Tourists pour into this area of the world, expecting to escape, and psychologically repress, at least for a couple of weeks, the disaster they face at home. And yet, the Pacific is no longer – as its Latin root suggests – an ocean of peace. It is increasingly, and relentlessly, being integrated into a system that seems to drag the whole creation into an abyss. Deforestation of tropical rainforests, on a large scale, ruthless, exploitation of the maritime resources, extraction of minerals, at any cost – I need not enlarge on that. The greenhouse effect seems to suggest that all of us, North and South, are sitting in the same boat. But, be careful: once again a pretended solidarity might turn out an ideological lie, aiming to deceive those who are in a weaker position,

anyway. I think the Third World has good reasons to take the initiative by itself – for its own survival, and for the sake of God's creation as a whole.

How are we going to respond? Again, in our own context, with our own history at our back, as a result of both, with our own preconceptions and approaches, and yet – that might be a sort of common denominator – with the suspecting sensation deep in our guts that something is going wrong, calling for change.

There is a whole range of ways to respond. In passing, I would like, at least, to enumerate three of them, responses which we have to immediately leave behind, which we definitely can't afford to adopt, for various reasons, but which we have to mention, at least, because they are a living – more accurately speaking – a "necrophilic" (literally: death-loving) reality in the minds of many of our contemporaries, and, therefore, we are bound to deal with them theologically and pastorally.

The first response is indifference, and, sometimes, the desperate attempt to play the threat down. Humanity has, so far, managed to find solutions to any problem that has arisen – why shouldn't science and technology be able to cope with the greenhouse syndrome also?

The second response is the indulgence in a pseudo-apocalyptic panic. The total catastrophe is standing right at the door, any avenue leading forward is blocked, even its consideration, there is no room to develop visions, and examine perspectives.

The third response is aware of the problems, maybe even of their urgency, but they are beyond its personal concern, relegating responsibility to anonymous authorities, in particular, the government. In this respect, we Lutherans have especially to struggle with a misconception of the doctrine of the "Two Kingdoms".

Again, I think we can't afford to adopt any of these approaches, nor any of their innumerable variations. More and more, I am convinced that the threat, we are exposed to, is historically unique, even in European categories. Throughout history, humanity has been threatened in many ways. Today, however, life and creation, as such, are threatened, in a radical and unparalleled way: threatened is the "extra-human" creation, as a reality of its own before God (Ps 148). Threatened is the extra-human creation, as the material condition of our humanity. Furthermore, humanity, itself, is

threatened, in its own quality and dignity. If this assumption is correct, then, in one way or the other, the following steps need to be taken:

1. We have to face up to reality without illusion. This is challenging enough, since it demands we, inevitably, discard our sacrosanct lies of life, in particular, as far as we Westerners are concerned.

2. Reality is a product of history. In order to come to terms with the former, we are bound to examine the latter, in light of the question: how have the problems, we need to struggle with, come into being? Which determinants and factors have given rise to them?

3. But, for us, as Christians, neither reality itself, nor its history (in general), is the ultimate criterion. The decisive, and all-determining point of reference, is the particular history of God with His chosen people, Israel, culminating in God's revelation, in the person and history of Jesus Christ, aiming at the whole of humankind. So, we have to raise the question: which message does the word of God hold for us, amid the reality we find ourselves in as a product of its identifiable history?

4. Having viewed reality better – some crucial aspects of it – in light of God's word, we find ourselves confronted with the question: how does God want us to respond to His self-revelation, with regard to our situation, as the place where we are bound to exercise our responsibility? How are we going to relate to reality? Which perspectives and consequences might we come up with?

Needless to emphasise that, to thoroughly process through all these questions, by far exceeds my capacity, in particular, in a brief presentation. All I would like to do is to sketch out some heuristic lines, so to say, following the aforementioned four steps, in order to stimulate our reflection and discussion.

1. Injustice, Violence, and Destruction of Creation

In the first paragraph, I am not going to even try to present a rough outline of the forces threatening creation. Rather, I would just like to confine myself to referring to the ecumenical process of "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" ("JPIC"), which reached its temporary climax at the convention

in Seoul, Korea, in March this year, even though it could not meet all the far-ranging expectations set in it. I make this reference, not only because we would certainly not gather here to discuss the topic of "Integrity of Creation" – at least at this particular point of time, and under this particular headline – if this ecumenical process had not already raised our awareness and sensitivity, but also because our topic is integrated into a wider and more comprehensive context, by the very designation of this movement: Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation. The latter is "only" part and parcel of a wider concern, compelling us not to keep transfixed with the ecological problems, rather to view them in relation to problems of social justice, and the military threat. The modes of production, distribution, and consumption, the relation of the social groups and factions to each other, the question of ownership of the means of production, the standard of science and technology, the disposition and control of research and technology, the specific relation of the sexes, the means of violence being accumulated and concentrated, the rationale of education, the function of administration and bureaucracy, the encroachment of the mass media in the minds and subconsciousness of the people – all these factors and forces (and this is just an arbitrary selection) constitute a closely-related net of interdependent determinants, eventually making up the whole of societal reality, conditioning our own life, without us being aware of it. JPIC is the attempt – not to isolate, and compartmentalise, but, on the contrary – to structure this net, which is, at first sight, so confusing and discouraging, to identify the main determinants and operational forces, and their correlation, and ventilate, examine, and work out, potential avenues towards counter-strategies of life.

Spontaneously, three examples occurred to me, which might illustrate this interdependence. Right in these weeks, the United States' army has started withdrawing chemical shells from the territory of my own country, in order to burn them up on the Johnston Atoll, here in our wider neighbourhood. No harm at will be done to the inhabitants of these islands – that's what the military bureaucracy claims, but that's what the French army, too, keeps contending, with regard to its tests on Mururoa. Here, we have an indication of the military-ecological complex – the prostitutes in the Philippines are said to be concentrated, not least, around the foreign military bases. Meanwhile, we have come to know that these young women do not sell themselves, out of an immoral inclination, rather, social misery has driven them into the glittering towns, hoping to find a job there, but, due to the lack of opportunity, they eventually end up in a brothel – thus indicative of the socio-military complex. Or, consider the landless campesinos and

improverished favella-dwellers in Brazil – in the train of huge logging companies – as they move deeper and deeper into the Amazonian jungles, in a desperate search for prospects of survival, but, inevitably, contributing to the rapid depletion of that huge resource – an example of the socio-ecological complex.

2. Dichotomy, and Antagonism, Alienation, and Reification

In this second paragraph, I am going to focus, again, on the issue of "Integrity of Creation", in the narrow sense, even though constantly keeping in mind its interrelatedness with the issues of justice and peace. And yet, the ecological crisis deserves specific consideration. In the following, I would like to briefly identify a couple of historical determinants, located on various planes, which, as I see it, have contributed to the crisis we are in now.

a. There is – to see with our situation here – the process of colonisation. I don't refer to it in the first instance as a political category, rather as a socioeconomic one, since I assume the political infrastructure to be just a corollary of the economic forces. In this respect, Melanesia has shared the fate of her fellow third world countries: she has been integrated into the worldwide economic system being dominated by a handful of countries in Western Europe, North America, and East Asia, and in the international division of labour, relegated to the role of supplying raw materials, to be processed and distributed in these economic, political, and military metropolises, under conditions dictated again by the latter. The interior logic of this system comes down to the most profitable exploitation of both the human labour force and natural resources, under the condition of private ownership of the means of production.

b. Going back, further up the road of history, we have to take a glance at the period of Enlightenment, since that was an era highly crucial for the issue under scrutiny. It was not only the time when modem industrial production vigorously emerged – along with it, and closely intertwined with it, and mutually determining each other – modern science developed at a new stage of quality. We must bear in mind that, in the wake of these changes, man had shaken off the shackles of the church, discovering himself as a subject in his own right. The differentiation between man and the non-human creation around

him sharpened to an almost hostile dichotomy, degrading, in the long run, the latter to a mere resource-pool of the former. Nature was ruthlessly subjugated to human manipulation and exploitation, thus depriving it of a dignity of its own. Science was assigned the function to enable and enhance that process, entailing technology as its practical application, all of them constituting the backbone, and driving motive, of an industrial economy, affecting, and conditioning, any dimension of life. As I see it, a "qualitative leap", in a very specific way, has been the invention and disposition of the atomic bomb. From then on, it has become increasingly clear that we should not do everything we are technically able to do, unless we risk our own survival. Throughout the last couple of decades, it has been dawning on us that we are going to survive or perish, only along, and in association with, creation.

c. Theology – regardless of its own source and origin – is part and parcel of the societal processes. No wonder, therefore, that we can easily identify analogies of that economic-scientific-technological-cultural-philosophical configuration, mentioned above, on the plane of theology. In terms of time, I am referring, in particular, to the era of Protestant Orthodoxy, and then carried on down throughout the centuries, until the most-recent past. Theology, in general, and dogmatics, in particular, were conceptualised along anthropocentric lines. Salvation of the individual was at stake, the concern of the church was to pave the way to heaven, by means of the proclamation of the word, and the sacramental system. There was, certainly, a feeling of commonality, also by virtue of the very existence of the church. But that was only a facet, within a concept, strictly focusing on man. Interestingly enough – we will come back to this point later on – when that anthropocentricity had gained enormous momentum in the period of Enlightenment, the doctrine of the Trinity was, more and more, reduced to a peripheral decoration.

Moreover, hierarchy and laity, domination and subjection, superiority and inferiority, were inveterate components of the fabric of ecclesial praxis and theological reflection. It doesn't come as a surprise that the theologically all-determining understanding of God, too, was conceptualised along authoritarian lines. The Reformation, in a sense, was launched as a sort of

counter-movement, in its initial stages, bringing to the fore the revolutionary, liberating potential of the gospel. But, for reasons we cannot trace back here, this project bogged down pretty soon, and fell short of its own vision, in particular, between that overall dichotomy and antagonism we mentioned above, and an authoritarian concept of theology and church praxis.

In our context, it is reasonable to specifically draw our attention to the understanding of the two biblical creation myths, and attendant passages, in particular in the Psalms. The approach being taken – until recently! – was, basically anthropocentric, dichotomic, and antagonistic, i.e., passages, like Gen 1:26ff, were taken as a vindication of an attitude putting extra-human creation at the virtually-unlimited disposal of man. Stewardship was conceptualised in terms of a rational and efficient use of creation, for the sake of satisfying human demands.

Theological tradition is never sacrosanct – in particular, from a Protestant point of view. Theology is supposed to help us to live our life in creative response to God's revelation, within a given situation. We have come to realise that the latter forces us to critically re-examine our traditions, and to reread the scripture in a way, which allows us to creatively identify God's promises, and His call to conversion, at a uniquely crucial stage of the history of creation and humanity.

3. Trinity, and Integrity of Creation

How are we going to relate ourselves to the situation we are in, the challenges we are inescapably exposed to, in the light of God's Word? If God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, being borne witness to in the Bible, is the ultimate, and decisive, foundation, criterion, and norm of our existence – what does that mean, in regard to the integrity of creation, and our responsibility for it?

