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Ecological Conversion in a Changing Climate: An Ecumenical Perspective on Ecological Solidarity[1]

Abstract

This paper explores the relevance of a Christian theology of creation in the light of the changing climate for ecumenical dialogue, both in the sense of a deeper awareness of cultural and political globalization and also in the literal sense of climate change. I argue that an adequate theology of creation, while taking its cue from reflections on the relevant biblical texts and theological traditions, also concerns itself with liturgical practices. In a joint statement with the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholo-mew I, Pope John Paul II encouraged the Catholic community to undergo an *ecological conversion*. I suggest that the meaning

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[1] This paper is based on a presentation given at an ecumenical conference held at the University of Bamberg, June 16-18, 2011, entitled "Ecumenism and Orthodoxy in Europe", to celebrate the 85th birthday of Jürgen Moltmann. I would like to thank Daniel Munteanu for the invitation to deliver this paper, and for very helpful feedback from the other participants at this conference. I would also like to thank Rebecca Artinian-Kaiser for her painstaking and careful work in copy editing this article.

of that conversion is not simply humanity's turn to nature, but a profound appreciation of the deep relationship between Christ and creation expressed in a particularly poignant way in the celebration of the Eucharist. The basis for such a connection can be found in the Christological hymn to wisdom in Colossians 1, which had its origin in an ancient liturgical setting. The redemptive theme here also points to the unfinished nature of creation and the task of humanity in the eschatological goal for creation. A cosmic Christology combined with a more expansive understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit inspired by the sophiology of the Orthodox writer Sergii Bulgakov provides a theological rationale for Roman Catholic social teaching on solidarity to be extended beyond the human sphere so as to include other creaturely kinds.

Key words

climate change, globalisation, ecological conversion, cosmic Christology, Bulgakov, ecological solidarity, wisdom.

1. Introduction

Approaching a theology of creation at the beginning of the twenty-first century provides both a unique challenge and an opportunity for theologians. Both revolve around the changing climate, and we can understand two senses in which such changes are taking place. In the first place, the current situation is one where there is a greater cultural awareness that we live in a dynamic globalised world, so that social, religious and cultural traditions are more exposed to mutual scrutiny and appreciation. Yet our modern society is also one where there is a transition from an international order of national sovereign states to different forms of transnational politics.[2] But

[2] J. Habermas, *Time of Transitions* (C. Cronin and M. Pensky (eds and trans.), Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

transnational negotiation is more often than not driven by the dictates of the global market economy, which threatens to undermine the social solidarity within constitutional democracies and exacerbate global insecurity. Into such a shifting political climate Jürgen Habermas recognizes the crucial role of the Christian tradition, so for him:

> Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than a mere precursor or catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, of the individual morality of conscience, human rights, democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love (…) To this day there is no alternative to it.[3]

He also suggests that, under pressure from modernity, there is a "cognitive restructuring" of religious faith and Church practice. Yet, clearly, any shift in religious thinking to become more self-reflexive and adapted to the conditions of modernity must not go so far as to undermine the strength of a tradition in order to speak *into* the changing cultural climate in a positive sense. In a more recent publication, Habermas refers to secularity as a "transformer" directing the flow of tradition in a particular way, rather than as a "filter" separating out its contents.[4] Here there is room for a positive contribution of religious belief; hence, he points to the breakdown in solidarity and the failure of secular reason alone to keep alert to violations of that solidarity. But then we have to ask ourselves more precisely *how* different Christian traditions might be able to offer a specific

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3 Ibid., pp. 150-151.

4 J. Habermas, "An Awareness of What is Missing", *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post Secular Age* (J. Habermas (ed.), C. Cronin (trans.), Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 18.

contribution to meaning, solidarity and justice – a question that Habermas, sensibly perhaps as an atheist philosopher, leaves to one side.

The second sense in which the climate is changing is the one mapped by modern scientific methods, and, like other areas of ecotheology, such scientific analysis serves to inform theological reflection. The history of climate science has shown a shift towards a much greater confidence by scientists that the various activities of human beings that release carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse gases into the atmosphere are responsible for a significant proportion of the rise in global earth temperatures since the eighteenth century.[5] There is little dispute about the fact that carbon dioxide levels in the earth's atmosphere have gone up from pre-industrial levels of 280 parts per million (ppm) to 379 ppm by 2005, and to 387 by 2010, and 389 in 2011, representing a current rise of about 2ppm a year. There is also little dispute that climate changes disproportionately and negatively impact the very poorest communities of the world, many of whom live in areas where there are large landmasses that are more vulnerable to climate changes, or in island or coastal communities threatened by submergence from rising sea levels. However, what is still controversial is what might happen next. We will leave aside for the moment the public controversies surrounding the models used by climate scientists to forecast climate change in different parts of the world. However, it is enough to comment that for some interpreters there is a strong likelihood that there will be

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5 The rhetoric of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for example, began with a more cautious "plausible" in 1990, but by 2007 the IPCC report stated that human induced change was "undeniable". For more discussion of this topic, see C. Deane-Drummond, "Climate Change: Engaging Theology with Science in Society", *God, Humanity and the Cosmos* (C. Southgate (ed.), London: Continuum, 3rd edn, 2011), 420-441.

