Ecological Christology:
incarnation, redemption and resurrection in relation to all creation.

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Much ecological theology is rooted in the Old Testament. Yet, if ecotheology is to engage all Christians in a meaningful way, it must also be found in the New Testament and specifically in the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is a widespread assumption that the New Testament focuses away from creation towards a more 'spiritual gospel'. Richard Bauckham speaks of "the impression that the Gospels have not much to offer on this subject"[1] and James Jones writes: "Up until my study leave, if you had asked me what Jesus had to say about the earth and whether the Gospels had anything to say in formulating an environmental ethic, I would have thought 'precious little'".[2] Yet, as this paper will demonstrate, ecological Christology is both fundamental to the New Testament and critically important with regards to many core Christian doctrines including incarnation, redemption, missiology, ecclesiology and eschatology.

In addition, today's conservation and environmental movements are increasingly appealing to faith communities to help find a moral and spiritual basis for environmentalism. Jonathon Porritt has issued a plea for "'a new story', enabling us ... to understand better our place in creation, and to experience that sense of interconnectedness and interdependence with the rest of life on Earth".[3] Science, education, business and politics are vital but do not address the values and beliefs at the heart of today's multiple environmental crises. A seminal paper on *The Death of Environmentalism* puts it thus: "Environmentalists need to tap into the creative worlds of myth-making, even religion, not to better sell narrow and technical policy proposals but rather to figure out who we are and who we need to be".[4]

The uncomfortable fact is that Christianity will be marginalised in the search for worldviews to address today's environmental challenges, unless a clear ecological Christology can be constructed upon New Testament foundations. This does not mean ignoring Christianity's Jewish foundations but rather discerning a complex intertextuality,[5] involving continuity and radical reinterpretation of how the Gospels and Epistles use the Hebraic scriptures.

In this lecture, a Christological centre of gravity will be discerned, providing an ecotheological framework regarding Christ's significance for all creation. This approach necessitates addressing distortions in the majority western tradition of biblical interpretation. Tracy writes of the need for suspicion of a largely anthropocentric, Eurocentric, white, male, interpretive elite, and the need to question this in the light of "the 'dangerous' prophetic memory of Jesus".[6] Thus, as we examine the Gospels and Epistles we will resist anthropocentric assumptions regarding Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Rather, the synoptic Gospels will be examined in the light of Hebrew wisdom literature and Messianic prophecies, and Johannine and Pauline passages pointing to the cosmic relevance of Christ will be analysed. As we will see, the theocentrism of the Hebrew Scriptures is transformed into a Christocentrism which incorporates humanity within an orbit, both deeper in its inclusion of the earth and its creatures, and wider in its cosmic vision of Christ's importance.

[1] Bauckham 2009, 1
[2] Jones 2003, 7
[3] SDC/WWF 2005, 5
[4] Shellenberger and Nordhaus 2004
[5] Hays 2016
[6] Tracy 1982, 90

Jesus and Wisdom in the Synoptic Gospels

Richard Bauckham argues that the key to discerning the synoptic Gospels' ecological significance, "lies in appreciating links between the Gospels and the Hebrew Bible, which the Gospels themselves of course everywhere presuppose".[7] The synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, show Jesus habitually telling nature=based stories. In this, he followed a tradition of wandering Rabbinic teachers using Hebrew wisdom as a commentary on Torah.[8] Jesus' teaching used natural analogies and illustrations to explain Torah and re-interpret it afresh. As Luiz Ruscillo states,[9] "The whole of Wisdom literature and theology can be described as 'creation theology'. The wise person reflected on all aspects of creation, earth, plants, animals and humanity".[10]

In the synoptics, particularly Matthew, we see the culmination of this nature wisdom tradition in Christ's teaching. Just as Proverbs, Song of Songs and Job contain frequent references to animals, birds and natural phenomena as a way of discerning God's character and how to live wisely, so Matthew contains 27 separate references to animals and birds.[11] The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) particularly reveals how closely Jesus built upon the Old Testament wisdom tradition. Just as Solomon's wisdom included knowledge of plants, animals, birds, reptiles and fish (1 Kings 4:33-34), so Jesus described foxes, doves, snakes, fig trees, ravens and lilies, and instructed his followers to study birds and flowers. In Matthew 6:26-28 the Greek for 'look at', *emblepsate*, is in the imperative. As Martin Luther commented, "You see, he is making the birds our schoolmasters and teachers".[12] This form of nature wisdom, exemplified by Jesus and gained through immersion in nature, is often spiritualised by commentators yet, as Davis sagely comments, "nature wisdom" is indispensable to an accurate estimation of the proper human role in God's creation".[13]

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) also reflect wisdom influence in their pithy style, their overturning of conventional values, and their holistic nature. Leske observes that, "the principle of interconnectedness is assumed in which all living things are mutually dependent on each other for wellbeing and fulfilment of God's eternal plan".[14] Whilst the Beatitudes' immediate context concerns human relationships, their underlying ethos is the inclusive vision of God's Kingdom, rooted in social and environmental justice. Bredin[15] argues that, whilst the evils evident during Christ's lifetime were social, today they are increasingly ecological and thus, given the holistic vision of the Kingdom, the Beatitudes should also be applied ecologically today. They are virtues upon which to build a sustainable world, where the meek who inherit the earth should include nonhuman species victimised by human greed, where hunger and thirst for righteousness is needed in tackling climate injustice, and where being merciful and waging peace are vital ecological virtues.