Let me start this paragraph with a hypothesis, which, at first sight, might sound pretty general: we ought to rediscover relationality and reconciliation, as key categories of our theoretical reflection, and practical orientation, at the expense of separation and dichotomy, which have failed to provide for life and integrity. To exclude a misunderstanding, right from the start, I am not going to advocate a sort of self-salvation, assuming humankind to dispose of the power to bring its own ambiguity, and the ambiguity of history and creation, into eschatological unequivocality. Rather, I would like to bring into focus a strictly-trinitarian, and Christological, concept. But the

triune God has called upon us to respond to His word, in terms of a humanity, which is consistent with His divinity – under the condition of sin, and Christ's salvation, of course. Later on, I will try to spell out the meaning of these categories of relationality and reconciliation, in biblical and theological terms. Just to indicate the direction already: it is a very unWestem approach, in German, we have a saying: "brushing it against the line". On the other hand, we find vital components, and aspects of it, in so-called "primal religions", and, prominently, in the Oriental traditions, like in the great religions of Asia. These differences, and pluriformity, are not conceived of in terms of exclusivity and incompatibility, rather as elements of a high unity, unfolding itself in terms of a complex complementary reality. Therefore, the latter is not being approached in terms of an exclusive either/or, rather of an inclusive both – and applied, not only on the plane of theoretical perception, and reflection, but also of praxis. This way to relate to reality, has consequences, which are at hand: a relation, or better, non-relation of dichotomy is thoroughly undermined in favour of a higher, and comprehensive, unity. The disastrous antagonism of perceiving an active subject, on the one hand, and of intelligible, and passive, object, on the other, is transformed into a meaningful intercommunication and interaction. And let us not forget that the way we relate, or non-relate, to the extra-human creation is closely linked to the way we deal with our fellow humans – and with God. Critically applied to our situation, under the conditions of a modern industrial society, organised along the lines of maximal profit, on the basis of exploitation, we tend to "reify" our fellow humans, i.e., to turn them into things, dead objects.

Let me briefly share a personal experience. I have come to deeply appreciate the sensitivity, friendliness, openness, and helpfulness of you Papua New Guineans. And over against that background, it has struck me, time and again, to observe that the more people are educated and socialised, in Western terms, the more they tend to drop these traditional virtues and values, and adopt a cold-blooded, alienated, business attitude – mainly, of course, in the context of business, itself. I don't say that for the sake of romanticisation and moral indignation. But it doesn't take me by surprise any longer. Rather, it strikes a chord in me, and stimulates a vision. Or, take another example, located on a totally different plane, and yet, for me, pointing to the same direction. A renowned, popular theologian in my country once said – and this word has kept lingering in my mind: "Whoever is not able to recognise God in a stone, will never come to recognise Him." I interpret this, trying to exclude misunderstandings, as: "We will never

recognise God unless we recognise our solidarity with a stone, as a part of God's beautiful creation."

But, the crucial question is whether this approach, with the principle of relationality at its core, is consistent with the biblical tradition. But here, we have to make a differentiation, right from the start. There is no monolithic, biblical tradition at all. This book, evolved in a complicated process of redaction, over many centuries, is, in its end result, a compilation of highly-disparate traditions – even though, of course, ultimately converging in a common focal point. In this conglomerate, we find, indeed, separation and dichotomy, perhaps – in many parts, at least – dominating. I leave aside a discussion of these historical questions. But I contend it to be a theologically-legitimate approach, to concentrate on, emphasise, and intently adopt, those traditions, which have been underrated, and overlooked, and which point to another direction, suggesting a "worldview" (in the deepest sense), and methodology, characterised by relationality and reconciliation, all the more, as they seem, to me, to reflect God's own essence, as I will attempt to show.

But, before I try to do that, in positive terms, let me critically give evidence to our ecological crisis, in terms of theological anthropology. Maybe anthropocentricity is, insofar, correct, as it points to the very bottom of the disaster. Maybe the crisis of creation is really the crisis of man, as described in Gen 3 – not as an event of the past, long ago, rather as a tangible reality, here and now – in which respect, is man his own question? – in terms of sin, of course. But what is sin? Breaching God's law, we might tend to answer. Maybe. But sin is also something more, perhaps even more basic, namely, the disruption of fundamental relations in at least four directions: man's relation to woman or his fellow man (even though, I think, in the distortion of man/woman, relation sin becomes manifest in a distinctive way), man's relation to the extra-human creation (only in the covenant with Noah, is man allowed to eat animals, not yet at the very beginning of creation!), man's relation to God (the history of Israel, and humankind, is a history of idolatry, consisting in exchanging the creator and creature), and man's relation to himself. (Which man/woman has really been "*wanbel*" with himself/herself? Hasn't human existence been an existence in contradiction?)

This is not, at all, a discovery of my own. With various means, the history of theology (and philosophy) has tried to intellectually come to grips with this inconceivable event and process, testified to in Gen 3: man's

concupiscence has been identified as the driving force on man's part, self-transfixion and solipsism, in the last analysis all of them – especially under particular societal conditions – coming down to reifying (turning into things and objects), and forcing, under His unlimited control, everybody and everything, which is different from man himself. That "dominium terrae", that commission to take charge of creation in Gen 1, has turned into a self-defeating posture, culminating in the threat of self-destruction.

This is the point where we have to re-examine our traditions, and to reread the scripture. And the painful experience we are going through, and heading for, might stimulate us to rediscover, and reconsider – to put it in a rather stilted way – the ontological basis of relationality: namely the triune God Himself – or, shall we say: themselves? The very bottom of being, as we Christians believe, is the One who does not exist in Himself, rather, who coexists in relation before creation, already from eternity to eternity. Whose very essence is relation, intercommunication, and interaction as Father, Son, and Spirit. And this relation is clearly qualified as a relation of love. Otherwise, the author of the first letter of John couldn't have bluntly stated that God is love. But, more than that, the triune God has not kept this love to Himself, rather He also decided to create creation, including man/woman, in order to share His abundant inner-trinitarian love with an extra-trinitarian partner. God, in a sense, is in relation, not only, intrinsically, in Himself, but also with regard to creation. Here, I would like to briefly highlight the main stages of the trinity's history with His creation.

a. Again, creation is basically nothing else but the reflection, and external "objectification", of God's love. According to the priestly creation account, having an inclination towards that antagonistic strand in the Bible, God (the Father) relates to His creation, in a mediated way, by means of His Word (Jesus Christ). In line with that, man and woman are put in control of, and domination over, extra-human creation – even though, of course, subject to the supreme Lordship of God. Whereas, in the Jahwist account, God is working on man and woman, like a craftsman relating to the work of His hands, very directly, and without mediation, lovingly sharing His life-giving, and sustaining, breath (the Holy Spirit) with His creature. Accordingly, He explicitly commissions man to "cultivate and guard" Eden (Gen 2:15) – we might say: a prophetic complement to the first account. And the fact that man/woman

is assigned a prominent place in creation does not deny that there is a lasting relation between God and His extra-human creation, valid in its own, and that that part of creation, too, is destined, and called upon, to respond in its own way (Ps 148).

b. Jesus Christ is the person, and history, in whom God (more specifically, the Father) has done His work of salvation, and, in whom He has, at the same time, decisively, and ultimately, manifested Himself. In a very distinct way in Him (Jesus Christ), integrity of creation is neither a reflection only, nor a vision, but reality at hand. In Him, creator and creation are one – a mystery our early church fathers had such hard times grappling with. In Him, the whole universe has its source, and foundation, and being, and aim. In Him, "God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and unseen things, including spiritual powers, lords, rulers, and authorities" (Col 1:16). In Him, God restored and reconciled everything to Himself, establishing the new covenant, and reaching out to anybody. He healed what was damaged, spoilt, and broken. He gave the blind their sight, and proclaimed liberation to the oppressed. He privileged, and dignified, the elements of creation: water, bread, and wine, to symbolise God's determination to maintain, at any cost, that covenant. He shared the Spirit, that bond of love, as the trinity's inmost being, with His friends, uniting them with each other, and with Himself, as He was one with His Father. He, in a very unique way, is the point of convergence between creation and salvation. Any creature – whether he or she or it is aware of that or not – is immediate to Christ, and, through Him, with his/her/its salvation, and fulfilment.

c. And yet, we are still on our way. What has appeared in Jesus Christ: creation brought into integrity, in unity with God, is going to be extended to the whole universe, ontologically and noetically, i.e., it's going to be recognised in full by anybody and anything. Again, we are not the subjects of that eschatological fulfilment – it's the triune God alone. But He wants us to witness to that reality, so that the world might come to partiality (1 Cor 13:12), perceive, and recognise, the depth and the mystery of creation and being, and glorify the Creator, here and

now already. But, it is a witness, and glorification, under the conditions of strife and suffering, broken and tempted, a witness and glorification, in contradiction, and patience, and resistance. According to Paul (Rom 8:18ff), there is a symphony of the cries of those radioactively contaminated on Mururoa with the fish, indiscriminately being caught in a death wall, the rainforests, relentlessly being chopped off, and the subsistence gardeners, discovering that, with only the compensation received from the mining company, they can't reanimate the polluted river. It might still be a long way to the new Jerusalem, just leaving us with God's Spirit, who gives us a foretaste of it, and the nerve, and the power, to carry on.

4. Consequences and Perspectives

Which consequences could be draw from what I have tried to briefly sketch out? Which perspectives could be identified as responding to the self-disclosure of the triune God, in the throes of the crisis of creation, as long as we are still on our way? I am not going to come up with preset solutions, let alone any panacea. I would just like to enumerate a few suggestions, all of them pointing to a particular direction.

a. We should venture to embark on a sort of remythologisation of "nature". I do not suggest undoing the debate over "demythologisation", held during, and after, the Second World War. That's a totally different issue. What I mean, is to reattribute – or better, less patronisingly speaking – to accept, and take seriously again, that extra-human creation has certain rights and dignity of its own, not secondarily derived from its significance and usefulness for man/woman. That might seem not to be in line altogether with the priestly creation account. But, a different situation calls for a different adoption of God's Word, at bottom, of course, identical with itself. Perhaps in Babylonia, under the condition of the technology of the sixth century BC, nature, at times, could be experienced as hostile to the survival of man/woman – I think of the potential of great floods. But now, at the threshold of the third millennium, with the technology at our disposal, nature has to desperately struggle for survival, being fatally threatened by man. Therefore, under these particular conditions, I would advocate a remythologisation of nature, on a higher level – enriched by the

painful experience we, and our sister creation, have had. This would be a place where the biocosmic concepts of primal religions, like the ones that have been predominant in Melanesia, could perhaps be transformed, and critically adopted, in trinitarian terms. I do not suggest "pantheism", with a sort of identification, and equation, of creator and creation. This distinguishes us from radically-monistic concepts, assuming that being emanates from one ultimate reality. But, maybe we could consider, and elaborate, on a sort of "pantheism", viewing God in close attachment to, and solidarity with, His beloved creation.

b. But this, so to say, post-modern attitude, needs to be spelled out in concrete economic and social terms. We ought to intently seek structures of production, and reproduction, being geared towards human coexistence with non-human creation, respecting the latter's intrinsic, i.e., God-given, right to survival, reproduction, renewal, evolution, and dignity. This would be the place where the question of "appropriate technologies" comes in – not only in third world countries, of course.