an irreversible climate change or tipping point, so as to lead to runaway global warming and positive feedback effects.[6]

2. Building Blocks Towards Ecological Conversion

2.1 The Earth in Theocentric Perspective

The question that now comes to the surface in theological reflection is *what* kind of a theology of creation might have the power to speak both to a Christian community, which may be alarmed by the growing realisation of the scientific evidence for threatening forms of climate change, *and* into a secular, public sphere searching for new forms of solidarity in order to enable negotiated settlements in difficult transnational political negotiations? In the first place, the story of Genesis reminds us, as many others have noted, that the earth and its creatures can be considered to be active agents in the unfolding narrative. Michael Welker, in commenting on Genesis 1 and 2, declares: "The creating God is open to being confronted by the independence, the originality, even the need for improvement of that which has been created".[7] This is not so much a linear model of causation and dependence as one where the creature is active in the process, so that the earth and its creatures are themselves productive (Gen. 1.24). God, then, works with other creatures in a cooperative way in order to bring about God's purposes. This qualifies one of the enduring issues embedded within the Genesis text regarding its seeming elevation of the human being as having dominion over the natural world, as in Gen. 1.28. While such texts have frequently been interpreted

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6 Michael Northcott reviews the literature in M. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: DLT, 2007), pp. 27-30. See also A. Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

7 M. Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999), p. 10.

more along the lines of stewardship, rather than domination,[8] on either count the relative significance of the human relative to other creaturely kinds remains strong, along with the possible temptation towards hubris.

The book of Job, while it is unusual in the Wisdom writings in that it is a commentary on suffering, is also one that forces humanity away from self-absorption in order to consider the majesty of creation and its goodness, almost as a poetic response to the suffering of Job and the relative lack of wisdom of his counsellors.[9] The hints of agency in the created world that come to the surface in Genesis and Job speak of an interconnected world of living creatures, a perspective that is becoming rather more familiar to a contemporary audience when faced with the challenge of climate change.

The common focus on the Genesis text as the primary basis for consideration of a theology of creation is understandable, but I suggest that in the specific context of climate change the book of Job is of particular relevance. Journalistic writer Bill McKibben has taken inspiration from Job as an argument against what he perceives as the dominant anthropocentric view of the natural world.[10] He suggests that encountering the book of Job provokes humanity to move away from an individualistic, consumer culture towards a more expansive

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8 This theme recurs frequently in the work of ecotheologians. See for example, R. J. Berry (ed.), *Environmental Stewardship* (London: Continuum, 2006). For a re-reading of the Genesis texts see D. Horrell, C. Hunt, C. Southgate, and F. Stavrakopoulou (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics* (London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2010).

9 Norman Habel was one of the first biblical scholars to appreciate the importance of the book of Job in developing an ecological hermeneutic of scripture. N. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1985). See also K. Dell, "The Significance of the Wisdom Tradition in the Ecological Debate", *Ecological Hermeneutics* (D. Horrell, C. Hunt, C. Southgate, and F. Stavrakopoulou (eds), London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2010), pp. 56-69.

10 B. McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job and the Scale of Creation* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2005).

understanding of the value of the whole of the natural world in the context of environmental concerns. However, McKibben's work is deliberatively provocative, intentionally polemic, as well as heavily journalistic in style. I suggest that the text has not been given the scholarly attention that it deserves, especially by theologians writing on climate change.

The first obviously relevant point to note about Job is that this is a book about innocent suffering. Such suffering applies to those on the receiving end of climate change, since those who are suffering the most have done the least to contribute to climate impacts.[11] Climate change is also indiscriminate in as much as it impacts on both the welfare and survival of a host of other species, disrupting ecosystem functioning on a scale that is almost unimaginable. Does the book of Job have anything to say to this innocent suffering on such a grand scale? At the heart of the book are the divine speeches, spoken following the dissatisfactory answers to the problem of innocent suffering by Job's friends, who refuse to admit that he is really innocent in the way he protests. Yet interpretations of the essential meaning of these speeches are extremely varied in the biblical literature, ranging from a portrayal of God as somehow impotent in the face of evil, through to insistence on the authoritative lordship and rule of God in creation, where Job is humbled by his encounter with God, or even more extreme, the portrayal of God as a jealous tyrant who abuses his power, a God who is roundly rejected by Job.[12]

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11 For some concrete examples, see C. Deane-Drummond, *Seeds of Hope: Facing the Challenge of Climate Justice* (London: CAFOD, 2009).

12 See, for example, A. Brenner, "God's Answer to Job", *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981), pp. 129-137; O. Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnug an Ijob* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978); E. L. Greenstein, "A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind", *Texts, Temples and Traditions* (M. V. Fox (ed.), Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 241-258; J. Biggs Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahweh", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979), pp. 495-511.

The most convincing position, it seems to me, in this array of interpretations is one that portrays the divine speeches as offering a distinctive theology of creation. Human beings are no longer perceived either as the crown of creation or as having a mission to exercise dominion over it, as in the Genesis account; rather, they are envisaged as *participants* in creation, in company with the sea, other animals, mythological beasts and celestial bodies.[13] Job then moves from self-preoccupied despair at his own fate, to one that is more conscious of the interconnected relationships in which his life exists, as well as to a deeper insight into the way God orders the world. Job's view of God has to change through this encounter, along with his understanding of how God orders the world. Instead of viewing that ordering as a protective fence around his life, preserving him from harm, he has to admit to the possibility of chaotic forces being given permission to exercise their force. In other words, the ordering of God does not exclude the possibility of chaotic forces but permits their existence, along with human wickedness, within divinely ordained limits.