Jesus' numerous references to nature are not simply to illustrate teaching. They also imply moral obligations towards nonhuman creation. Attfield states that Jesus' teaching about animals and birds, "presupposes their independent value and moral standing".[16] If God shows such interest in care for common birds and wayside flowers, then humanity, in reflecting God's image, should do the same. Leske comments, "Human beings are to learn from other members of the Earth community how God takes care of his creation".[17]

[7] Bauckham 2009, 1
[8] Bromiley 1995, 1080
[9] Ref. Zimmerli 1976
[10] Ruscillo 2007, 10
[11] Jones 2003, 50
[12] Luther 1956, 197-198
[13] Davis 2000, 56
[14] Leske 2002, 15
[15] Bredin 2010
[16] Attfield 2006, 83
[17] Leske 2002, 17

One intriguing example of Christ's nature wisdom and its implications for the value of wild nature is found in Matthew 10:29-31 (also Luke 12:5-7):

> "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?
> Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.
> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
> So don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows."

At one level this passage is clearly anthropocentric in that its primary focus is God's care for humanity, with an indubitable hierarchy of value between human life and that of sparrows. However, the passage is also ecologically remarkable. Firstly, humans are relatively, not infinitely, more valuable than sparrows. We are worth more than 'many', undefined numerically but clearly not the total population of the cheapest bird of the time. Secondly, God cares actively for sparrows. Given the attitudes of ancient middle eastern cultures towards nonhuman animals, Jesus' statement that God notices the death of a single sparrow is remarkable and contains implications for how we value wildlife. The Greek text of Matthew 10:29 literally describes no sparrow falling to the ground "without your Father" (*aneu tou Patros hymōn)*. God's very self is, in some mysterious way, associated with the loss of even one individual of the commonest of species.[18] At very least, the passage reveals God's interest in the death of the least of his creatures. What then does God think about the biodiversity loss we see today? What does God think about the unnecessary suffering of birds and animals in factory farming and animal experimentation? The fact that humans are worth more than many sparrows may imply permission to use nature for human benefit, but we do so only within a larger context of God's care for each individual of every species.

There is an implicit challenge here for those contemporary conservationists who focus on nearly extinct or evolutionarily distinct species. The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has identified 100 'Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered'[19] species as a focus for conservation work. It argues that their genetic makeup and specialisms make them a "unique and irreplaceable part of the world's natural heritage".[20] Such an approach, focusing on "nature's most amazing animals",[21] has obvious appeal but carries the danger of creating a hierarchy of value within nature. As well as the strong biblical argument against avoidable extinctions in the light of God's inclusion of all living creatures on Noah's ark, Christ's comments on sparrows suggest each individual of every species matters to God.

Turning to the Lord's Prayer, the relationship between God, humanity and wider creation is explicit in the petition for God's Kingdom to come "on earth as it is in heaven." The Greek *gé* refers to the physical earth, and James Jones comments "The consummation of the coming Kingdom is the earthing of heaven".[22] Similarly, Hans Küng's phrase, "The Kingdom of God is creation healed"[23] boldly summarises the scope of Jesus' vision. Jesus' use of 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of Heaven' had a background in the Hebrew Bible, particularly the Psalms, where God's kingly rule is "cosmic in scope, encompassing all creation, by no means confined to human society".[24] Thus, Jesus' use of 'Kingdom of God' to include the inter-relationship of God, humanity and the rest of creation in peaceable coexistence draws deeply from the well of wisdom and from Old Testament prophetic visions. As demonstrated in the parable of seeds growing to harvest amongst weeds (Matthew 13:24-30), "The kingdom does not come to extract people from the rest of creation, but to renew the whole creation in accordance with God's perfect will for it".[25] It is not an otherworldly Kingdom but is rooted in the realities of a transformed earthly existence.

[18] Pao and Schnabel 2007, 327
[19] ZSL 2016
[20] Ibid.
[21] ZSL 2007
[22] Jones 2003, 20
[23] Kung 1966, 214
[24] Bauckham 2011, 73
[25] Bauckham 2009, 6

To extend the botanical metaphor, we may conclude that the seeds of an ecological Christology are sown in the Lord's Prayer vision of God's earthy-yet-heavenly kingdom (*basileia*) and, whilst they remain dormant in the climatic conditions of New Testament society, they now find fertile soil in today's context of humanity's reckless abuse of nature. If the Kingdom of God is creation healed, those who pray for God's Kingdom to come on earth must necessarily be committed to seeking the wellbeing of every part of God's creation.

Another glimpse linking Jesus to Hebrew Wisdom is Mark's account of Christ's temptations in the wilderness. Only Mark includes the suggestive phrase that Jesus was "with the wild animals" (1:13). Most interpreters have assumed that the wild animals were a threat which Jesus resisted. Loader suggests that the animals were dangerous and threatening but tamed by Jesus.[26] Bauckham, however, reading Mark 1:13 in the light of Isaiah 11, emphasises that "with" (*meta*) has overwhelming positive associations and that Mark's phrase "indicates Jesus' peaceable presence with the animals".[27] In terms of exegesis, the text is ambiguous. Interpretation ultimately turns on the significance of wilderness as the locus of temptation. Wilderness was both a place of threat and testing for Israel, and also a place of dependence, divine encounter and of God speaking through natural theophanies (Job 38-41). The agrarian writer Wendell Berry describes wilderness as the place, "where we must go to be reborn – to receive the awareness, at once humbling and exhilarating, grievous and joyful, that we are part of creation, one with all that we live from and all that, in turn, lives from us".[28] Similarly, Bauckham argues "the wilderness is the non-human sphere, a place where humans cannot live, but other creatures do".[29] Mark 1 commences with "a voice of one crying in the wilderness" (1:3) in order to prepare a path for the Messianic Lord, and there are echoes here of Isaiah 40:3, Exodus 23 and Malachi 3:1. Loader comments that, for Mark, "Wilderness was, therefore, a favourite place for great expectations and preparations for new acts of liberation that echoed those of old".[30]