c. I might be wrong, but I suspect that Melanesia, too, like so many other countries in the South, sooner or later, will have to say farewell to the innocence of Western development. What is profitable for some might turn out to be a disaster for others. Not only that social stratification is increasingly sharpening, but the price has to be paid by nature as well. What is in the Philippines, Madagascar, or Brazil, that are already a ruinous reality, might be looming in Melanesia.

d. This calls for a competent perception of social reality. Regardless of the contingency of events and developments, social processes tend to follow distinctive, inherent laws. In order to identify, and grasp, and productively deal with, the latter, a minimal competence, in terms of social science, is indispensable. Which of our seminaries has taken serious effort to scrutinise, in a methodically-disciplined way, social reality, to which God's Word wants to relate creatively and critically? I have the suspicion that a lot of well-meant social church activities fall short, and fail, just because of the naivety, and ingenuousness, of those who carry them out. If we want to

achieve something, we need to know how our contribution is going to affect the whole social fabric. This is not only a question of pastoral sensitivity, but also of scientific rationality.

e. The seriousness of the crisis demands joint efforts from all those, who share the vision of a creation universally brought again into its integrity. Therefore, ecumenical cooperation, in any respect, is imperative. No church can afford to leave the resources and potential of another untapped, and unadapted, and, on the other hand, to withhold insights gained in her own history and experience. Furthermore, ecumenical dialogue is not confined to a doctrinal level, rather intercommunication, and cooperation, on the plane of praxis, constitute a valid complementary approach, and might open up new avenues of interchurch encounter, and even shed new light on inveterate dogmatic differences, out of a new perspective of praxis. This applies, likewise to the local, the regional, and the international level. The latter, insofar specifically relevant, as it might help us to bridge the "development lag": in sharing with contemporaries, let's say, in the Philippines, Madagascar, and Brazil. Melanesia might learn from the experiences, and insights, that have been gained already in those areas, and adapt these lessons creatively, and critically, to her own context, and seek alternatives of life to the vicious circles of death and destruction.

f. Solidarity is not only possible, and demanded, with fellow-Christians. Anybody of "good will" ought to be considered as a potential partner, and encouraged to join our witness, as far as possible. That leads to my last suggestion. Imperative is not only ecumenical, but also interdisciplinary, cooperation. I indicated, already, that pastoral sensitivity and theological intelligence are not sufficient in our struggle for the integrity of creation. Necessary effective changes are possible only under the condition that the scientific and technological tools can be recovered from the monopoly of those who put them to work for the sake of their private profit, and be made available to the effort to work on a mode of humanity, which is inspired and determined by the triune God's love of life. I don't know how far that has been done already. But a question, which occurred to me in this connection, is: has MATS established links of

discussion and dialogue with the departments of the University of Papua New Guinea, dealing with natural sciences, social sciences, and technical disciplines? The Religious Department, which is going to be set up at UPNG, could play a vital role in such a dialogue. And what about the relations of our respective churches, of MCC, and MATS to organisations like the Melanesian Environmental Foundation, Melanesian Solidarity, and Greenpeace?

I am aware that the approach put to discussion might lead into conflicts. But the latter can't be avoided, anyway. The only question is who is going to seize the initiative? And who is ready to shoulder the burden, and perhaps incur the blame? Ultimately, this comes down to asking are we ready to take up our cross? This calls for a last question:

Epilogue: Who is the Church?

I, basically, see two false ecclesiological alternatives. The first one, I would call "ecclesiastical docetism", conceptualising the church as living in isolation from the "world", detached, and dissociated, from its struggles and suffering, not really coming down to earth, thus renouncing Christ's incarnation. This kind of concept of the church will never be seriously concerned about the issue of the integrity of creation, because the latter is a reality, beyond the boundary of a seemingly "pure" "spirituality", with which the former is so preoccupied.

At the other end, there is what I would call "salvific triumphalism", claiming the church to be the subject of salvation, to bring reality into its ultimate being. In this concept, concern for the integrity of creation might be at its very core. Productive forces might be unleashed in that kind of church, and yet, it ignores the "eschatological proviso", thus opening up prospects of frustration and fanaticism.

Who is the church? In my understanding, the church – and I am not referring to a particular denomination, but to the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church – is the community of those who have had a meaningful encounter with God, in His self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, and, from there, in His creation; who know about God's purpose with humankind, and the whole creation; who know about the tragedy, consisting in our rebellion against God, and the ensuing all-embracing alienation and reification; who know that God, nevertheless, has not forsaken us, but, rather, has covenanted anew with

us in that Jesus Christ; who know that He is determined to maintain, and accomplish, His covenant; and who – in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in discipleship of the One who is creator and creation, in integral unity, and in solidarity with life, wherever cynically threatened – bear witness to that triune God, and His unfailing love for His entire creation.

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Some Reflections on the Stewardship of Creation

Fr Gary Roche

Being Creative in our Response to God

Some years ago, when discussing the art of "sculpturing" with a professional sculptor, I asked him whether he already had a complete "idea" in his head when he began the actual work on the material. He said that he might have a general idea, but, usually, he first made a "clay" model, and, often when making that model, the clay, itself, would suggest some shapes and forms to him. He said that the material will, itself, suggest shapes and forms to the artist.

I began thinking of the biblical saying, "I am the potter, and you are the clay." Perhaps, as the clay can suggest shapes to the potter, so, also, can we, in our own way, make suggestions to God about the shape of the kingdom. Is it not one of the wonders of salvation history, that God involves us, so much, in the whole process? The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men.

As a wise father gives his son an opportunity to make suggestions, and, indeed, is even happy and proud, if his son does make good suggestions, so also, God invites us to work with Him in building the Kingdom.

Perhaps God gives us more freedom than we realise, with regard to how, exactly, we respond to His gift of salvation. We often talk of doing the will of the Father, yet, perhaps often, the will of the Father is that, while seeking guidance from the Spirit, we use our own ingenuity, and wisdom, in deciding how to respond.

If one is too detailed in spelling out what one expects in return in "covenant exchange", then the freedom, and the ingenuity, of the other partner is curtailed. It is true that the general guidelines for Christian response are spelled out, and, again and again, we realise that the best "return" we can offer to the Father is Christ Himself, but there is still much room for individual freedom. And, rather than trying to discover exactly what God demands of us, by way of individual response, perhaps we should spend more time in ingeniously planning how to respond, and then discerning how this fits in with God's plan of salvation.

We talk of "discovering the will of God", but are we not also called to be creative in putting forward ideas and suggestions that may be within the will of God. Is it not, perhaps, the Father's will that we use the intellect He gave us to try and put forward the best proposals we can for building up the kingdom?

In this sense, then, our covenant with God goes beyond our reconciliation. It leads us into active cooperation with the Lord. Our stewardship of creation, then, must, itself, be a creative stewardship. We do not live in a "zoo". Our work with the Lord, in building up the kingdom, involves more than simply conserving "nature", as we happen to find it now in the 20th century. Discernment is still called for. Together with God, our "Potter", we discern the "shape" of the kingdom, as the "clay" in our own humble way, we creatively present possibilities.

This awareness of our creative partnership with the Lord, in building up the kingdom, gives deeper meaning top our "stewardship" of creation. This "stewardship" of creation is part of our ethical response to God.

Salvation and Ethics

At this stage, I feel it is necessary to pass some comment about salvation and ethics. In recent times, at least in the Catholic church, there has been a lot of attention given to ethical issues. On the "left", Liberation Theology has, rightly so, brought social justice very much to the fore. On the "right", controversies about abortion and contraception have focused attention on "sexual ethics". Now, the new awareness on ecological issues is bringing forth more emphasis on ethics.

There is a danger in all this. There is a danger that the reality of justification in Christ becomes clouded by the emphasis on the ethical response to that justification.

We have been saved by Christ. That salvation does demand that we make a response to it – but we are saved by Christ, not by our response. There is a danger that, with all the attention being given to ethical issues, the message of the church will be interpreted as referring only to ethics, and the reality of the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus will become obscured.

We must make a response, yes. But unless the greatness of salvation, and the invitation to God is first proclaimed clearly, then we face the danger of slipping back into a type of Pelagianism, where we attempt to save ourselves by our own efforts.

While examining, in more detail, the type of response we must make, in issues concerning development, etc., we must, at the same time, be sure that we are proclaiming clearly the good news of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Awareness of the Importance of the Whole of Creation

Concern for the stewardship of creation theologically stems from the fact that the Christ-event was meant for the salvation of the whole world.

In the past, the focus on the theology of redemption was usually on the deliverance of the individual from personal sin. Yet, it would be inaccurate to assume that, until the present time, Christian theology had ignored the rest of creation. We need only look briefly at church history to be aware that concern for all of creation did manifest itself. We can take note that:

- Concern for all creation, which is "groaning in travail", is present in the NT itself.
- In patristic times, the writings of Dionysus (Pseudo-Dionysus) presented a comprehensive cosmic theology, wherein the whole universe was seen as being part of God's great plan of salvation.
- In the Middle Ages, St Francis is an obvious example of Christian concern for creation. Later, Nicholas of Cusa was a theologian, who also developed a cosmic theology.
- In more recent times, Teilhard de Chardin has written about the unity of the whole universe, and its part in God's plan.

Today, circumstances are leading to a rediscovery of the fact that redemption should be focused, not solely on humanity, but on the whole of creation.

This has largely been brought about by an increased awareness of the importance of ecology. Evidence of threats to the environment have stirred up, not only our instinct for self-preservation, but also have rekindled interest in development ethics and environmental ethics. Perusal of periodicals and recent books, will reveal that environmental ethics is an issue very much in vogue.

Questions to be asked

In matters such as these, there are evident questions we can ask, e.g., concerning the mining of resources. Why are we in such a hurry to get all the

gold and copper out of the earth so quickly? Could we not mine at a slower pace, and leave something for those who come after us?

However, I believe that, at this stage, it is important for us, individually, to begin in our own backyard. It can be tempting for us to give a moral critique of the multi-national corporations. This draws attention away from how our own style of living might be affecting the environment. We must begin with an examination of our own style of living.

An ethics of environment can, indeed, apply itself to some of the greater issues of today. But, for us, it must also begin in our own backyard.

- Do we understand the environment we live in?
- Do we know how to "protect" it?
- Do we consume, without regard for future resources?
- How do we dispose of all the "waste" that we produce?

There is a continuous need for scientific research, in order to know how we can best care for the environment. There is a continuing need for us to inform ourselves about the environment. How do we achieve a balance between conservation and development?

Conclusion

In this brief reflection, I have tried to draw attention to:

a. Our creative covenant partnership with God.

b. The necessity of seeing ethical action as a response to salvation in Christ.

c. The new emergence of environmental ethics.

d. The importance of practising environmental ethics in our own backyard.

Personally, I believe that it is important for each one of us to explore, at greater depth, our creative covenant partnership with God. Becoming more aware of the freedom and dignity that God has given us, can help us to become more active in creative cooperation in building up the kingdom.

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The Implications of Integrity of Creation for Theological Education and Evangelisation

Mai Ori

Christian Leaders' Training College, September 1990

Other papers have been presented at this conference on the topic of the "integrity of creation". I wish to summarise my own views on this topic in relation to the teaching curriculum of our theological colleges, and the task of evangelism in Melanesia.