The book of Job certainly does not give an answer to innocent suffering, but it does challenge preconceived ideas about the way God orders the world, and it does encourage a deeper sense of interconnection with the created order, enhancing a sense of a shared mortality among all creaturely beings. But now we have to ask ourselves why is the message of interconnection so hard to absorb in the contemporary cultural context of modern society? One of the drawbacks of globalised culture is an associated reliance on information technology of all kinds at the expense of human relationships. Machines and devices seem to have filled the slot once occupied by other creaturely kinds in earlier societies. Alongside high tech culture, we find either a romantic attachment to other creaturely kinds or a refusal to live in a social world, replaced by the avatars of

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13 K. Schifferdecker, *Out of the Whirlwind: Creation Theology in the Book of Job* (Cambridge: Harvard Theological Studies, 2011), pp. 2-3.

cyberspace. The question now becomes, given this kind of social sphere, what might help to realign human societies with God and other creatures in a way that will promote a proper recognition of the earth as gift?

What happens if we go back to the dominant theology of creation in the Bible as represented by the book of Genesis and read it in the light of the book of Job, bearing in mind its call to a much deeper sense of humility in relation to God and other creatures? This is also likely to be the original function of Job, namely, as a correction to the dominant wisdom in the rest of Bible. I suggest that one of the most convincing ways to read Genesis is as poetry that has a communal and liturgical role.[14] A recurring theme in this poem is that God perceives the creation as good, so the corollary is that human beings need to learn to contemplate the world in this way as well. Goodness does not imply fixity but a deeply appreciative and responsive attitude to creaturely reality in which human beings are embedded. The special place and privilege of humankind is the ability to perceive the created world in a manner analogous to the way God does. This results in contemplative appreciation that then informs the particular vocation or calling of humanity as sketched out in Genesis 1 and 2. Basil the Great wrote a poetic prayer based on Genesis 1 in which he recognises the profound need for human conversion in seeing the world and the other creatures in it from a different, *theocentric* perspective, instead of viewing them as simply resources for human benefit. This magnificent prayer captures the liturgical and poetic mood of the Genesis text:

> O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship
> with all living things, our brothers the animals

[14] This interpretation is drawn from biblical scholar E. Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 42-65.

> to whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us.
> We remember with shame that in the past
> we have exercised the high dominion of [humankind] with ruthless cruelty
> so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up in song,
> has been a groan of travail.
> May we realise that they live not for us alone
> but for themselves and for thee,
> and that they love the sweetness of life.[15]

This prayer brings together different elements in beginning to articulate a theology of creation that still has the power to speak into a changing climate. In the first place, our sense of the proper role of humans in relation to others is one that is called into being by prayerful acknowledgement of the grace of God that is able to transform the attitudes of human hearts. In the second place, our natural habitat is one that is shared with other creatures encouraging a richer participative sense of both human and creaturely agency. But human activity, in so far as it has induced unprecedented alterations in climate, is shifting the basis on which other creaturely forms can live through the devastation of the natural habitats of other species. The present disjunction from the poetic ideal of shared creaturely existence under God is therefore all the more striking.

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[15] St. Basil the Great, in D. M. Stewart, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), p. 6. Also formatted in the way the poem is cited in Davis, *Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*, p. 47.

2.2 The Call to Ecological Conversion

The remembering with shame that Basil recognises as an important aspect of how to see creation in a new light comes to the fore in more recent Roman Catholic social teaching in which Pope John Paul II, when reflecting on the devastating environmental changes taking place, joins with the ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew I in speaking of the need for ecological conversion.[16] When this declaration was composed in Vienna in 2002, climate change was not as high up on the political agenda as it is today, but its insights still remain highly relevant.[17] In the declaration they speak of the need for a "genuine conversion in Christ" as enabling humanity to fulfil its vocation, for human beings are "called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom".[18] Drawing on Genesis 1, they envisage God's intentions for creation as being one of "beauty and harmony", but this should not be confused with purely aesthetic sensibility or nature romanticism. Rather, it is about protecting what might be termed "the inner purpose of creation" that is known to God and only dimly perceived by humankind. Ecological conversion, in this context, is less about the turn to nature and more about a responsible and loving attitude towards it, inspired by an appropriate appreciation of the particular role of human beings. The strong sense of an inalienable human dignity in Roman

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16 While the words "ecological conversion": are used by Pope John Paul II at an address to a general audience on January 17, 2001, a similar thread emerges in the joint declaration, though here conversion is spoken of as a conversion in Christ.

17 For further commentary, see Deane-Drummond, *Seeds of Hope.*

18 Pope John Paul II, and His Holiness Bartholomew I, *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics*: *Common Declaration of John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch, His Holiness Bartholomew I*, June 10, 2002, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020610_venice-declaration_en.html (accessed May 11, 2009).