Taking all this into account, Mark 1:13 provides a suggestive insight into the nature of Christ's rule and of the Kingdom (1:15) he proclaimed. Based on Hebrew wisdom's understanding of wilderness as a place of encounter with God amidst wild creatures and wild nature, and the prophetic anticipation of a Messianic figure who would establish God's peaceable Kingdom of *shalom* throughout the earth, the idea that Jesus at the start of his ministry established peaceful relationship with previously threatening wild creatures is indeed, to quote Bauckham, "a Christological image for an ecological age".[31]

Creation in John's Gospel and Paul's Epistles

Looking beyond the synoptics, John's Gospel and the Pauline Epistles clearly identify Jesus as both fulfilling the Hebrew wisdom tradition and also challenging and superseding Hellenistic wisdom. Luiz Ruscillo writes, "It is no accident that much of the "high Christology" of the New Testament is couched in wisdom terms. Christ is "Hagia Sophia" (Holy Wisdom) incarnate, in whom the "new creation" is realized".[32] The prologue to John's Gospel demonstrates numerous parallels with Old Testament wisdom, particularly the personification of wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-35. The *Logos*, God's creative word is, like wisdom, with God from the beginning and alongside God in creation. The theme of light, found throughout John's Prologue, has resonances both with the illumination of wisdom and with Torah (Psalm 119:105). John's Prologue goes further than Proverbs by personifying wisdom as a physical person, but "it is the Old Testament wisdom literature that gives John his vocabulary and theological categories".[33]

[26] Loader 2002, 37-39
[27] Bauckham 2011, 76
[28] Berry in Wirzba (ed.) 2002, 199-200
[29] Bauckham 2009, 4
[30] Loader 2002, 32
[31] Bauckham 1994, 3-21
[32] Ruscillo 2007, 11
[33] ibid, 13

Similarly, Ruscillo[34] has demonstrated how Colossians 1:15-20 draws on Proverbs 8 in its description of the cosmic scope of Christ. In Proverbs, Wisdom is brought forth first, in Colossians Christ is first-born; in Proverbs, alongside the creator, in Colossians all things were made by him; Wisdom and Christ are both described as before all things, and the subject of God's delight and pleasure.

The most explicit Pauline passage regarding Christ and wisdom is 1 Corinthians 1, addressing both Hebrew and Greek backgrounds: "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). In the wider passage, Christ crucified is presented as embodying a radically new power and wisdom, overturning Jewish ideas of law (20) and Greek philosophical wisdom (22) through the apparent foolishness of the cross. Paul does not negate Hebrew and Greek wisdom but rather the anthropocentric tendency to put one's trust in independent human agency instead of in God. Alongside John 1 and Colossians 1, 1 Corinthians 1 is a profoundly Christocentric passage, identifying the person and work of Jesus Christ as the source of divine wisdom and power. As with the divine speeches in Job, it is a profoundly de-centering text, demolishing anthropocentric wisdom in favour of a total reliance on God in Christ: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1:31).

Thus, when New Testament accounts of Christ's life and work are read in the context of Hebrew wisdom, we see nonhuman creation not only reflected but reinterpreted in Jesus Christ. Christ is more than a wise Rabbinical teacher through whom creation becomes a storehouse of imagery. In his intimate knowledge of creation, his insight into God's care for it, his companionship with wild animals and supremely in the emergent vision of his cosmic relevance, the New Testament sees Christ as recasting of wisdom in the light of the incarnation, cross and resurrection. Creation's whole *telos* is to be interpreted Christocentrically, with implications for the value of, and relationship between, all creatures, human and nonhuman.

God's Kingdom and the Messianic scope of Shalom

Theologically speaking, teleology, eschatology and the prophetic tradition are closely connected. Old Testament prophecies include both forthtelling and foretelling: prescriptive judgment and predictions concerning God's future plans within and beyond history. The Gospel narratives drew heavily on prophetic visions of a Messianic era of justice and peace, summarised in the concepts of 'shalom' and 'jubilee'.

In virtually all the prophetic accounts this vision encompassed not only renewed relationship with God and neighbour but also an ecological restoration, pictured in terms of safety from wild beasts and a return to the prelapsarian vegetarian state of the animal kingdom. Thus, in Isaiah 11:6-9, wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, calves and lions and children, cows and bears, infants and snakes will all live in harmony, "for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (11:9b). Although Messiah is not explicitly mentioned, the passage became associated with messianic expectation, and to a vision of reconciliation between humanity and wild nature, together with, "a picture of gentle and beneficial service to wild animals" by human beings – as seen in the image of a small child shepherding wild animals (11:6b).[35]

When the Gospels are read in the light of Old Testament wisdom and Messianic prophecies their ecological implications come into focus. As Richard Hays has demonstrated, all four Gospels draw richly on the Jewish scriptures, not only with direct quotation but with allusion, imagery, recapitulation and metalepsis in order to reveal "the way in which Israel's Scripture has always been mysteriously suffused with the presence of Jesus".[36] Similarly, whilst casual readers may conclude that the Gospels contain little about creation, a closer reading reveals numerous ecological references, allusions and images.