The Integration of creation

All of creation is related to its Creator. "God, who made the world, and everything in it, is the Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). The beginning of the Christian view of nature, is the concept of creation that God was there before the beginning, and God created everything out of nothing. The true Christian mentality is that everything rests upon the reality of creation-out-of-nothing by God. All things, including man, are equal in their origin, as far as creation is concerned. Now, how did He create? On the side of His infinity, there is the great chasm. He creates all things, and He alone is Creator. Everything else is created. Only He is Infinite, and only He is the Creator; everything else is the creature and finite. Only He is independent; everything else is dependent. So man, the animal, and the flower, in the biblical viewpoint, are equally separated from God, in that He created them all. It is from this dependent state of creation that we can talk about its integrity, or wholeness.

Evangelical Passiveness Towards creation

Dr Lynn White Jr; a professor of history at the University of California, Los Angeles, in his article called, "The Historical Roots of our Ecology Crisis", published in *Science Magazine* (March 19, 1967), argued that the crisis in ecology is Christianity's fault. He says that Christianity had a bad view of nature, and so, this is carried over into the present-day, post-Christian world. He bases his allegations of a "bad view of nature" on the fact that Christianity taught that man had dominion over nature, and so man has treated nature in a destructive way. In my opinion, this allegation is partially true, in a sense that not all Christians treat nature as such. However, the distressing thing about this is that evangelicals often really have had no better sense in this area than

unbelievers. Many evangelicals, then, ought to acknowledge their passiveness, and lack of proper stewardship, toward God's creation.

The Disintegration and Reintegration of Creation

Any discussion, which ignores the dependence of creation on its Creator, to talk of creation as an independent entity, would be untrue to the biblical picture of creation as pointed out in my introductory comments. And this discussion would not be able to take seriously the fact that the essence of sin is precisely "independence" from God. The failure to recognise that the disintegration of creation is the result of a broken relationship with God, can only lead us away from the central message of the Bible, which is about salvation, and the glory of God. The restoration of mankind, and the rest of creation, is only accomplished through the restoring work of the cross of Christ. And, according to scripture, this "integrity" of creation is an eschatological expectation.

The Gospel and the Integration of Creation

It is our desire, in theological education, and in evangelism, to place, as our priority, the fact that God is not only Creator, but also Redeemer. One cannot enter into covenant relationship with the Creator until one receives His personal offer of redemption. Without the perspective of the resurrected Christ, and the power of His resurrected life, there can never be a truly holistic concern for God's creation. An understanding of how to enter into a covenant relationship with God, and how to live within that covenant relationship, is a necessary prerequisite to understanding how to live in relationship with the rest of creation. The work of evangelism is to call people into that covenant relationship with God, through Christ. They may then relate to the rest of creation, and also value it properly, with the same integrity. Lynn Smith, a non-Christian, has said that the solution to the ecological crisis is rooted in religion.

> What people do about their ecology, depends on what they think about themselves, in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature, and our destiny – that is by religion.[1]

Men do what they think. Whatever their worldview is, this is the thing, which will spill over into the external world. A regenerated mind gives one a

[1] *Science Magazine*, March 19, 1967.

proper view, and a truly holistic concern, for the rest of creation. For God values everything as He made them. God deals with a plant as a plant, with an animal as an animal, with man as a man, not violating the orders of creation. He will not ask the plant to behave like a man, neither will He deal with man as though he is a plant. God treats His creation with integrity; each creature in its own order, each the way He made it. For a Christian, the value of a thing is not, in itself, autonomous, but due to its relationship to the Creator. A restored covenant relationship with the Creator does bring a healing, here and now, through the church's ministry and stewardship, and the promise of complete healing for the whole of creation (Rom 8:18-25).

Do We Need an "Integrity of Creation" Theology?

It is necessary, in our theological colleges, to teach skills, which will enable students to interact with social and ecological issues. It is this interaction, which will be important in the development of their own theology. Yet, theology should not become too relative to social and ecological issues. For every Christian theology, irrespective of its cultural roots, is grounded, firstly, in the universal Christian truths of God as Creator and Redeemer. So, I wish to emphasise, again, that when we speak of creation as an "integrity", it can only truly be so through the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not possible, otherwise, to put together the broken pieces of creation.

After attending the 1988 WCC Consultation in Norway, on the subject of the "Integrity of Creation", Dr Margaret Guite, in a recent article, questions whether or not we need a new theology, to confront the ecological issues. Her answer is a resounding "no". After arguing against the popular claim that the Judaeo-Christian theological tradition is largely to blame for the ecological crises, Dr Guite concludes:

> We do not need either a new theology, nor an over-compensatory, one-sided interpretation of our tradition, if we are to undo the damage of false emphases in the reading of that tradition in previous centuries. With the grace of God, we can go back to the old theology, and get the balance right.[2]

If our theology does not need readjusting, to address the social and ecological issues, then, perhaps, neither does the teaching curriculum in our theological schools need adjustment. Raising student awareness of

[2] Margaret Guite, "The Integrity of Creation: Do We Need a New Theology?", in *Anvil* 7-1 (1990), pp. 11-21,21.

contemporary issues, through seminars, workshops, and practical assignments, in which "the old" theology is applied to these issues, is what we probably need more of.

We are thankful for the report of Paul Roche on his recent participation in the WCC Convocation on Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (Korea), and for the publication of this report in *Catalyst* (20-1 (1990), pp.72-82). The faculty in our theological schools must be aware of these issues, and interact with them in the classroom.

The Present and Future Integration of Creation

While I have said that the integrity of creation is an eschatological expectation, we believe that the kingdom rule of God is now present in and through the church. The church, then, is a witness in the world to total integration in the future, and to what a covenant relationship with God means. The ramifications of that relationship on creation is also both present and future. God's calling to the church is that, we should exhibit a substantial healing, here and now, between man and nature, and nature and itself, as far as Christians can bring it to pass. There has, correctly, been a renewed emphasis in theological education and evangelism, in the last few decades, on the holistic ministry of Jesus, and the need for the church to emulate His example. The "evangelicals" owe something to the "ecumenicals" for this renewed emphasis. And so, we have talked much about the integrity of Christian witness and ministry. But we should also take note of the recent warning of Dr Emilio Castro, the WCC General Secretary:

> The global vision of God's kingdom to come could lead astray in two directions: "falsely eschatological", inviting passiveness, and "falsely activist" inciting radicalism, in which ideological convictions are made sacred, and too easily substituted for the kingdom to come.[3]

Both tendencies are to be found among the churches of Melanesia, and in the theological colleges, which serve those churches. It is good that our churches and colleges represent a diverse range of interests, in regard to the total work of mission. Yet, we should all agree on the theological basis for social justice, and working for the integrity of creation. Irrespective of hermeneutical presuppositions, the biblical message, which bases the integrity

[3] Quoted from Dr Fidel Castro, "Address to the World Council of Church's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism", in Susan Perlman, "An Evangelical Perspective on the San Antonio Conference", *Missiology* LXXVIX-313 (1990), pp. 6-16, 13.

of creation on the creative and redemptive work of our God, is a common starting point for those within the Christian faith. And this must be our starting point in theological education and evangelism. Given this firm basis, the church can participate in God's restorative work, and, itself, be an example of creation reintegrating, in the form of proper stewardship, in anticipation of God's own complete restorative work.

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The Integrity of Creation: an Ecumenical Overview

Christopher Garland

"How can the church call itself ecumenical, if the universe, itself, is left out?"
(Simone Weil)

Ecumenism is about taking an overall view of the church, and ecology is about taking an overall view of creation. The present condition of the natural world is of concern to all human beings, and can only be dealt with by them all working together. The breadth of vision we need to restore unity to the church is also needed to restore the integrity of creation. It is Christ, who brings unity to the church, His body, and Christ, who unites the whole of creation to Himself.

The words "ecumenism", "ecology", and "economy" all begin with the Greek word, **οἶκος** = *oikos*, meaning "home". Economy – **οἰκονομία** = *oikonomia* – literally means housekeeping, or stewardship. So, ecology and ecumenism both have to do with being at home, in a greater, God-given whole, to which we belong, and both involve housekeeping, or stewardship. They are words, which speak of the diversity of the particular members of a home, and the unity of the home, to which they belong. The "home", which was given to us by God in creation, was restored to us by Jesus Christ, when He, Himself, dwelt within that home. As human beings consciously accept the presence of Christ dwelling among them today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in word and sacrament, so they become His body, His temple, His home, and make His presence available to the whole of creation. They recognise that, by the Holy Spirit, God has already gone ahead of them, and is only waiting for His creatures to respond to Him, so that He can be effective in their lives. If we are to recognise, and respond, to the Holy Spirit, we must be sensitive to His presence. To be sensitive in that way will require prayer and meditation, to be open to God, and poetry and prophecy to make Him known to others. Yet poetry is not just a subjective matter of feelings. It also needs an objective basis, in reality, and so must be allied to science. Both poetry and science, like prayer and effective action, come from loving attention to the world as it really is.

As we recognise that God is present for, and involved with, His creation, we also recognise that creation is not yet perfect, and so God is sharing in the suffering that results from the brokenness of creation. God's share in the suffering of creation was revealed by the cross of Jesus Christ. Yet, by sharing in the suffering of creation, God acts to heal it, and that healing is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is a foretaste of the renewal of the whole of creation. By the Holy Spirit, that renewal is being made present now, and all human beings are called to respond to it, and cooperate with it. By the renewal of creation, its brokenness is healed, and the barriers that divide and estrange human beings from God, human beings from human beings, and human beings from nature, are overcome. The way in which barriers are broken down is Christ's way of humble love. Only by humility can we remove the high barriers that human pride has erected. So it is this way of humble love that unites the divided church, and heals the broken integrity of creation.

If we take the way of humility, we will not need to wait for big solutions to be imposed from the top, but can begin at the grass roots level by loving our neighbour, and caring for our environment.

Making Sense of the Oneness of Life: a Melanesian Christian View on Creation

Ronnie Tom Ole

Why talk about the integrity of creation? It seems, though, that we are responding to the modern crises of the disintegration of creation. A lot of ink is now being spilled in Christian literature, on trying to recover, or, perhaps, explore, appropriate theological reflections, to provide a strong impetus for concerns on justice, peace, and integrity of creation. The World Council of Churches, through its Church and Society sub-unit, has much to say on the "integrity of creation" aspect, in particular, Dr Preman Nile's little book, *Resisting the threats to life*, (WCC Risk Series), for example, is an excellent summary of stories that may reflect the disintegration of creation. Niles also further notes, from a biblical perspective, why Christians should resist such threats to life as an "integral part" of their confession of faith.

But there are also others, like Jim McPherson, who say that, on the matter of the environment, and its despoliation, "Christian systematic theology has been strangely silent".[1] Furthermore, he also argues that the responsible body of WCC, focusing on the aspect of integrity of creation, "has been unable to find suitable theological categories to address its agenda of environmental concern".[2]

This paper will neither repeat what others have already said on the theme, nor will it propose a theology on the integrity of creation. Others have done that, and I think they have done it well. I am unaware of any discussions on the impact of Melanesian cultural concepts of creation to contribute to Christian theology, and that issue is the subject of this article. It will highlight Melanesian thinking on creation.