Catholic social teaching is well known, and in the more recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict XVI insists that while the natural world is a "gift" of God, it should never be viewed as more important than the human person.[19] Yet even within this text he recognises that we need to learn that as the natural environment is "a wondrous work of the Creator", so we find "a 'grammar' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not reckless exploitation".[20] This points to the acknowledgement of a deep covenant between human beings and the natural environment.[21]

The idea of a covenantal bond between human beings and the natural world echoes the Christological hymn to wisdom in Colossians 1. This celebratory hymn takes up the importance of other creatures in the divine plan of salvation in a new way, and it has been the inspiration for linking theology and ecology across a range of Christian denominational traditions, from the

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19 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2009), §48.

20 Ibid.

21 The idea of covenant between humanity and the natural environment comes particularly to the fore in Pope Benedict XVI, World Day Message of Peace, 2008, is repeated in subsequent years, and echoes the prior messages of Pope John Paul II. The appearance of ecology in Roman Catholic social teaching has its own history, and it is, I suggest, tied up with concern with the specific way the pontiffs use the terms *authentic human development* and *human ecology* in a way that makes a distinctive contribution to this literature. Pope John Paul II summarises his position in *Evangelium Vitae*, where he claims that "It is the ecological question- ranging from the preservation of the natural habitats of different species of animals and other forms of life to 'human ecology' properly speaking – which finds in the Bible clear and strong ethical direction, leading to a solution which respects the great good of life, of every life". John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), § 42, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html (accessed July 15, 2011). For further discussion, see C. Deane-Drummond, "Joining the Dance: Ecology and Roman Catholic Social Teaching", *New Blackfriars* 93/1044 (2012), pp. 193-212.

emphasis on nature and grace in the work of Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler, to the relationship between Christ and creation in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, through to an appreciation of the cosmic significance of Christ in the thought of Pope John Paul II.[22] As a liturgical hymn that links Christ to creation, it can also be found in the work of those wanting to argue for what might be termed deep incarnation, that is, the significance of Christology for the whole of the natural order, not just human beings. Niels Gregersen, Denis Edwards, Elisabeth Johnson, and Christopher Southgate and some of my own work takes up this theme of deep incarnation in slightly different ways.[23]

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[22] Pope John Paul, for example, speaks of the cosmic significance of Christ's incarnation in claiming that "The "first-born of all creation," becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also "flesh" – and in this reality with all "flesh," with the whole of creation." *Dominum et Vivificantem (On the Life of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church)* (1986), §50, http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0142/_INDEX.HTM (accessed May 14, 2009).

[23] Deep incarnation more often than not takes its cue from a reflection on the text in the Gospel of John, *the Word became flesh*. Niels Gregersen, as far as I am aware, needs to be credited with coining this term, and he has developed the idea further in the following article, N. H. Gregersen, "Deep Incarnation: Why Evolutionary Continuity Matters in Christology", *Toronto Theological Journal* 26/2 (2010), pp. 173-188. In the latter article, Gregersen engages with the deep ecology of Arne Naess. My own view is rather more suspicious of the merits of using the language of deep ecology as a muse to consider the meaning of deep incarnation, since, while it raises the importance of grounding the term in considerations of practical ecology, deep ecology has its own "biocentric", political agenda. I would also want to distinguish a little more clearly between Christ's incarnation and what I prefer to term divine immanence. Nonetheless, discussion of the meaning and significance of the term "deep incarnation" is currently a matter of intense debate among theologians and was aired at a recent workshop organized by Niels Gregersen in Denmark in August 2011.

But is such a translation of cosmic Christology into a modern context legitimate, given that the view of the ancients with respect to cosmology was so very different? This question finds articulate expression in Vicky Balabanski's essay that inquires after the particular cosmology in the background of the letter to the Colossians.[24] She argues that the cosmology of Colossians, including that of the hymn to wisdom in Colossians 1, is very different from other allegedly Pauline letters which all stress the temporary nature of the cosmos. This is so much so that, like many other biblical scholars, she rejects any suggestion of the Pauline authorship of Colossians; she also is not convinced by theories that allege that the magnificent hymn to wisdom in Colossians 1 is inserted subsequently into the text. She argues, instead, that in Colossians we find Christ identified *ontologically* with the cosmic creation and believes that this aligns Colossians with the Timaean framework of Platonic cosmology, most likely interpreted through the Stoic emphasis on the earth as a Living Creature in which all creation exists and is permeated by a fiery *pneuma* or spirit.[25] Balabanski insists that this is an incorporation of Stoic cosmological concepts into a Christology rather than the other way around; this means that such originally Stoic concepts lose their pantheist dimension for they are connected to the *particular* blood of the cross of Christ, as in

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24 The eco-justice principles through which Balabanski seeks to base her ecological hermeneutic were originally developed by Norman Habel in the light of a theology of a cross, but the principles were not framed in theological terms, purportedly in order to allow greater dialogue across disciplines. See N. Habel, "Key Ecojustice Principles: A *Theologia Crucis* Perspective", *Ecotheology* 5 & 6 (1999), pp. 114-125. How far some of these eco-justice principles are genuinely warranted or not is debatable, but clearly the biblical text does allow for rather more subjectivity to be given to the earth than is often acknowledged. V. Balabanski, "Hellenistic Cosmology and the Letter to the Colossians: Towards an Ecological Hermeneutic", *Ecological Hermeneutics* (D. Horrell, C. Hunt, C. Southgate, and F. Stavrakopoulou (eds), London: T & T Clark/Continuum, 2010), pp. 94-107.