[34] ibid, 11

[35] Bauckham 2009, pp.2-3

[36] Hays 2016, 289

One example is Jesus' birth narratives in the synoptic Gospels. When seen in the context of Messianic expectancy, suggestive clues appear. Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), echoes Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:8, full of messianic hopes for justice and righteousness. Her words proclaim God's preferential option for the *anawim*, the landless, dependent 'humble poor' who have no human support and cry out to God for help, and her hymn of praise anticipates the agenda that Jesus would set for himself in Luke 4:18-19. Similarly, the role of John the Baptist is built upon Old Testament expectation of a Messianic herald. Also, often overlooked, because it is implicit in these passages, is the prophetic ideal of *shalom* or harmony throughout creation which underlies the Magnificat, John the Baptist's role, and Jesus' Nazareth manifesto.

The vision of *shalom* becomes explicit in the angelic appearance to shepherds outside Bethlehem (Luke 2:8-15). Shepherds were frequently amongst the marginalised *anawim*, living on society's margins and performing unsociable, menial roles. They contended with very real threats from wild animals. Yet, it was to them that angels proclaimed glory to God and 'peace on earth' (2:14), fulfilling Messianic hopes of a Davidic King (2:11). The English term 'peace' (*eirene* in Greek) fails to convey the scope of the Old Testament concept of 'shalom'. 'Shalom' included an all-encompassing sense of well-being, wholeness and reconciliation transcending the spiritual, social, economic and ecological realms and flowing from Godself.[37] It is, according to Wytsma, "the intended state of peace and wholeness that all of God's creation is meant to experience".[38] Is it far-fetched to imagine that first century Jewish shepherds, reared on prophetic visions of shalom, and living with the threat of wild animals, linked the angels' proclamation of 'peace' embodied in the birth of Christ-child, to Isaiah's and Hosea's visions of harmony throughout creation?

When Jesus inaugurated his ministry by reading in the synagogue from Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:18-19), he tapped into Jewish messianic expectations with their spiritual, social, economic and also ecological dimensions. Although the passage mentions neither Messiah nor nonhuman creation specifically, it explicitly references the year of Jubilee ("The year of the Lord's favour") which in turn builds upon the Sabbath. Sabbath and Jubilee were profoundly theocentric institutions, establishing that work, property, time and land all ultimately belong to God. There were social and ecological dimensions to this. During the Sabbath year, fields, vineyards and olive groves were to be left untended so that poor people and also "wild animals" might feed in peace (Exodus 23:11).[39] Whether or not Jubilee was ever practiced, it shaped first century messianic expectation. The land belonged to God, not to those who farmed it (Psalm 24:1) and Jubilee proclaimed a deeply theocentric view of political and natural ecology. As Lowery states, "Sabbath year, like the creation-sabbath narrative in Genesis 1, rejects an overly anthropocentric view of the world".[40] By relativizing land-ownership, Sabbath and Jubilee created a vision that was deeply theocentric and morally heterocentric, enabling human beings to see their reliance on the fragile goodness of nature and their responsibility to protect its integrity. This was at the heart of what Jesus proclaimed in his first public act in the synagogue in Nazareth.

The Messianic visions of a peaceable Kingdom of *shalom* and Jubilee mean that we must never instrumentalise or objectify wild nature. All of creation, human and nonhuman, derives its value from God and is included within a Messianic vision of harmonious interdependence. The radical Jubilee vision of all land, property and creatures ultimately belonging and returning to God undermines economic valuations of nature. Attempts to put a financial value on species or ecosystems based on what they accomplish for human thriving is nullified by Jubilee economics, which re-calibrates the scales so that true value can only be measured in relation to God. This does not mean that wild nature should never be assessed economically but that anthropocentric valuations should be seen as tentative, partial indicators of economic benefit, never indicative of true value.

[37] Westermann 1992

[38] Wytsma 2013, 24

[39] Kinsler and Kinsler 1999, 12

[40] Lowery 2000, 61

Christ as Lord of creation

We shall now look more broadly at Christ's miracles in the Gospels. The synoptic Gospels seek to establish who Jesus is in terms of his authority over the forces that control both human life and the natural world. Thus, feeding crowds, healing the sick, deliverance from demonic powers and resurrection from the dead all demonstrate Jesus' power over natural forces. He is revealed as Divine in his capacity to address the forces of nature as he turns water into wine, feeds crowds of thousands, restores sight and shrivelled limbs, cleanses from leprosy, and liberates from demonic powers.

Jesus' power over nature becomes explicit in the stilling of a storm on Lake Galilee (Mark 4:37-41; Matthew 8:23-27; Luke 8:22-25). Commenting on Mark's twin accounts of Jesus stilling the storm and walking on lake Galilee (Mark 6:45-54), Faricy states, "We can find in these two passages an implicit but clear reference to the credal account of creation in the book of Genesis. Just as the Creator dominated and ordered the chaotic sea 'in the beginning', so now Jesus dominates the sea and orders it to be still".[41]

The stilling of the storm also has symbolic references to Hebrew concepts of the sea as a place of chaos and battle against evil forces. Jesus' contemporaries would have been well aware of Old Testament references to God alone stilling the seas.[42] No wonder they reacted in fear and astonishment to Jesus' authority over the storm. Writing in an era of climate crisis, where extreme weather events are increasing in frequency and rising sea levels expected to cause problems for humanity and ecosystems, Christ's power over the forces of nature deserves greater theological reflection as a motif for Christian engagement with these issues.