What are the Melanesian cultural perceptions of reality that will contribute to the thinking of other people? This question is prompted by a sense of urgency for those of us, who are still experiencing the continual disintegration of our tribal land bases; for those of us, who watch the ever-increasing attack on the earth, and the environment, with much pain. The suffering, on our own doorstep, only tell us the

[1] Jim McPherson, "The Integrity of Creation: Science, History, and Theology", in *Pacifica* 2-3 (October 1989), p. 333.
[2] Ibid., p. 334.

powerful prayers of the oppressors. What are our responses, as Melanesians, to those prayers?

The Melanesian concept of creation must be understood, in terms of people's relationship to the earth and the environment, with all their contents, visible and invisible. It is an affirmation of life's unity – the interrelatedness, and the interdependence, between human life and nature. According to Melanesians, a world without human beings is an incomplete understanding of creation, and vice versa. Each is connected, and is dependent on the other. Each is made possible by the other. The interaction, that takes place between nature and people, provides a meaning of life. Consider this Papuan mythology of creation, for example:

Melanesians say that, previously, human beings had no coconuts. When they cooked taro, they had no coconut milk to put on it.

> In the early days of creation, there used to be a village near the sea. The men, who lived there, went fishing every morning. But they did not catch many fish – except one man, who went by himself. He could catch more fish than he could eat.
>
> "This is very strange indeed", the men said. So they had a meeting about it. While the meeting was in progress, a boy stood, listening, and thought of a plan, and he put it before the gathering.
>
> "Tomorrow, I will follow him, and see what he does."
>
> The next day, the boy did as he planned, and followed the man, till he came to the seashore. Then the boy hid behind a tree, and watched the man carefully.
>
> This is what he saw: the man put down his fishing basket, and then took hold of his head with his two hands. He pulled and pulled, till his head came off. He placed his head on the sand, and he walked into the sea, till the water came up to the middle of his body. After he had stopped in the water, the man bent down till his throat was level with it. Then the fish came swimming in great numbers, and swam down the man's throat. When he had enough, he walked slowly back to the shore. He shook the fish out, and put his head on again. The boy, who witnessed all this, was afraid, and he ran home quickly, and told others about it.

> The next day, all the men went quickly to the seashore, to see what happened. They saw the man take off his head, and get into the water. Then, one of the men ran out from the trees, and, taking the head, he threw it into the bush. After a short while, the owner came out of the water, and began feeling for his head. When he could not find his head, he ran back into the sea, and changed into a big human fish. He swam out of sight.
>
> A few days later, the boy, who first saw the man, started to think about the head. He went into the bush, to try to find it. When he came to the place, where it had been thrown, he found a palm tree growing. Nobody knew what the tree was. It had nuts on it. The men, who saw this, then were afraid to eat them. But one of the women took a nut, and ate the inner part. When the others saw that she was not harmed, they ate some as well.

Melanesians say, if you look at the nut, when the husk has been taken away, you can see the face of a man. I can tell you, it is the face of the man, whose head became the first coconut.

A new meaning of life is expressed clearly in this creation story, as both nature and people interact. One could say, as humankind opens itself up to nature (and vice versa), it elicits possibilities of new life – life in its fullness, life complete. In other words, in the interaction with the environment, persons discover that they are being interrelated and interdependent to creation – all that is living. Both nature and people, according to Melanesians, are inseparably integrated. Bernard Narokobi makes a similar point, when he speaks of religious experience. He says: "An experience, for a Melanesian, I believe, is the person's encounter with the Spirit, the law, economics, politics, and life's own total whole",[3] and I would add, "with nature, as well". For Narokobi, this is the "Melanesian's vision of cosmos, and its relationship with it."[4] But, I would further add, that this is what life means in Melanesia.

Life has to be seen in its totality. (This is the meaning of creation.) Therefore, the notion of life, is the bottom line of Melanesian thinking.

One will notice, from the legend, that, according to Melanesian thought, creation is that which is full of life, new life. Life becomes transcendental. It is creative and recreative. Life moves beyond the horizons of limitedness to explore

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[3] Bernard Narokobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian?", in James Knight, ed., *Christ in Melanesia, Point* (1&2/1977), p. 8.
[4] Ibid.

new dimensions, while, at the same time, provides new and fresh possibilities. The transcendental life is not, altogether, a life of nature. Life is also sacred, that is, from a Melanesian perspective. Life is sacred, because, by origin, it is sacred. Since the Melanesian cosmos is all spiritual, life then becomes an issue for spiritual concern. Like other Melanesians have said, a Melanesian is born into a spiritual world. Life is consecrated towards upholding that religious order. A Melanesian is aware that he or she exists, and functions, within the world of spirits.

Within this given understanding, the origin of life is understood as divine. In the context of its divine origin, human life is necessarily oriented around religious and moral implications. Thus, the questions of human life cannot be considered without, first of all, answering political, economical questions. I suppose this is what Narokobi means when he says "total experience".[5] And, because life has to do with the transcendental experience of creation, and provides possibilities for human life, it is quite right for a Melanesian to say that life serves as the context, in which structures for meaning are enhanced. Life becomes the framework that relates things religious, and things profane; that orders social structures, and patterns for living for the society; and that binds the community and nature in one common bond of relationship.

From this perspective, Melanesians do not segregate nature and human life. If we lose our land, for example, we lose our place in creation. If we find ourselves alienated, or exiled, from our land, we find ourselves at odds with ourselves and with all creation.

Two years ago, I was pastorally appointed to Karawa United church of Central Province, to be the minister of that local church. At certain times, I was invited to join the men for hunting and fishing expeditions. As I recall, on my first hunting trip, I was dazzled by what they told me. Pointing to the land we stood on, and waving his hands to the trees, and the river, one of the men said to me, "All these you see and hear provide the people of Karawa with all basic needs." He added that the land and the environment provided food, medicine, and material for building a house, or a canoe. He further stated that the land we were standing on was sacred, because it was the dwelling place of the "*Palagu Para*" (the big spirit). In other words, land and environment is everything, and "all things", for a Melanesian.

This understanding of being inseparably interrelated and interdependent to nature gives Melanesians a sense of reverence and care for creation. Melanesians

[5] Ibid.

treat nature with care and reverence, because nature is not dead. It is alive and creative, and is also recreative. It is continuous. If nature is not given reverence and care, then it would mean nature does not exist. Then no life would exist. The element of continuity in life would not give Melanesians a new sense of meaning in life. Furthermore, since nature must interact with people, human life is also treated with reverence and care. This reverence for human life confirms the very existence, and growth, of nature. Melanesians' perception of reality is that nature is alive, and is maturing in all dimensions, with ever-new human possibilities.

The Melanesian notion of life opens up to the concept of community. This is a question of the meaning of creation. In other words, the concept of community arises out of, and is rooted in, the understanding that nature and people belong to one another. It is that network of life that produces the ethical-communal relationship of human life. Thus, the notion of life serves as the framework of interpretation of the world. What goes on in the world concerns life. Life becomes the springboard for all things to exist, for creativity and recreativity. To use Greek terms, life is the alpha and the omega of all creation. Life is continuous, it has no ending. It constructs living structures, and patterns for the society. In short, life is the basis for Melanesian community life.

A long-time Protestant missionary, and one-time politician, the late Revd Percy Chatterton, notes the "gut" of this life, when he writes from the Papuan perspective. He comments: "What is this Melanesian way? It is, or was, a life-style, which was communalistic and egalitarian, making its decisions by consensus, and achieving its aims by cooperation. . . . Within these limits, it was possible to arrive at decisions by consensus, because the people making them were interrelated and interdependent.[6] The communal aspect of human life draws from the common source of life. That source identifies power of living. It informs a meaningful way of life. So it is logical for Melanesians to address problems of discontinuity in life, or problems that promote disintegration. It would only make sense to the Melanesian to say that the notion of life is to address political, economical, social, and spiritual questions, for the good or evil of the society. At the extreme, one could say the idea of community derives from the understanding that people and nature are one – people own nature, and nature owns people. The communal aspect of human life does not find meaning, or make sense, without discovering its oneness with nature, which is the source of all life.

The idea of oneness, for Melanesians, sets the commonality of the community. All of creation, all of life, is one, every creature in community, with

[6] Percy Chatterton, *Day That I Have Loved*, Sydney NSW: Pacifica Publishing, 1974, p. 118.

every other, living in harmony, and security, toward the well-being of every other creature. Therefore, our commonality is in community. All people are children, and members of a single tribe, heirs of the single hope, and bearers of a single destiny. Melanesians acknowledged that, since human life and nature are one, persons are bound together in a common loyalty. It is consequently inconceivable to proclaim this commonality, based on life's oneness, on the one hand, and on the other, allow for what Preman Niles calls "the threats to life"[7] to shake the foundations of what life is for a Melanesian. It would simply not make sense anyway.

Furthermore, the commonality in community is also bound by a common experience. That common experience is rooted, and is informed by, that oneness. It reminds us, once again, that the distance, and strangeness, between nature and human life do not exist. Since Melanesian thought on community refers to the oneness in life, certain symbols of life are shared to enhance persons to live in communion with each other and nature. Sharing is a pattern of living that affirms, and prepares, people for understanding each other. A life of sharing, in the notion of Melanesian community, develops and maintains the identity of each and everyone. It is the experience of the corporate identity I am referring to. And this is lived out in at least two ways.

As pointed out earlier, in brief, firstly, the corporate identity is experienced relationally. Melanesians are caught up in institutional structures, customs, and kinship networks. It relates people into relationships in time and space. According to the Melanesian notion of community, a person exists only in relationship to others. This theme is not only the key to the understanding of unity of nature and human life, it is central to the well-being of the relationship of people among themselves (no wonder the term "*wantok* system" is an enemy to contemporary life-style). The relational theme enables Melanesians to take risks. It invites them to explore the unknown. It frees them to engage in that reciprocity of giving and receiving. Bride price, for example, along the Papuan coast, is forced by this notion. Even when the price is so high, people are pulled into intimacy. These structures affirm and enable the continuity of our communication, and make visible our interrelatedness.

Secondly, corporate identity is lived out spontaneously. This theme is most appropriately reflected in the use of the word "celebration" to describe occasions that are not normally experienced – occasions that go beyond the experiences of

[7] Preman Niles, *Resisting the Threats to Life*, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1989, especially chapters 2, 3, and 4.

human life – encounters with the spirits, the sacred, the land, the sea. In 1988, I witnessed a great feast-dance in honour of the "*Palagu Para*" at Karawa village. It began with a few tentative, seductive drum taps in the still heat of the early afternoon, and worked slowly up, for long hours, to a climax of non-stop dancing and singing. Then, following the distribution of food, collected the next day, on the sacred platform, the celebration ended. The kundu drums, headdresses, and ornaments, were put away safely for some future celebration. The participants went back to a more mundane life.

The life, lived out through this aspect of community, is a moment, not a state. It is not hierarchical, but egalitarian. It is not segmented, but holistic. From this perspective, then, participants are known to one another, in the commonality of their submission to the power of moment. These spontaneous moments of community provide the intimacy of the transcendent, and allow for the transformation of the immediate. Disintegration has no place in this Melanesian experience of oneness that renders solidarity, and renews vision. Such moments also remind us of whom we are. They renew our commitments to the source of our corporate life.