25 V. Balabanski, 'Hellenistic Cosmology', pp. 100-101.

Col. 1.20. This lends meaning to the statement that we find Christ *in* all created things, not just in the Church or in the Eucharist. This text is important in other ways, since, although it stresses the particular ontological basis for affirming creation through Christology, it also points to its future redemption. Moreover, the cosmological scope of the significance of Christ for creation can only be claimed in the light of resurrection hope.

2.3 An Unfinished Creation

Jürgen Moltmann has on many occasions emphasised that creation is as yet unfinished.[26] An adequate doctrine of creation, therefore, especially when viewed through the lens of climate change, points to its *unfinished* quality.

The question that now hangs in the balance is one of the particular role and place of humanity in relation to the natural world. While the book of Job offers the particular challenge to re-think what it means to share our creaturehood with other creatures, perhaps no other biblical text addresses this more poignantly than Romans 8. This text is also used in contemporary Roman Catholic social teaching on the environment[27] and is echoed in that magnificent prayer of St Basil cited earlier. The text of special relevance is Rom. 8.23-24:

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[26] Moltmann often implies this rather than using the term explicitly, as in, for example, speaking of the eschatological key in which creation is set from the beginning, e.g., *God in Creation* (Margaret Kohl (trans.), London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 86-93.

[27] Romans 8 has been used from the earliest references to the environment in Roman Catholic social teaching. For example, it appears in 1971 in *Justitia in Mundo*, arising out of the World Synod of Bishops meeting, in order to stress the suffering of creation and the human responsibility to bring about a better world. *Redemptor Hominis*, the first encyclical written by Pope John Paul II in 1979, uses Romans 8 to argue that humans have to shoulder the responsibility for the futility suffered by the rest of the natural order. In other words, he links the futility and groaning of creation with human action.

"From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free". Such "groaning" has usually been interpreted by ecotheologians in the light of the *suffering* of creation, particularly that which accompanies the natural selection of species, the predatory aspects of ecological existence or human interference in the process of nature.[28] On the other hand, Jürgen Moltmann gives a much more positive view of this expectation in his discussion of Romans 8 in *The Spirit of Life*. For him "the present experience of the Spirit is understood as the presence here and now of the coming new creation of all things", while, at the same time, "the new creation of all things is experienced as the completion of that which is already experienced in the here and now".[29] The question now becomes how precisely to understand the "groaning" and "expectant waiting" of creation: is it a longing to be relieved of suffering? Or is it an expectant hope, the promise of the kingdom? Or, in a paradoxical way, both?

The overall theme present in Romans is that which is focused on *human* salvation from corruption, but it is embodied human life, rather than detached from creaturely existence.[30] Hence, the liberation of human bodies in Rom. 8.24 is not so much

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28 This is in line with Roman Catholic social thought, discussed above. Christopher Southgate also uses this text as a paradigmatic theme for his book on evolutionary theodicy. C. Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2008).

29 J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* (Margaret Kohl (trans.), London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 74.

30 The background here is likely to be Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, with the present world in a corrupted state standing under God's wrath (Rom. 1.18, 5.9) to be followed by an age to come where humans fulfil the original intentions of the Creator. However, Paul perceived these two ages as overlapping, rather than in sequence, as in Jewish apocalyptic thought. B. Bryne, *Romans* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 20-21.

detachment from creaturely existence but a way of living out bodily existence so that it is pleasing to God, which is only possible through the transformation of human minds as in Rom. 12.2.[31] The "groaning" of creation in Rom. 8.20-21 is a parenthesis to the "expectant waiting" of creation in Rom. 8.19 and helps to explain its meaning. This eager longing of creation is one that is marked by the existence of humanity and all of creation being bound up together, a theme which derives from a "tradition, stemming ultimately from Gen. 1. 26-28, that sees creation in this sense as intimately bound up with the fate of human beings for good or ill".[32] Therefore, human failure, or its opposite, impacts on what happens to creation.[33] Creation as subject to futility implies that creation cannot achieve the original purpose intended for it in Genesis, but the *agent* in the Genesis text is God, so that its subjection in Romans 8 is more

31 Brendan Bryne is helpful here in B. Bryne, "An Ecological Reading of Rom. 8:19-23", *Ecological Hermeneutics* (D. Horrell, C. Hunt, C. Southgate, and F. Stavrakopoulou (eds), London: T & T Clark/ Continuum, 2010), pp. 83-93 (87).