Overall, the synoptic Gospels demonstrate suggestive possibilities for ecological Christology. Jesus' words and works rest on a foundation of Hebrew wisdom and the Messianic vision of shalom recast in the language of the Kingdom of God. God's purposes embodied in Christ are not only spiritual and social, but implicitly deeply ecological. Whilst the presenting issues in the first century concerned human society, the synoptics provide ample space to apply Christ's message to today's radically different context of ecological collapse. As we now examine the theological reflections of the early Church upon the cosmic consequences of Christ's coming, we will see the parameters of an ecological Christology for our current age become even clearer.

The Incarnate *Logos* and the Cosmic Christ

As the post-ascension Christian community reflected on the significance of Jesus, awareness grew that his relevance transcended the boundaries of space and time. In John's Gospel and Paul's epistles we see the emergence of a sophisticated reflection on Christ's significance. Some implications were evident to the authors whilst others, including the ecological consequences of Christ's Lordship, can only be seen from our radically altered context. It is this Johannine and Pauline understanding of Christ' cosmic significance that provide the contours into which the fragmentary ecological evidence of the synoptic Gospels may fit.

The Gospel of John is highly sophisticated theologically.[43] John structures his writings thematically, such as around the 'I am' sayings. He consciously re-interprets Hebrew Scripture in the light of Greek thought and, in reshaping Torah, knows that he is in some sense writing scripture himself. This can be seen at the start of the Prologue, *in the beginning was the Word*, where the opening words of Genesis are combined with the Hellenistic concept of the 'Logos' as the organising principle within creation.[44] In addition, typically of John's multi-layered approach, there are allusions to Proverbs' personification of Wisdom delighting and

[41] Faricy 1982, 44

[42] Nahum 1:4 (God rebuking the sea), Job 9:8 (God walking on the waters), Job 26:12 (God's word stilling the sea), Psalm 77:16-19 (God's path through the mighty waters) and Psalm 104:7 (God rebuking the waters).

[43] Culpepper 1988

[44] The debate around the influence of Philo and Hellenistic Judaism on John's use of 'Logos' is incidental to this thesis. I take the view that the author of John's Gospel boldly reinterpreted 'Logos' in ways that neither pagan Greek nor Hellenistic Judaism had contemplated [Hagner 1971].

participating in creation at God's side (Proverbs 8:30). Thus, from its opening words, John's Gospel portrays Jesus Christ as pre-existent Creator. Richard Hays states that, in John, "all creation breathes with his life".[45]

The Logos is, in William Temple's words, "The word of the Lord by which the heavens were made. It is also the Rational Principle that gives unity and significance to all existing things".[46] The historical Jesus is simultaneously the source and fulfilment of Torah, of Hebrew Wisdom and of Greek philosophy. Whilst John's intent was probably apologetic, the Prologue gives ample space to reflect on the cosmic and ecological dimensions of Jesus Christ, God's Logos. Christ was the origin (John 1:1) and source (1:3) of all creation, and thus the whole created order finds value and purpose in relation to him. Whilst there is alienation within creation (John 1:10 "Though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him"), this is due to humanity's preference for darkness over light (3:19), and will ultimately be overcome, because the Logos is also the light of the world (1:4, 5, 9; 8:12).

The implications of John 1 are profound for our understanding of incarnation and Christology in relation to ecology. In John's Logos, the transcendent God of Genesis 1-2 has become immanent within the physical world. John affirms the Hebraic distinction between God and creation, yet radically reinterprets the tradition in terms of God's intimate identification with materiality. Specifically, "for John, it is not Christ who is cosmic, but the cosmos that is Christic".[47] The implication is far-reaching. Christian earthkeeping is not based solely on God as Creator but arises from the Lordship of Jesus Christ in relation to all creation.

John's term for the incarnation is instructive. If the focus was anthropocentric, then the Word would have become *ánthrōpos*. However, in John 1:14 the term used is *sarx* or 'flesh', an everyday term for animal flesh. In speaking about the *Logos* becoming *sarx* John re-interpreted both Hebrew thinking on creation's post-Edenic alienation from God, and Stoic ideas about the possibility of the divine principle entering material creation. John surely intends us to understand that the incarnation not only describes God becoming *Homo sapiens* but also God entering into and blessing the whole creation with the divine presence. John emphasises the essential familiarity of all fleshly creatures honoured by Christ's incarnation. Clough observes of *sarx*, "It is … an inclusive term for all living things, with roots in the Hebrew *basar*, used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to all living creatures".[48] Nor can it be argued that John 1:14 is anomalous. The Pauline and Johannine letters all use the same term for the incarnation (Ephesians 2:14-15; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 John 4:2). Gregersen writes, "The flesh that is assumed in Jesus Christ is not only the particular man Jesus but the entire realm of humanity, living creatures, and earthly soil".[49] Elizabeth Johnson agrees, stating "The sarx of John 1:14 thus reaches beyond the person of Jesus and beyond all other human beings to encompass the whole biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed".[50]

The implications of Christ's incarnational identification with the whole created order are fundamentally important for our treatment of animals and for theological anthropology. Oliver O'Donovan writes of the incarnation: "the whole created order is taken up into the fate of this particular representative man at this particular moment of history, on whose one fate turns the redemption of all".[51] The incarnation emphasises that distinctions within nature, whether based on science or philosophy, are secondary to the commonality shared by the whole created order. Whilst there may be relative differentiation between the value of human and other life (as in Matthew 10:29-31), there can be no absolute difference when all creatures have been affirmed in the incarnation. As David Clough writes, "The doctrine of the incarnation does not therefore