Such a way of living is full of life, which is founded in the oneness of life, where nature and human life unite in the ongoing creative and recreative process, thereby presenting humankind with ever-new possibilities. It would be audacious for Melanesians to claim for themselves any relationship that claims to hurt that commonality. All are no more than one with each other, through one common experience.

Problem

This article, in a way, shows the concept of creation, from traditional Melanesian thinking, and the structure of living informed by that worldview. We noted that such a concept of the world, and structure of living, is informed by the understanding that all creation is interrelated and interdependent to/with each other. The structure of living, which emerges from this theme, is characterised by a life of care and reverence for others and nature. In short, political, economical, social, and religious life is rooted in, and is governed by, the concept of interrelatedness and interdependence.

Can we suggest that the concept of a united life be recommended as an alternative thinking to today's life – people, nature, modern technology, and science? In the Pacific region, for example, the problems of science and modern technology are characterised by nuclear weapons. Does this demand we look seriously at a different way of thinking and existence in the world? It seems,

though, that the present definitions of life, and models of living, informed by that worldview, is guiding people to self-destruction – both the destruction of human life and nature.

Melanesian thinking, and relating to self, others, nature, and the ultimate, is an appropriate alternative, because it has the potential. It really does point to a foundation for a doctrine of creation, and the creative and recreative dimensions of the human society.

If the Melanesian notion of life can inform manners of living, can we allow it to inform and regulate all structures and action of the ministries of the church? To name a few: theological education curriculum, preaching, pastoral care, and evangelism. It is interesting to observe that the "bottom line" of our practices in those ministries is well isolated from the Melanesian concept of the "oneness of life".

Somewhere along the line, something has prevented the enhancement, and empowerment, of such ministries. Perhaps I am thinking along the lines with the late Revd Joe Gaqurae, in his introduction to the article "Indigenisation as Incarnation: the Concept of a Melanesian Christ", where he states that, "Christianity came with Western civilisation. . . . At times, local people saw Christianity as identical to Western imperialism."[8] In other words, the West introduced a new system of thinking, and structure of living, foreign to Melanesians. This is the problem. This cultural imperialism was taught in schools, and through evangelism, in the churches. So the faith system of Melanesians was disoriented. Consequently, Melanesians' relationships to others, and to nature, become conditioned by this new faith system. So when Melanesians' thinking, and structure of living, was disoriented it ruined their perception of reality, which forms their way of life. This is what foreign cultural imperialistic attitudes did to Melanesians.

As long as the imposition of foreign cultural views has its place, Melanesian hermeneutics will be isolated from our "guts". Melanesians will only find a dichotomy, which will prevent them from understanding their own cultural assumptions, as given by that cosmology.

Today, the dichotomy between the Melanesian perception of reality and a foreign cultural system does not allow for the concept of "oneness of life" to be the guiding principal for life and practice.

[8] Joe Gaqurae, "Indigenisation as Incarnation: the Concept of a Melanesian Christ", in *Point* (1&2/1977), p. 147.

Conclusions

Hence, I begin to inquire into the Melanesian Christian perspective on the integrity of creation. The vision of life, which God intended, is no more than what has already been discussed in these concepts. "In the beginning, God . . .", is a faith statement that provides the framework, and goal, for our exploration on the theme of the integrity of creation. It diverts the perspective that informs our understanding on disintegration, while, at the same time, affirms the vision of life.

Therefore, as Melanesian Christians, instead of being fascinated with the uniqueness of an individual person, we should be impressed by the common threads that spread through the human community. Instead of viewing society as a make up of individuals, we should perceive each person as a necessary part of the social milieu. Themes, such as, interdependence and interrelatedness, rather than independence, should dominate our attention and thinking. The notion of community should set the precedence, as an image for understanding the nature and meaning of existence, rather than personal identity. We do not deny the importance of the uniqueness of independence in individuality. No. Rather, we are taking seriously – more seriously – the view of the corporate body, based on the belief that everyone is responsible for everyone, everything is responsible for everything, everyone is responsible for everything, and everything is responsible for everyone.

The most powerful and formative of all human experiences, in other words, is to be found in our interrelatedness – interdependence with each other, with all of nature and creation, and with God. The oneness of life is what makes sense for a Melanesian Christian.

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Towards a Biblical Theology of Land and Environment

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Introduction

Examining many a biblical or theological dictionary, one could easily be led to believe that land and environment are not issues of great theological concern. However, the truth is that, right from the opening verse of Genesis through to the last chapter of Revelation, God is pictured as being active, with respect to both.

Land and Environment in the Creation Account

The first chapter of Genesis pictures God as creating man's environment, and home place, and taking great pleasure in doing so. Throughout the description, there is an ascending order of creation. In the first three days, the basic forms of the created order are established: light, firmament (separating the "waters above" from the "waters beneath"), and dry land. In the next three days, each of these forms is, in turn, filled with substance. Thus, on the fourth day, sun, moon, and stars appear in the sphere of light; on the fifth day, the sea and air are filled with life; and, on the sixth day, the land creatures are formed, culminating with the creation of humankind.[1]

Man is here clearly portrayed as the crowning act of creation, for whom this whole created order has come into being. Thus, he is given dominion over it, and over all it contains.

Therefore, the creation account pictures God as being the great giver, from the very dawn of time. Man's whole environment, the very setting, in which his life is to be lived, is something unmerited by his worthiness or achievements. Instead, it has been provided in an act of sheer generosity on God's part.

Thus, land and environment become potent symbols of God's grace and love, proffered, not because of any attribute in the recipient, but solely because

[1] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Leicester UK: IVP, 1967, pp. 45-46.

of the nature of the giver. In this way, the New Testament gospel of salvation, centring on the indescribable gift of Christ Jesus, and justification, apart from human merit, is anticipated in the gifts of land and environment.

However, the gifts of land and environment are not autonomous gifts, for they cannot be separated from the giver. With them, God also gives himself. This concept becomes plain, when it is considered that the account of creation week does not finish with the creation of man, but with the record of God resting on the seventh day. Gen 1 illustrates how the world was made for man, while Gen 2:1-3 illustrates how man, in turn, was made for God.

The purpose of God's rest needs to be clarified. Clearly, the rest is not for God's own benefit, for God does not grow weary or faint (Is 40:28). Rather, the rest appears to be for man's benefit. God is here indicating His desire to fellowship with man, and to enter into the stream of time to be with him. The gracious purpose of God, revealed in the incarnation, is thus anticipated. God is not the absentee landlord of the deists, but takes an active and ongoing interest in His creation.

It must be remembered that the last day of creation week is pictured as man's first full day of existence. Man has been placed in a perfect environment, but, from the start, he is to be shown that it can only truly satisfy, when relationship with God is given first priority.

Hence, it is made plain that, while man has dominion over the created order, his dominion is a borrowed dominion. The land is given to him, and was, indeed, created for him, but it is not a final personal possession. Rather, it is a trust from God, to whom he remains accountable for its management. His dominion over the environment remains valid, insofar as he continues to acknowledge God's dominion over him. Similarly, the corollary of man's rebellion against God, is the natural world's rebellion against man.

Therefore, with the gifts of land and environment, there come responsibilities and commandments. Man must till and keep the soil, and he is commanded to "be fruitful, and increase in number; and to fill the earth, and subdue it", and to "rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:28). Likewise, man is commanded to show his acknowledgment of God's ultimate ownership of the world, by not eating of the fruit of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:16-17).

When man transgresses this specific command, the created order is quickly disrupted. Man becomes aware of the shame of his nakedness, even before God encounters the guilty pair (Gen 3:10-12). Furthermore, when God does appear, the pain of childbirth increases, the woman is subjected to the man's rulership, the ground is cursed with thorns (albeit for man's sake), man is condemned to return to the dust, and he is driven out of the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:16-23).

Thus, while the land and the environment, in the creation story, are free gifts of grace, in order for man to retain them, there are certain obligations he must fulfil. Therefore, the gifts of land and environment not only anticipate God's gift of grace in Jesus, they also anticipate the responsibilities, which that grace brings with it.

Land and Environment in the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants

In the creation account, God's covenant with man is directly linked with His gifts of land and environment, while man's transgression of the covenant is directly linked to the defilement, and even loss, of the land.

However, not only in the creation story, but right through the Old Testament, God's covenant is repeatedly linked with the gifts of land and environment, just as transgression is, likewise, repeatedly linked with the defilement and loss of the land.

Again, in later covenant settings, the language of the original creation is often borrowed to describe the new situation God is bringing to pass.

These facts can be seen in Genesis, itself, in the settings of the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants.

For instance, the flood comes because human evil and violence have corrupted the earth (Gen 6:5, 11-12). However, hope remains on the other side of the judgment because Noah has found favour, or grace, in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8). The flood is, in many respects, a reversal of creation, as the ordained separation between the "water above" and the "waters beneath" is abrogated, along with the separation between land and sea (Gen 7:11). However, there is a new creation, as the wind moves over the earth – just as God's Spirit did in the beginning – and the waters are once again separated, as are the land and the sea (Gen 8:2-3). Likewise, the original cycle of the days and seasons, established on the fourth day of creation, is now restored, for as long as the earth shall endure (Gen 8:22).

With this new creation, the command to "be fruitful, and increase in number, and fill the earth" is reiterated (Gen 9:2). New commands are given, in view of the new situation. For example, capital punishment for murder is instituted for the first time (Gen 9:6), one reason, seemingly being, is the belief that the shedding of the murderer's blood will prevent future defilement of the earth through violence (cf. Num 35:33-34; 2 Sam 21:1-14).

The covenant with Abraham, likewise, centres on the multiplication of the future seed, and upon the gift of land. To Abraham's seed, the land of Canaan is encompassed in these promises, for God promises that, through Abraham, "all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2-3) – in reverse to the curse that came upon the whole human family at the fall. The New Testament uses the fact that Abraham was promised the world, as a gift of grace, as an Old Testament example of justification by faith (Rom 4:1-13).

Land and Environment in the Exodus Covenant

It is in the context of the Exodus that the promise of land to Abraham is first pictured as being fulfilled (e.g., Ex 6:8). Here again, we see the patterns of a new creation, as the blowing of the wind once more separates the waters and divides the land from the sea, making way for the birth of the nation of Israel (Ex 14:21). It is also in the context of the Exodus that some of the clearest statements of the gift nature of the land are found: statements as clear in their expression of the doctrine of grace as any found in Paul's writings (e.g., Deut 7:7-8; 9:5-6).

The fact that the land and the environment are only derived possessions, held on trust, is likewise repeatedly emphasised. It is God who really owns all the earth (Ex 19:5). For this reason, there are responsibilities attached to the reception of the gift, which, once more, are powerful types of the responsibilities, inherent in receiving the grace of the gospel. If the people will acknowledge the giver, through obedience, then the land and the environment will flourish, along with the people, as Eden is progressively restored. On the other hand, if the people disobey, then God will play no favourites. They will, as surely, perish from the land, as those "whom the Lord cast out" before them, for defiling it by the same sins (Lev 18:25-8).