32 Ibid., p. 88.

33 I am referring here to the impacts of human failure on the natural world, rather than a more traditional view that the natural world somehow "fell" with the fall of humanity. Holmes Rolston III challenges the traditional idea on the basis that it is illogical and impossible for creatures other than humans to be tainted because of human sinfulness. However, what he may be misunderstanding here is the extent to which human beings are understood in traditional theological interpretations as *standing for* the natural world, both in the sense that humanity has fallen, but also in the sense that humanity will be redeemed, along with the created cosmos. His preferred solution to the difficulty is to envisage the natural world as "cruciform". I agree with Rolston that the main subject for redemption is humanity, but rendering "nature" as "cruciform" requires careful theological interpretation, as it could rather easily be interpreted as a justification for cruelty in all its forms, including that expressed in human atrocities, rather than its challenge. Holmes Rolston III, "Does Nature Need to be Redeemed?", *Zygon* 29/2 (1994), pp. 205-229.

likely to be through the agency of God, even if Adam was the cause in the sense of deserving the punishment.
Creation is therefore portrayed in Romans 8 as the innocent victim, but the reward will be a sharing in the eschatological hope of human beings. Biblical scholar Richard Bryne argues that we should interpret the "groaning" of creation as not simply related to human beings' negative impact on the earth, but in the wider context of hope in which this passage is situated. Any sense of humanity being directly responsible for the suffering of creation is therefore stretching the meaning of this passage, but Romans does speak of the wider bondage of human beings to sin. Adam functions here as representative of that tendency in humans to be enslaved to selfishness, and this points to a fundamental problem in human relationships that needs to be addressed in dealing with climate change. Yet the hope for creation comes through a much more powerful story of grace, where the vocation of humanity is one of obedience (Rom. 6.1-7.6). Rom. 8.19-22 implies the *transformation* of this world, rather than its re-creation, so that it is "hermeneutically irresponsible to conclude that even if human beings destroy the world, God will ultimately recreate or rescue it".[34] God's grace works through human cooperation, so that in considering climate change human beings are called to act faithfully and responsibly, mirroring that found in Christ.

3. Towards Ecological Solidarity in a Changing Climate

3.1 Living in Wisdom

In light of these meditations on Colossians 1 and Romans 8, the question now becomes: how can humans put into practice elements of this transformative hope? The threat and present reality of climate change, with its apocalyptic images of

[34] B. Bryne, "An Ecological Reading", p. 93.

destruction uppermost in the common mind, can easily lead to a sense of fear or even paralysis. If we are to think more precisely about the relationship between Christ, the Spirit and creation, then the sophianic theology of Sergii Bulgakov may come to our aid, even if there are certain problems associated with aspects of his theological construction.[35] For him, the second and third hypostases participate in creation through expressing their activity as self-revelation in Sophia.[36] The glory

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[35] I am fully conscious that the writing of Bulgakov is not all that well received in some Orthodox circles, and he has been heavily criticised both during his life and subsequently for his particular way of formulating the Trinity in Sophianic terms. For a recent critical review, see S. Tanev, "*Energeia* vs *Sophia*: The Contribution of Fr. Georges Florovsky to the Rediscovery of the Orthodox Teaching on the Distinction Between the Divine Essence and Energies", *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 2/1 (2011), pp. 15-71. One of the most convincing aspects of this critique is whether Bulgakov is justified in saying as much as he claims in relation to self-revelation, in a way that might imply a *necessity* in God, especially as he links Sophia with God's *ousia* or being. I contend that there are certainly places where Bulgakov seems to say far more than is justified, though to reduce what merits attention in speaking of revelation simply to responses to heresy strikes me as overdrawn. A second important aspect of this critique is whether the language of Sophia is adding any more to the concept of *energia*, in that in some texts it seems to serve as a semantic replacement for the Orthodox concept. In this case, however, I believe that the language of Sophia is important in that the wisdom motif has deeply biblical roots in a way that the language of energies does not. In other words, it makes sense to speak of Christ and the Holy Spirit as the Wisdom of God in a way that resonates with biblical reflection on wisdom; the semantic use of wisdom is meaningful in this sense, even if the Patristic authors, such as Gregory Palamas, preferred to use the language of *energia.* Tanev also argues that Bulgakov does not distinguish adequately between human and divine natures, which results in an inappropriate "anthropological maximalism" (p. 66) that owes more to philosophy than theology, but this charge needs to be qualified by Bulgakov's repeated attention to the created world as such, creaturely Sophia.

[36] S. Bulgakov, *The Comforter* (B. Jakim (trans.), Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmanns, 2004), p. 191.

of creation is manifested from the beginning in the Genesis account, so that "The express action of the Holy Spirit which clothes creation in beauty and glory must also be considered to include the first, preliminary manifestation on earth of the glory of the creation, the transfigured earth: this first manifestation is the planting of paradise".[37]

Bulgakov comments on the importance of the Spirit's brooding presence in Genesis, likened to a bird in its nest, that shows the "life of matter as a reality that is to become permeated with the Holy Spirit and *spiritual* in this sense, that is, a reality that is to achieve its transfiguration as the 'new earth' (together with the 'new heaven') where the *tohu vabohu*, the chaotic formlessness and void, will be overcome".[38] Here he argues that creation bears witness to an experience of the activity of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of God, rather than a hypostatic presence of the Holy Spirit in a "supramundane Pentecost". [39] What he means here, however, is not that Sophia acting in Word and Spirit is somehow separated from their hypostases, but that the hypostases of Son and Spirit are *concealed* in the hypostasis of the Father, so that "Three hypostatic flames are lit in a row, one behind the other; and therefore they are seen as a single flame; and this single flame is the I of the Father".[40] In this way, he can claim that the Spirit of God never acts apart from the hypostatic Holy Spirit, but it is disguised, as it were, bringing both "fullness and perfection on one hand, and development and incompleteness on the other".[41] This sense of the on-going presence of the Spirit of God in creation is important, since it shows up the dynamic involvement of the presence of God in an unfolding creation.