[45] Hays 2016, 344
[46] Temple 1947, 3
[47] Faricy 1982, 42
[48] Clough 2012, 85
[49] Gregerson 2015, 234
[50] Johnson 2015, 138
[51] O'Donovan 1986, 15

establish a theological boundary between humans and other animals; instead it is best understood as God stepping over the boundary between creator and creation and taking on creatureliness".[52]

God's valuation of all creatures has implications for attitudes to topics as diverse as animal husbandry, meat production, agricultural policy, biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation. All things are sanctified by the incarnation of Christ. Bauckham states, "The incarnation makes the incarnate One integrally part … of the whole of material reality – not only animals (with whom Jesus shares genetic continuity) but also plants and inanimate nature".[53] Thus, through creation and incarnation, matter is hallowed and living creatures are animated with divine breath. Nature, whether wild, domesticated or human, must never be objectified or instrumentalised, but valued and respected for its integrity. It is incumbent on theologians and Christian leaders to communicate these implications more widely and reflect more deeply upon their consequences. Another key term in John's Prologue is *kosmos* or 'world'. In 1:10 we read that "the world was made through him." In a typically multi-layered Johannine manner, the meaning of *kosmos* depends on context. David Atkinson states, "Sometimes John means the world God loves; sometimes the world of all people; sometimes the world in the sense of 'worldliness' which needs to be resisted and 'overcome'".[54] Balabanski identifies four major meanings: the 'world' or context into which light comes (1:10), the totality of creation (1:3, 1:10), the world of human rather than divine action - in itself morally neutral (John 3:16), and the sinful world of fallen creation in contrast to the world above (8:23, 18:36).[55]

This latter meaning of *kosmos* as a world of moral failure separated from God has influenced dualistic theologies. Hellenistic dualism and Gnosticism regarded material creation as inferior to spiritual. Yet, such an interpretation is implausible given John's understanding of incarnation. The *kosmos* into which God became flesh was the created physical world, declared 'very good' in Genesis 1:31. The Johannine notion of a fallen world makes sense only when we recognise that it refers primarily to the moral state caused by humanity's rejection of God. Balabanski notes a crucial distinction between John's use of *kosmos* in relation to sin, where the context is always that of humanity, and in relation to salvation where the context is cosmic, "because the sinfulness of humanity impacts upon the entire Earth community, rendering Earth also in need of salvation".[56] In the context of Hellenistic Judaism, *kosmos* encompasses the totality of heaven and earth together and specifically includes both *gé* (the earth as a whole, and as soil or biotic community, translating the Hebrew *erets*) and *bios* (the living world of creatures).

Moving to John 3:16-17, we read that God so loves the *kosmos* that he sent his Son, so that all who believe in him might be saved. Here there is no negative sense whatsoever in *kosmos*. The Son has not come to judge the world (3:17). The world that God's loves is, in immediate context, the world of human society, since humanity is invited to respond by believing in Christ. However, in the light of John's vision of the cosmic scope of Christ as Word and Light of God, Creator and Redeemer, we can see an additional cosmic dimension within John 3:16-17. The world that God loves is the world of land, plants and living creatures which the Word spoke into being, into which He has become flesh, and which is included within God's redemptive plans in Christ. As Craig Koester states, in relation to John 3:16, God in Christ "offers his love to a world estranged from him in order to overcome its hostility and bring the world back into relationship with its Creator".[57]

The redemptive scope of Christ's work is confirmed as we move from John to Paul. In both the Johannine and Pauline literature, there is a growing emphasis on understanding Christ in cosmic terms. Sittler writes, "There is clearly a momentum and directionality at work in the scope and variety of the New Testament witness to Jesus as the Christ. … This circle spins out in larger and larger orbits until, in Colossians, chapter 1, and in the

[52] Clough 2012, 103
[53] Bauckham 2015, 35
[54] Atkinson 2015, 7
[55] Balabanski 2002, 89-94
[56] ibid, 92
[57] Koester 2008, 81

great rhetorical passage in Ephesians, chapter 1, it enfolds "all things" as destined in Christ to be interpreted as existing "to the praise of His glory".[58]

Within the Pauline epistles, this can be found repeatedly. The Christocentric doxology of Romans 11:33-36 speaks of Christ as encompassing all creation, stating: "from him and through him and for him are all (*panta*) things" (11:36). 1 Corinthians 8:6 speaks of the origin of creation in terms of "one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." Ephesians 1 speaks of Christ as the unifying force at the heart of the cosmos in terms of God's purpose "to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (1:9-10), and later of the Church as "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:22-23). Philippians 2:5-11, having described Christ's kenotic descent into the incarnation and crucifixion, proclaims his return to cosmic supremacy: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." In the development of Pauline Christology, the place of Christ as source, significance and destiny of the whole creation, and the role of the Church as Christ's body on earth in relation to creation are central. These themes become clearer as we look at two key passages, Colossians 1:15-23 and Romans 8:18-25.