Blessings for obedience include multiplication of Israel's seed, an abundance of rain, crops and flocks; and health, long life, and protection from enemies. On the other hand, curses for disobedience include barrenness, drought, crop and flock failure; and disease, premature death, and defeat at the

hands of enemies, culminating in loss of the land, and fresh captivity (Deut 11:14-17, 28, 30).

In the context of the Sinai covenant, the Sabbath commandment, as recorded in Ex 20:8-11, reflects a special concern for the integrity of creation, and of ourselves, as part of that creation. The Sabbath here becomes a regular reminder that man's true value cannot be established in economic terms, but must be seen, instead, in terms of relationship with the Creator. Even the humblest members of society: the manservant and the maidservant, are not, primarily, economic resources, but human beings, with a right to rest and refreshment, just like their masters. Indeed, even the animals must be given rest, for they, too, as a part of creation, are God's, and have intrinsic value, and rights.

In addition, with the establishment of Israel as a nation, two specific land laws are given, in anticipation of Israel's entry into Canaan. Both the law of sabbatical rest, and the law of Jubilee, illustrate a profound realisation that the land is really God's, and is thus, man's, only on trust (see Lev 25).

Every seventh year, the land is to lie fallow in Sabbath rest, just as the people are to rest every seventh day. Whatever other meanings may be implicit in this symbol, one obvious one is the importance of preserving the fertility of the soil. Soil conservation is, then, a biblical issue.

Every 50th year, a year of Jubilee is to be proclaimed, in which all farming land is to be returned to its original owners. Clearly, since man did not create the land, he holds it only as a steward, and, therefore, has the responsibility to pass it on, intact, to future generations. It would be gross theft to sell out the divinely-ordained inheritance of the, as yet unborn, simply for present gain. Thus, when agricultural land is "sold" in the Old Testament, it is not, strictly speaking, the land, which is sold, but rather the use of it, to raise a certain number of crops, i.e., until the next Jubilee. The land, itself, is inalienable.

The attachment of the original owner to the land is so great that, even before the Jubilee, the original landowner has the right to reclaim the land if he, or more likely, a kinsman, raises the funds to compensate the purchaser for the crops that remain until Jubilee time.

Clearly the Jubilee is also meant to have a social impact, in preventing the progressive accumulation of God-given resources in the hands of a minority.

Obviously, while not every aspect of these laws, either could, or should, be applied today, there is a need to find ways of translating the principles behind them into contemporary action.

Land and Environment in the Prophets

The prophets portray the sad fact that Israel, and later Judah, both choose the pathway of the covenant curses, rather than the covenant blessings, with often catastrophic environmental results (e.g., Hos 4:1-3).

The ultimate result of Israel's disobedience, is predicted to be a return to Egypt, with the sword raging against the cities, and the fortresses being destroyed (e.g., Hos 10:14; 11:5-6). These words find their primary fulfilment in the Assyrian captivity.

Likewise, it is predicted that Judah's rebellion will lead to the wasting and desolation of the land (Is 6:11-12), with briars and thorns replacing fields of vines (7:23-25), the land being burnt up (9:17-19), and the crops being uprooted early, only to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey (17:11; 18:5-6). Ezekiel, in harmony with Lev 26, predicts a fourfold scourge of sword, famine, wild beasts, and plagues (Ezek 14:21). These words find their primary fulfilment in the Babylonian captivity.

However, for both Israel and Judah, the promise is held forth for a second Exodus (e.g., Is 11:10-16), and a renewed creation, with the drying up of "Babylon's sea" (Jer 50:38) paralleling the creation of the dry land on the third day, the drying up of the waters after the flood, and the drying up of the Red Sea.

Once again, the land and the environment are central to the promised covenant renewal. The people will return to the land, but God's covenant will not just be with them, it will be "with the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and the creatures that move along the ground" (Hos 2:18). The rebellion of the animal creation will be replaced with natural harmony (Is 11:6-9; 65:25), while the desert, itself, will flourish with vegetation (35:1-2, 7). Even the Dead Sea will teem with fish (Ezek 47:1-12). The mountains will drip with new wine, the hills will flow with milk, and the ravines will run with water (Joel 3:18), while the crop-yield will be so abundant that the harvester

will still be harvesting when it is time for the ploughman to plough again, and the crushing of the grapes will still be going on when the time comes for the new vines to be planted (Amos 9:13).

In connection with the promises, and prayer for the restoration of the land, its nature, as a gift, is again made plain, in statements, which, once more, remarkably anticipate the New Testament teaching of salvation by grace (Hos 2:19, 23; 14:4-5; Mic 7:18-19; Dan 9:9, 16-19).

However, while the restoration of the land is an act of sheer grace, the gift, again, cannot be separated from the giver, and the continued reception of the blessings freely offered is still pictured in the post-exilic era, as being dependent upon obedient response to the Lord (Zech 1:2-6).

Land and Environment in the New Testament

In the person of Jesus Christ, God's covenant reaches its climax, and the creation is again renewed. In Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, the dominion, originally entrusted to man over the creation, has now been restored (Heb 2:5-9). He, as the second Adam, is the new head of the human race, and while we await the final consummation of glory, the eye of faith beholds Him, even now, as the victor.

Matthew hints at the role of Jesus, as the beginning of a new creation, in His opening words, which may be rendered most literally as "a book of the genesis of Jesus Christ", while Luke's description of the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary, and "the power of the Most High" overshadowing her, is curiously reminiscent of the Spirit's hovering over the deep in the first creation (Luke 1:35).

However, it is John, in his gospel, who most plainly develops the theme of the new creation. His opening words are identical to those of Genesis: "in the beginning", and God is central to the first sentence of both. Early in the first chapter of Genesis, we have the creation of light (John 1:3-5), while early in the first chapter of John, the theme of Jesus, as light, is central (John 1:4-5). Adam is placed in a garden, while Jesus, as the second Adam, is crucified in a garden (John 19:41). Adam falls into a slumber, and has his side opened, that he might have a bride, while Jesus' side is opened, that He might have a bride, the church (John 19:34). In the beginning, God makes the world in six days, and rests on the seventh, while, in passion week, Christ, having completed His work of atonement on the sixth day, cried out, "it is finished" (19:20), and

rested in the tomb on the seventh day, before rising again on the first. Finally, Jesus' supremacy over the forces of nature, illustrated in Peter's miraculous catch of fish after the resurrection, points to Him as the one to whom Adam's lost dominion is now being restored (John 21:5-7).

In the New Testament, the promise of grace is, of course, perceived to include much more than simply the possession of the land, *per se*. For instance, the writer of Hebrews argues, from Ps 95, the typology of the primordial Sabbath, and the experience of Israel in Joshua's day, that the promise always was meant to point to something deeper than just land, even, ultimately, to the rest of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Heb 3:7-4:11).

This broader understanding is, thus, not seen as contradictory to the Old Testament, but rather as implicit in it. For this reason, the writer of Hebrews can identify the hope of the faithful of the Old Testament, for a promised land, with the hope of the faithful of the Christian age (Heb 11:13-16, 40). Hence also, Jesus can reiterate the promise of Ps 37:11 that the "meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5).

The place for the land and the environment, then, is as important in the New Testament hope as in that of the Old Testament. For instance, the thrust of the description of the new heavens and the new earth in Rev 21 and 22 seems to be that all of which was lost of the Edenic land and environment has now been restored.

The chief difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament perspectives seems to be in the way that the renewal of the land and the environment is to be achieved. In the New Testament, there seems, no longer, to be any realistic hope of a gradual transformation of the old order into the new, in contrast to much of the Old Testament. Instead, a sharp apocalyptic division of the ages is envisaged, with this world destroyed by fire, that a new one might be created from the ashes (e.g., 2 Pet 3:7-13; cf. Is 65:17-20 and Rev 21:1-8).

Of course, the new age is a present reality in Jesus Christ, in whom the "not yet" of future hope is anticipated in the "now" of faith. The present is, therefore, most definitely not devoid of meaning. However, present physical possession of land, down here in this world, is no longer as central to the present experience of the covenant as it seems to have been in the Old Testament. For the church, hope is focused on the Jerusalem above, rather than on the present city of Jerusalem (Gal 4:25-26). Genuine worship is a

matter of truth and spirit, rather than of holy places (John 4:21-24), and the presence of Christ is the source of rest (Matt 11:28-30).

It might be tempting to conclude, therefore, that the New Testament apocalyptic perspective diminishes the importance of stewardship of the land and the environment – and, indeed, many Christian groups, with an apocalyptic emphasis, have seemed to pay scant regard to such issues.

However, the truth is that such a viewpoint ignores the very rationale behind some of the most apocalyptic portions of the New Testament. Rev 11:18, for instance, speaks of the time coming for "destroying those who destroy the earth". It is the defilement of the land and the environment – whether through sin, in general, or through direct neglect of the resources entrusted to us – which is to bring down the wrath of heaven upon the world.

This fact becomes even plainer if the unfolding of the mysterious apocalyptic scroll of Rev. 5 is understood in terms of a kinsman's redemption of a forfeited inheritance (cf. Jer 32:6-16).[2] As the scroll is opened, the covenant curses of war, famine, plague, and beasts are fulfilled anew, with perhaps the same intention as in parallel Old Testament prophecies and narrative: namely, the casting out of those who, through transgression of the covenant, can no longer legally claim a share of the land (Rev 6:3-8; Lev 26:14-26; Ezek 14:21). This action is taken so that the rightful heirs may rule over the earth instead (Rev 5:9-10). So it is, that the meek, who alone can be trusted to care for the land and its resources, shall indeed inherit the earth.

Conclusions

Throughout the Old Testament, land and the environment are both viewed as divine gifts, which, fittingly, represent the gracious nature of God's covenant. However, they are always gifts, given only on trust, and so, as freely as they might be received, continued retention of them always entails the fulfilment of certain basic responsibilities. Therefore, they represent both the privileges and responsibilities inherent in grace.

In the New Testament, the hope of a restored land and environment is, ultimately, as central to the covenant as in the Old Testament. However, the present possession of land, here on earth, today, is not considered as important as in the Old Testament, for the new earth is no longer conceived of as coming

[2] Desmond Ford, *Crisis!*, 3 vols, Newcastle CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982, vol 2, pp. 328-329.

about by the gradual transformation of the old. Instead, it comes about by a fiery apocalyptic sweeping away of the old, to make way for the new. The heavenly Jerusalem and land, where the future victory is already now enshrined, in the person of Christ, is the focus of present attention.

Nevertheless, this fact does not diminish the importance of continued faithful stewardship of land and the environment, here and now. On the contrary, one of the chief reasons for the coming destruction of the world is human defilement of the land. Therefore, it remains vital for Christians today to continue to seek contemporary ways of expressing the divine concern for land and the environment

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A Statement by MATS on the Integrity of Creation

The Bible teaches that God created the world, and saw that it was good. Our wonder and delight, in the world in which we live, prompts us to assent to the biblical revelation, and to respond, with praise and thanksgiving. Further, the Bible teaches, and our consciences acknowledge, that we are responsible to God as stewards of His wonderful creation. We, the people of Papua New Guinea, in our culture, are aware of the goodness of the natural world, that comes as a gift from beyond ourselves, to be in a reciprocal relationship of exchange within the whole community of creation.