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37 Ibid., p. 193.
38 Ibid., p. 194.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 195.
41 Ibid., p. 197.

3.2 Pan-en-theism in Love Through Sophia

Becoming is therefore built into the world from the beginning and, as such, is echoed in the dialectic relationship between Divine and creaturely Sophia. So, "In the creaturely Sophia, the Spirit is a hearing and perceiving silence, in which the Word born from all eternity is born again for creation, as it were".[42] Here we have what might be termed a "*panentheism*", God creating the world by and in Sophia, so that in its sophianic foundation, it is divine, but in its creaturely aseity, it is not. But, for Bulgakov, this life-giving power of the Spirit of life is manifested in the overcoming of creaturely nothing, understood as an "elemental power of creation", or "the dark face of Sophia".[43] For Bulgakov, humanity expresses the hypostasis of creaturely Sophia, but this is created in such a way so as to be a natural receptacle of grace, expressing the image of God. Yet, importantly, humanity possesses the natural grace of inspiration that can be determined by communion with creaturely Sophia.

Yet when it comes to living out human life in the Spirit, Bulgakov calls for human beings to go beyond passive obedience and ascetic humility but also beyond an active taking of responsibility and creative audacity.[44] Bulgakov also confirms the sentiment expressed in Romans 8, that the world will not be created anew at the end of time but *transfigured*, and that this transfiguration will come about through the activity of the Holy Spirit.[45] The transfiguration anticipated is pre-accomplished by Pentecost, laying the foundation for a new matter of the world that is mirrored in the sanctification of matter made visible in the sacramental activity of the Church. For Bulgakov, the world is not yet ready to receive the fullness

42 Ibid., p. 199.
43 Ibid., p. 201.
44 Ibid., pp. 307-308.
45 Ibid., p. 342.

of the Spirit in its transforming power, so the kenosis of the Spirit works in participation with that of the Son, except that for the Spirit there is no emptying of Divine power, the task being one of *deification* rather than *in-humanization*. There is, then, a divine patience and restraint that is also a suffering, loving presence, so that "The sacrifice of this love consists in the fact that God must suffer the world with its imperfection, without destroying its proper self-determination. He must suffer and ...wait. And this restraint, this moderation, this kenosis of the Holy Spirit, is Love's self-sacrificing love".[46]

3.3 Solidarity with the Earth

One of the difficulties with Bulgakov's sophianic vision of creation is that while it can be inspiring in reminding humanity of the close theological connection with the natural world, it also paints a poetic but somewhat abstract portrait of the creation and humanity's role in that creation. Has he leaned too far from Romans 8's portrayal of the groaning of creation and Sophia understood according to I Corinthians as the wisdom of the cross? I suggest that one way to express the human Joban vocation to actively participate in creaturely being, yet follow a distinctive responsibility that is grounded in practical ethics, is through an expansion of the notion of *solidarity* as expressed in Roman Catholic social teaching. This term has been used

[46] Ibid., p. 352. How far and to what extent it is permissible to speak of the activity of the Holy Spirit in kenotic terms is a topic outside the scope of this essay. However, Bulgakov does not mean an emptying of divine power in speaking of kenosis. Moltmann uses the concept of kenosis to speak about the activity of God *as such* in the creation of the world, envisaging a spatial withdrawal in God, following Jewish kabbalic speculation on *zimzum*. J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp. 86-93; 156-157. Bulgakov's conception is rather different, and it seems to me, rather more convincing, since, while it is also speculative, it is more about restraint as self-sacrificing presence. It is this presence that could be argued is cruciform, rather than rendering nature cruciform in the manner discussed by Rolston above.

primarily to express the hope that those who are living in the Western world will act in solidarity with those who suffer on the basis of a shared humanity and a shared sense of human dignity. Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, for example, stated, "There can be no progress towards the complete development of individuals without the simultaneous development of all humanity in the spirit of solidarity".[47] But once we view the basis of that shared humanity in terms of shared *creatureliness* and mortality, rather than through separation from other living things, then solidarity can take up a new, more expansive meaning. We could therefore adjust this text to read: "There can be no progress towards the complete development of individuals without the simultaneous flourishing of all of life in the spirit of solidarity".

Pope John Paul II further clarified the meaning of solidarity in Roman Catholic social teaching in *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS) when he claimed that it "is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all".[48] But if the common good is understood in terms of the good of the earth, and that human flourishing cannot be understood apart from the flourishing of the rest of the natural world, then it makes sense to expand this commitment to other creaturely kinds as well. Furthermore, "In the light of faith, solidarity seeks to go beyond itself, to take on the specifically Christian dimension of total gratuity, forgiveness and reconciliation".[49] If we expand this idea to include the earth, then we have to seek forgiveness and

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47 Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), §43. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html, (accessed June 8, 2011).

48 Pope John Paul II, *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), §38. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html (accessed May 14, 2011).