Colossians 1 and Romans 8

In Colossians 1:15-20, God's work in creation and salvation has two key poles, 'Christ' and 'all things' (*ta panta*).[59] Paul's words were bold and radical. They asserted than an uneducated Galilean who died in disgrace was both eternal Creator and teleological destiny of the cosmos. Paul's motivation was both apologetic and profoundly doxological. Colossians 1:15-20 is a credal hymn of praise, a deeply theological meditation on the experienced reality of the scale and scope of Christ's person and work. The passage begins by referencing Genesis 1, seeing Christ as both Creator and 'image of God'. As Creator, all things are made in him and for him. The phrase 'in him' has given rise to much speculation. Moltmann argues for a Trinitarian ecological panentheism, writing "creation is a trinitarian process: the Father creates through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The created world is therefore created 'by God', formed 'through God' and exists 'in God".[60] God is not to be confused with creation, but rather an all-enveloping God has made space for creation to develop, and ultimately the fullness of creation will become reabsorbed into the divine fullness.

More significant is the notion of creation's purpose and fulness residing in Christ. If all things are created *for* him, their value is independent of their usefulness to human society. This value is intrinsic in its independence from humanity, yet also contingent in relation to Christ. Colossians 1:17 develops this further in stating that all things hold together in Christ. Christ is the personal force who brings about cosmic coherence. Writing about Ephesians 1:10, which similarly speaks of all things summed up in Christ, Bauckham writes, "This verse portrays Jesus Christ as the unifying centre of the cosmos. … a christocentric universe is not an anthropocentric universe but a universe centred on the God who through incarnation participates in the interconnected life of all his creatures".[61] This is a profoundly ecological image. Ecology is a science of how all parts of an ecosystem relate to each other. Paul tells us that, ultimately, they cohere in Christ. It is an image of a truly Christic cosmos.

Moreover, if the fullness (*pléróma*) of God is found in Christ (1:19) this has far-reaching implications for the created order. David Ford notes how Paul's use of *pléróma* is developed elsewhere: "The author of Ephesians seems to be improvising and enlarging on this theme and weaving together God, Christ, church, Christian living and the whole cosmos into a dynamic soteriology of abundance".[62] This insight combines Christ as creator and redeemer, encompassing humanity (individuals and the church) within an ever-expanding circle of God's

[58] Sittler 1972, 334
[59] Sittler quoted in Bouma-Prediger 2001, 110
[60] Moltmann 1993, 9
[61] Bauckham 2015, 51
[62] Ford 1999, 114

fullness in Christ. Similarly, Faricy proposes that, "In St Paul's writings, the meaning of Pleroma seems to be that all things are created in Christ, reconciled in him and find their fulfilment in him, in whom there is the fullness of God and also, in some way, of everything which exists".[63] Whether or not this is interpreted in panentheist terms, all elements of God's creation are clearly encompassed within the fullness of Christ. There is a centrifugal urgency to this vision of *pléróma*, constantly directing energy away from the self towards God's widest purposes in creation and salvation. Yet, if the impetus is towards God's cosmic *pléróma* in Christ, the moral application is stubbornly local and contextual. Ford writes, "Ephesians testifies to a salvation which is both cosmic in scope and utterly focussed through ordinary living".[64] The cosmic scale of Christ's work is not for philosophical contemplation but provides inspiration for practical engagement, seeing Christ's creative and saving work in every creature we encounter under heaven, every ecosystem with which our lifestyles engage.

At the heart of Christ's work in Colossians 1 are two interwoven dynamics, one creational and the other redemptive. As Christ the Creator encompasses the purpose of the whole creation, so Christ as crucified Saviour provides hope for all creation. In Sittler's words, "Unless you have a crucified God, you don't have a big enough God".[65] It is Christ's blood shed on the cross (1:20), which enables the reconciliation of all things on earth and in heaven. One of the terms used is *eirēnopoiēsas* or 'making peace', and its root, *eirēne*, corresponds to the Hebrew 'shalom.' The peace-making that God-in-Christ accomplishes on the cross is as wide as the scope of the prophetic vision of shalom. Thus, in Bouma-Prediger's words, "Creation and redemption are two acts of one divine drama. … Soteriology is earth-affirming".[66] Thus, the crucifixion, insofar as it encapsulates the suffering of all created beings, should engender in Christians a deep sense of compassion and lament at the suffering of creation. This is echoed in Romans 8 where the 'groaning' of creation (8:22) is accompanied both by a divine groaning (8:26) and by the groaning of God's Spirit within God's children (8:23).

If God, humanity, and creation are joined in the suffering of the crucifixion they are also united in the redemption it accomplishes and the new life of resurrection. The bodily resurrection of Christ and redeemed humans (1 Corinthians 15) comprises the firstfruits of creation's renewal in Christ. Ken Gnanakan writes, "Creation will no longer groan, for its Saviour has granted liberation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:21)".[67] In our current age, between Christ's saving work and its fulfilment, hopeful signs may be few and far between. Yet, we are assured that this reconciliation, "accomplished in principle on the cross, works itself out gradually in history towards the end of time, when all things will find their definitive reconciliation in Jesus".[68]

Colossians 1 also addresses the place of the Church in relation to creation. Christ, as the perfect image of God, exemplifies what it means for humanity to reflect God's image. Our vocation as *imago Dei* is redefined by Christ's incarnation, life and redemptive work.[69] Proclaiming the Lordship of Christ over the whole creation becomes a primary missiological and doxological task. The Genesis 1:28 mandate now belongs not just to individuals but in a particular way to the Church. Faricy states "the church has a central position in this plan".[70] If the Church is "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (Ephesians 1:22-23), then ecclesiology needs to be redefined ecologically. Christ's headship is relational rather than hierarchical, which is why the New Testament consistently uses the image of a body organically joined to its head. This is reiterated as we now compare Colossians 1 to Romans 8:18-25.