Yet, in Papua New Guinea, we are already seeing symptoms of an ever-increasing misuse by humanity of the responsible dominion entrusted to us by God. This dominion is exercised through the structures of politics, and economics, within society, and by the tools of technology. As a result of the misuse of the means of stewardship, the relationships between humanity and God, human being and human being, humanity and creation, are seen to be breaking down. In Papua New Guinea, the misuse of technology for economic reasons is leading to deforestation, over-mining, over-fishing, and over-intensive agriculture. Its effects and symptoms are seen in the exhaustion and poisoning of the land, and the disappearance of valuable species of plants and animals.

Although deforestation is in its early stages in Papua New Guinea, in other tropical countries, it is far advanced, so that loss of trees is contributing, in turn, to the build-up of greenhouse gases, climate change, and eventually to the raising of sea levels, and the submerging of coastal areas. These changes amount to unprecedented, and critical, interference in, and alteration of, the ecological balance of nature. As such, they are a violation of the natural order, which God has provided, to sustain the universe. Such a violation is not just an accident, or a casual mistake, it amounts to a consistent attitude of disobedience to the moral order that undergirds the natural order. Human beings are misusing the tools of technology for short-term economic gain. Unthinking desire for gain is not merely greed, but idolatry, for it makes desire for money into an absolute goal for human life, a "god", and erects a "technological imperative", that states that technology should be pushed to its limit to maximise economic gain.

As long as they allow themselves to be carried along by their greed and idolatry, human beings will be in the grip of the very technological tools and

economic forces that they seek to exploit, and will have no means to stop the acceleration of their efforts from continuing to the point of terminal breakdown. In that case, they will see environmental destruction as inevitable, if they refuse to face the thought of dealing with its basic cause, which is the human urge for power, uncontrolled by the will of God.

This urge for power is hidden behind an ideology of development, which sees "growth" in terms of an increase of material wealth, and measures success, solely in terms of monetary profit. It disregards the effects of the private accumulation of wealth and power upon the human and natural community, and upon future generations, who will have to cope with the waste and desolation, caused by temporary "progress". The result is not only the destruction of the integrity of creation, but also the disruption of justice and peace, leading to the loss of human wholeness. We are like passengers on a runaway, driverless PMV, or an oarless canoe, because we have abdicated responsibility for the control of the natural processes, of which we are stewards.

Confronted by the seeming possibility of a man-made end of the world, Christians do not give in to despair, complacency, or escapism. Instead, they turn to Christ. In Christ, the Father is renewing the whole of creation, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and is calling humanity into a new covenant relationship with Himself. By the incarnation of Jesus Christ, God dwelt among us, and by His Holy Spirit, He is in touch, not only with every human being, but with the whole of creation. The presence of God, through Jesus Christ, is offered to us by word and sacrament, by the Bible, and by the bread and wine, fruits of the earth, which Jesus Christ took to be His body and blood. The incarnation of Jesus Christ includes His cross and resurrection. By His cross, Jesus won the victory over all forces that are used by human beings to gain absolute power for themselves. He exposed all such forces as powerless, and condemned the greed and idolatry of those who use them.

So, the cross shows us our real powerlessness, if we idolise technology and economic power. Yet, if we accept our powerlessness, we are then open to the love of God, displayed on the cross, and to the resurrection life that flows from it. We are open to the love that builds community, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and so restores the integrity of creation, and restores justice and peace to humanity. So, the covenant relationship, into which God, in Trinity, calls us, is renewed and we are made stewards of creation once more. The reciprocal relationship with creation, in which we Papua New Guineans take

part, may be taken up into, and fulfilled by, this new covenant. So, by confessing our sin against the God of creation, we are brought to repentance, and are then renewed, and sent out, to act, by word and example, as prophets to our fellow human beings, to awaken them, both to the reality of their situation, and to the remedy.

When our understanding of our role as stewards is renewed by Christ, we will no longer allow the tools of technology, and the political, and economic structures of life, to enslave us, but will control them, by love, and use them to cooperate with God in the work of renewing His creation. Guided by love, we will respect each creature as a valued member of the web of creation. We will use all our skills of intelligence and imagination to work for the good of each creature, and use the tools of technology, and the structures of society, in a way that is appropriate to them. We, ourselves, will adopt a simpler, sustainable lifestyle, where necessary, by which we can live in harmony with the community of creation, and help restore its ecological balance.

If we are to use the tools of technology, and the structures of society constructively, we must use the advice of the technological, ecological, and social sciences, and incorporate them into the curricula of our seminaries, and into the life of our nation. Our audience for this appeal is the whole of humanity, for all human beings share in the call to be stewards of creation.

Book Reviews

***God is Green*, Ian Bradley, London UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990**

The author looks at the claim that Christianity has asserted the importance of human beings in a way that devalues all other creatures, and has contributed to the view of nature as a machine, from which God had withdrawn. In reply, he points to the way that the Bible insists that God is the creator of the whole universe, and not just of humanity. He quotes, not just from the Bible, but also from Christian saints and poets, who have spoken of their love of all God's creatures. He insists that, not only the doctrine of creation, but also the doctrine of the incarnation, rebut any dualist understanding of nature, that sees it as cut off from God, merely material, and therefore worthless.

He takes a sacramental view that sees God as dynamically involved in what we call "the sense of creation", and quotes the Bible, and St Francis, to support his view that the force that both drives and holds the world in harmony is the love of God. He also appeals to the way, in which evolutionary theory, and quantum physics, have led some scientists to a deep sense of wonder at the mystery of the immense, ordered energy, they find at the heart of creation.

When confronted by the claim that an exaggerated doctrine of the fall of man has led to the view that not only humanity, but also nature, is totally depraved, he argues that the brokenness of nature can be interpreted as an opportunity for healing and growth. Much of the imperfection of nature he sees as immaturity, rather than as corruption. He claims that a forward-looking, evolutionary approach to nature can be found in the Bible, above all, in the key text of Rom 8:18-23. He does not see this movement as being self-contained, self-sufficient, and independent of salvation, and fulfilment, by Jesus Christ. Instead, he sees that the evolutionary development of creation is made possible by, and is summed up in, the "cosmic Christ", who is the Saviour of the whole of creation.

He feels that Christians are called to respond to God's involvement in creation, by being stewards of creation, as gardeners, scientists, poets, artists, and priests. He says human beings are like priests, because they mediate between God and nature, and he quotes the biologist and priest, Arthur Peacocks, "Man's role may be conceived as that of a priest of creation, as a result of whose activity, the sacrament of creation is reverenced; and who, because he, alone, is conscious of God Himself and nature, can mediate

between insentient nature and God – for a priest is characterised by activity directed towards God, on behalf of others."

In order to put such ideas into practice in worship and action, he suggests that special services, including hymns and prayers in praise of God's creation could be included. He says the church could take a lead in community projects, such as recycling, and land conservation, and says churches should use land in their possession in an environmentally-responsible way. The whole of his book is a statement of the intrinsic value of every creature, and so is an encouragement to the church, to take political and economic action, to uphold that value.

***Creating a Just Future*, Jurgen Moltmann, London UK: SCM Press, 1989**

This book deals starkly with the present ecological crisis, and offers a Christian hope, based on the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to move human beings to responsible action, in the face of overwhelming danger. He does not talk of God intervening, apart from through His calling, and enabling, of human beings to take action, so he seems to allow for the destruction of creation by human folly. In that case, he admits that God would suffer loss, yet since He is the transcendent creator beyond His own creation, He would be able to transform the debris of creation, by a new act of creation: "He will bring this annihilated world into the creation of His new world."

Jurgen Moltmann sees the ecological crisis as cause and effect of a spiritual crisis, which produces sicknesses of soul, as well as body. He says that the ecological crisis has already become an ecological catastrophe for many weaker forms of life. He says that the crisis is the result of modern Western thought, which detaches human beings from the laws and rhythms of nature. "Only modern Western civilisations are one-sidedly programmed for development, growth, expansion, and conquest. Yet", he says, "mankind does belong within the equilibrium of nature, and, if nature collapses, then human beings will collapse with it." So, "only an extensive change in the life-style of human beings, and in the forms of industrial production, could ward off the ecological death of mankind. We need an ecological reform of our society, of production, of consumption, and of transport. . . . Ecological justice, which is the basis of a symbiosis of humankind, and nature, capable of survival, will become just as important, in the future, as economic justice, and justice between the generations. . . . Does modern society have a future? Its future is repentance. . . . Because we cannot know whether humanity will survive, we must act today, as though the future of all mankind depended on us, and, at the same time, trust wholly that God will remain true to His creation, and not let it fall."

Moltmann sees repentance as turning to Christ, and receiving His peace. "The peace of Christ is personally perceived through faith, in the depth of one's own heart. . . . The peace of Christ is universal, and permeates the whole creation; otherwise Christ is not the Christ of God." Moltmann goes on to argue that we must discern, and act, according to a moral order within creation: "we can live in accordance with God, only if we live also in accordance with nature".

He realises that the crisis is so great that many may lose their nerve. So He offers hope: "The Christian recollection makes present the suffering and death of Christ, as He was abandoned by God, and, through the anticipation of His resurrection from the dead, rouses hope for the victory of life against the power of death. . . . Hope against danger leads to paradoxical action, i.e., action against appearances, and against prospects of success, because, by virtue of hope in God, one sees more than the eye rightly sees, when it looks into the future of the world."

Moltmann looks at the ecological implications of the Sabbath, and Sunday, in a way, which might offer some common ground between Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians. In a section on "The Sabbath of humankind: the divine therapy", he speaks of the Sabbath as a "feast of creation", "on which one rediscovers the beauty of created things, and perceives the value of all the things, which one has seen during work, only in terms of utility". Moltmann, himself, sees Sunday as "that day after the Jewish Sabbath, which Christians had celebrated, from the beginning, as the day of Christ's resurrection". Yet he tries to combine the significance of the Jewish Sabbath with that of the Christian Sunday, which involves a compromise between the keeping of the Sabbath and the celebrating of Sunday: "The creation story speaks of 'evening and morning'. It helps me to begin the day of celebration on Saturday, at noon, and end it on Sunday afternoon. In that case, one relaxes on Saturday, and, at least on this evening, one can trace something of Israel's Sabbath rest. . . . On Sunday morning, we are then ready to celebrate the day of Christ's resurrection, and, on it, the first day of the new creation of all things, and to perceive that future, in which all things will be completed."

Moltmann's book is directed mainly at Western societies, but it has much relevance for Papua New Guinea, as it becomes increasingly Westernised.

***A New Teaching, A New Learning*, by Gerald Collier. TEF Study Guide 25, published 1989, by SPCK, Holy Trinity Church, Marylebone Road, London NWI 4DU England**

This book, subtitled, *A Guide to Teaching Theology*, will be required reading for all staff at seminaries and theological colleges.

It surveys the objectives of education: from acquiring basic knowledge, through skills in using and assessing the knowledge, through "inventiveness", through making knowledge personally, existentially "real", to learning to get inside the knowledge of other cultures. It looks at methods of learning, including the art of lecturing, setting practical projects, and using small groups within a class. It looks at how students gain self-knowledge, and at academic and professional assessment techniques.

It is written in a way that demonstrates the methods it describes, and lends itself to group discussion, so that it could be used as the basis of an "in-service" course for the staff of a college.

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