49 Ibid., §40.

reconciliation with the earth that we have damaged and the creatures within it that we have harmed unnecessarily. In its original meaning, those who are poor are also called upon to express solidarity by their own active contribution to the common good, rather than simply passively receiving material goods. Such a contribution is possible in the light of non-material gifts. Solidarity is also about seeing the other as a neighbour, rather than as an instrument towards selfish or individualized gain.[50] It, therefore, points to a different way of perceiving the world and the human place in that world. While the neighbour aspect can be expressed practically towards those in the human community who are poor by actively listening to their plight and hopes for the future and by sharing in material goods, a greater imaginative leap is required to enter into the plight of the suffering of other creaturely kinds. But if the flourishing of such creatures in and of themselves, and in some sense actively contributes to human flourishing, then there is a sense in which they too can express solidarity with human neighbours, as well as the other way around.

There are clear differences, of course, compared with human solidarity in that, in as much as humans are given the power of naming other creatures, there will be some creatures that actively harm human beings, so the thought of solidarity in such cases seems somewhat strained. But perhaps human beings also need to be rather more cautious than they have in the past about seeking to eradicate completely virulent creatures that are harmful to human societies. Moreover, it is the particular and unnecessary suffering of other creatures imposed by the unbridled activities of human beings that is primarily under consideration in this context, rather than suffering as such in evolutionary and ecological processes.

In the original context where solidarity was used in SRS, the natural world was viewed as a resource that should be shared

50 Ibid., §39.

evenly among all peoples, but, in light of our current awareness of interdependence, this approach is no longer adequate as far more is required of humanity than simply sharing out the goods of the earth, as if it was a disposable resource. At the same time, the practice of human living and ecological dynamics means that some suffering of other natural kinds is unavoidable; what is desirable is a resistance towards actively *contributing* to that suffering brought about by unnecessary direct or indirect human acts. Any killing of other creatures for food, for example, or even to protect a human population for the sake of maintaining human lives, is not to be undertaken lightly or wantonly but in deep awareness of the moral seriousness of such actions in terms of the power given to human beings in the taking of life.

Solidarity is, I suggest, the theological anthropology that mirrors, or in some sense imitates, the idea of deep incarnation in Christology, filled out by an appreciation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the community. For if Christ is in a sense deeply connected with all that exists, while showing forth his Divinity in an explicit way in the particular drama of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then our human vocation must be to express solidarity with the earth in practical, loving relationships, through the grace given by the Holy Spirit. This expansive solidarity chimes with the concept of human ecology that has been used in Roman Catholic social teaching as that which incorporates the *range* of the ecological question, from natural habitats to human relationships, and so avoids the temptation to forget about the plight of human injustices while concentrating on injustices towards other creaturely kinds.

Solidarity is, therefore, not so much a romantic affiliation with all creaturely kinds, as an awareness of the particular steps that need to be taken in order to permit the flourishing of humanity in the context of the wider flourishing of the earth. The book of Job also reminds us that solidarity needs to be expressed according to the perspective of the Creator, rather than that according to narrowly conceived human interests. It also points

to a different kind of societal structure that bases its account of human flourishing on more than simply gross national product.[51] In other words, it points to a new economic reality that is one grounded in interrelationships, but such relationships are more expansive than those simply associated with human societies. Pope Benedict XVI has suggested that we need to humanise economics so that it is based on gratuitousness. But such a gift relationship will not work if we forget about the way human life and that of other creaturely kinds are forged together, both across space and through time in solidarity with future generations yet to come.

4. Preliminary Conclusions

In a changing climate, theologians need to work much harder to envisage the specific ecumenical contribution that can be made to contested public issues around climate change and global responsibility. For religious ecclesial communities, this requires deeper self-reflection theologically on the nature of human social relationships, expanded to include other creaturely kinds but embedded in a practical liturgical context. In a secular public sphere, openness to solidarity gives some insight into its global relevance, even if the forms of that solidarity will be taken up in different ways in different cultural contexts.

In the first instance of religious communities, if, then, we can envisage the relationship between God and creation in a Christological key, interpreted through understanding the world as in some sense an expression of creaturely Sophia, then the "expectant longing" of creation also echoes a powerful expectant longing of God, who suffers and waits to see how humankind will respond to God's overwhelming generosity of

[51] Tim Jackson's *Prosperity Without Growth* (London: Routledge, 2011) comes closest to the kind of economic structure that I am envisaging here, though there is room for further development of these concepts in closer dialogue with theology.

love. The suffering and waiting of both other creatures and God are metaphorical in the sense that human beings can never fathom this mystery in its entirety in God or other creaturely kinds. But, in as much as humans are creaturely and yet bear the divine image, our human vocation as Christians is also one of responding as best we can by showing solidarity in the light of that expectant longing. In the context of climate change, the difficulty of that waiting becomes all the more intense, where human understanding of the groaning of creation as positive, expectant longing may be threatened by an overwhelming sense of threat from human avarice and selfishness. An ecumenical call for ecological conversion, therefore, gets to the heart of a call for the transfiguring presence of the Holy Spirit to come and transform humanity so that by God's grace the love of God will be made manifest in right relationships, with God, with each other and with the natural world. Such right relationships when conceived through an expanded concept of solidarity keep in balance the relative demands of justice in the human community and eco-justice. In this sense, the meaning of solidarity as expressed in the witness of religious communities can contribute to its wider meaning in secular worlds.