In Colossians, Christ's headship in the Church (1:18) and in creation (1:19-20) are developed in 1:21-2:15. Christ is both head of the church which is his body (1:18) and also head of the cosmos, which is also in some sense his body (2:9-10). In Romans 8:18-25 the role of the church is explained further. Creation waits in eager

[63] Faricy 1982, 10
[64] Ford 1999, 116
[65] Sittler 1981, 119
[66] Bouma-Prediger 2001 109
[67] Gnanakan 1999, 115
[68] Faricy 1982, 49
[69] Bookless 2014
[70] Faricy 1982, 8-9

expectation for God's children to be revealed (8:19). 'God's children' is Paul's term for the church (8:14-16). Paul is asserting that creation is waiting for the church! In the words of N. T. Wright, "The whole creation is waiting in eager longing – not just for its own redemption, its liberation from corruption and decay, but for God's children to be revealed: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans thought whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into that wise order for which it was made".[71]

The incorporation of the whole created order within Christ's redemptive work is restated in Romans 8:20-21: "the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God". The precise relationship between the saving work of Christ and the role of the church is not explored, but the text affirms that the redeemed community has a significant role in the liberation of nonhuman creation. The church's mission towards creation is part of the overarching *Missio Deo,* a theo-eco-centric purpose within which humans agents act within a divine purpose that includes all creation.

Conclusion

This lecture has argued that Jesus Christ must be at the heart of a biblical approach to environmental issues. Ecological Christology is essential to an authentically *Christian* reflection on matters of sustainability and ecology. Moreover, whilst the immediate context of New Testament authors was the relevance of Christ for humanity the implication of their Christology leaves ample scope for addressing today's ecological challenges. I. Howard Marshall argues that, whilst the infant New Testament church was preoccupied with survival, growth and internal issues, the seeds of socio-political engagement were also sown, and "with the growth of the church such activity becomes possible and mandatory. We are reminded that 'everything that was written in the past was written to teach us' (Romans 15:4)".[72] The same is true for ecological concerns.

Western theology has often been hamstrung by a dualism which devalues material creation, by an anthropocentrism which ignores our creaturely commonality, by an over-spiritualised Christology and by an individualistic soteriology. In the light of today's ecological crisis, the global Christian church urgently needs to recover an understanding that Christology must encompass what Howard Snyder calls God's "immense divine plan for the restoration of all creation".[73] This plan is nothing less than what Peter in Acts 3:21 describes as "the time … for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." It is a Christocentric cosmic vision that fulfils the dreams of Isaiah and Hosea for a restoration of peaceful relationship throughout the whole of creation.

In the New Testament, nature's value is redefined Christocentrically. Firstly, through Christ the creator, God's "eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20) are revealed in creation's diversity and beauty. Secondly, Christ is sustainer of the whole cosmos: both humanity and wild nature "hold together in him" (Colossians 1:17). Thirdly, Christ's incarnation as *sarx* (John 1:14) affirms the whole material creation as sanctified by God's presence. Finally, the death and resurrection of Christ reconcile "all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven" to God (Colossians 1:20). Nature is thus far more than a stage for humanity's drama or a resource for human enjoyment and exploitation. Rather, wild nature is fundamental to God's purposes from creation to redemption. All creatures, from the rarest to each individual of the commonest species, are of value because all things find their meaning, purpose and redemption 'in Christ'. The New Testament's cosmic Christology suggests *all* creatures are reconciled to God and will acknowledge his Lordship (Colossians 1:20; Philippians 2:10), implying their eternal value before God. This has clear implications both for animal welfare and conservation biology. As Bauckham states, "All these creatures, whether alive or extinct, whether they appeared early or late in the evolution of life, whatever ontological level we might assign them, have their own value in themselves and in the sight of their Creator".[74]

[71] Wright 2007, 213
[72] Howard Marshall 2000, 96
[73] Snyder 2011, 94
[74] Bauckham 2015, 47

The values of God's Kingdom challenge our selfish anthropocentrism. Relationships, with God-in-Christ, with other people, particularly "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40), and with the whole of creation, are to be characterised by *shalom*, rather than by the idolatrous pursuit of profit. The Gospels are clear that "abundant life" (John 10:10) does not consist of an abundance of possessions acquired by exploiting the poor or by abusing nature. Rather, the ethics of the Beatitudes and the example of Christ, who takes the form of a servant (Philippians 2:5-11; John 13:1-17), redefine anthropology. Humanity's role is to lead by self-sacrificial service of the other, finding our vocation in the flourishing of other people and of nature, to the glory of Christ. We are to be servant-stewards, seeking the restoration and reconciliation of all God's creatures. This is not simply an individual task but finds its expression in and through the local church. If Christ is creator, sustainer and redeemer of all creation, then Christ's body, the church, must include creation care. N. T. Wright comments, "The resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit mean that we are called to bring real and effective signs of God's renewed creation to birth even in the midst of this present age.".[75] This is a task both for the academy and for practical response in worship and mission, to the end that Christ's headship in the Church is reflected in creation. Irreversible changes wrought by anthropogenic climate change and the rapid depletion of tropical forests, marine ecosystems and global biodiversity give added urgency to this task.

Why do we care for creation? After reading the Gospels and Epistles, we are compelled to answer: 'Because Christ is Lord of all creation!' To proclaim, 'Jesus is Lord' is not only a statement of personal allegiance, but a commitment to bringing the Lordship of Christ into every area of creation, until that day when "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

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[75] Wright 2007, 120

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