

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

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H. ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

God's creation: A sacred responsibility

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ABSTRACT

The current ecological crisis we are facing is a serious concern. This a problem for all nations and indeed the church which understands the care of God's creation to be its sacred responsibility (Gen 2:15). Fundamentally, this is a spiritual problem. Although God created the earth good and entrusted it to humankind to care for and protect, humans have mishandled and exploited it for their own selfish purposes. This was never God's intention. Since the fall, the human quest for a 'mastery over nature' gained momentum, added by advances in knowledge brought about through science and philosophy. While this enabled enormous progress to be made, it also had a darker side to it by which humanistic ambitions strove in spiritual opposition to God's word and our sacred responsibility to first fear, love and trust in God above all things. Rather than concern for the neighbour, humankind chose self-gratification over self-giving, self-ascendancy rather than the ascendancy over all things through faith in the crucified and risen Christ. With their newly acquired power over nature, many started to question the need for a biblical worldview. The creation and its creatures became objects not only to be measured but to be exploited. Their creatureliness seemed to fade with each new successful discovery in science. The problem, however, is not science but our use of it. Like fire, 'it is a good servant but a bad master'. Baptised into Christ, the believer is no longer captive to sin but is free to serve. Through the Lutheran understanding of God's twofold operation in the world, science and many other vocations such as farming are valuable in fulfilling our sacred responsibility of serving and protecting the creation.

INTRODUCTION

1. The current context

As Christians we believe that 'to the Lord belongs the earth and everything that is in it' (Ps 24:1; cf Job 41:11) and that God created this earth 'good' (Gen 1) and gave it to us to 'serve and protect' (Gen 2:15).¹ Despite even our best intentions, it has become evident since the mid-20th century that we have not been very good stewards of all that we've been blessed with. During this time humans have altered ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in the past.² World population has doubled, food production tripled, energy use quadrupled, and overall economic activity has increased about fivefold. It is now being realized that this rapid rate of human consumption has come at considerable cost with a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life especially in Australia.³ Global loss in bio-diversity is estimated to be about 1,000 times faster than from processes of natural attrition (Chapin et al 1998, 1240).

The ecological crisis affects all society, both state and church. It is fundamentally a spiritual problem and originates in the rebellion of humankind against God. Christianity's efforts in de-divinising nature and eliminating paganism, freed the universe for our rational enquiry. No longer was 'nature' to be worshipped, feared, or held 'sacrosanct'. Through its association with Renaissance humanism, it was thought by some that the effects of the fall could be overcome and guided by a 'carefully specified methodological regimen' (Harrison 2007, 245). This 'regimen' enabled humankind not only to invest itself in its own material rewards but brought with it scepticism towards God's word, especially in regard to its own ethical responsibilities. Before too long the biblical mandate to have 'dominion over the earth' (Gen 1:28) was misrepresented as a claim for the unrestricted consumption and exploitation of nature.⁴ Caught up in the latest technology, many have become estranged from the creation and no longer care for it.

To some extent this has been influenced by an 'other-worldliness' arising from neo-Platonism, whereby earth is simply seen as a platform for heaven.⁵ This dualistic separation still remains today and is evident in certain contemporary Christian sentiments as:

¹ A very good resource that examines this topic of caring for God's creation from a Lutheran perspective is: 'Together with all Creatures: Caring for God's Living Earth' (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod 2010).

² It is not this author's intention to deal explicitly with the wide variety of environmental concerns that confront Australians as they are well described (e.g. State of the Environment Committee 2011). The following are major concerns: Consumerism and resource depletion, over-packaging, over-consumption; over-population; anthropogenic climate change; sea-level rise, ocean acidification; non-renewable energy depletion; habitat destruction (including: clearing of forests, reduction of biodiversity; coral bleaching, illegal fishing); health of waterways (e.g. Murray Darling, Torrens, Yarra, Parramatta, etc.); loss of fauna and flora; toxic spillage from oil and mining extraction; environmental impact of dams; genetically modified crops; waste management; land management issues (soil erosion, salinity, control of exotic weeds and pests, urban sprawl, over-grazing, irrigation; noise pollution, light pollution, visual pollution; food shortage causing hunger and malnutrition; supply of drinking water; conflict that arises from resource shortages; poverty; health issues; failure to act and avert predictable disasters.

³ For a good overview see Healey (2007). Australia lays claim to significant component of the global bio-diversity (just over 70%), however in the past two centuries we have lost many species: 27 mammalian, 23 avian, 7 invertebrate, 4 amphibian, 4 reptilian, and over 52 plant species. Many more are endangered and also face extinction. These include the koala, the Tasmanian devil, the orange bellied parrot and the Australian bustard.

⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg makes the observation: 'This happened, in other words, at the very time when modern humanity in its self-understanding was cutting its ties with the creator God of the Bible...It was in fact only the emancipation of modern humanity from biblical revelation that turned the biblical commission of domination into a subjugation of nature to human beings on their own authority and for their own arbitrary use' (Pannenberg 1985, 78).

⁵ See Santmire's 'metaphor of ascent' (Santmire 1985, 18). Although his distinction between a 'metaphor of ascent' and a 'metaphor of fecundity' is an important one, he groups Luther with Augustine and overlooks their significant differences in regard to matters of justification and other-worldliness.

'Forget 'Save the Earth'; what about your soul? The earth is going to burn, what about you?'⁶

'If you believe in literal truth—and the absolute power of a Creator—then it doesn't really matter if we humans have fouled our own nest. We'll be taken care of later.'⁷

'The main job of a Christian leader is to guide lost souls to redemption...In my view, any preacher who decides to get involved in environmental issues is like a heart surgeon who suddenly leaves an operation to fix a clogged toilet.'⁸

For many people facing the enormity of the ecological issues is just too hard and complex. To do so demands knowledge of not only many branches of science, but also economics and politics. It is not uncommon for the degree of certainty in these fields to be overstated, especially in the media, and substituted for religious truth. This breeds scepticism and a distrust for science and governments, and it is more convenient to dispense with the details; issues such as climate change are not considered a concern because 'God will provide' regardless.

2. Is the ecological crisis a result of 'Christian axioms'?

Since the publication of Lynn White's influential article 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' (White 1967), the common perception is that the demise of the environment is to be blamed on 'Christianity', because of its alleged anthropocentrism and in particular the biblical mandate to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it' (Gen 1:28). White asserts that the invention of the deep plough provides evidence of exploitative attitudes arising from the teaching of certain 'Christian axioms' such as 'no item in the physical creation has any purpose save to serve man's purposes' (White 1967, 1205). However, such anthropocentric axioms are more closely affiliated to the objectives of neo-Platonic humanism than Christianity.

Prior to the rise of the modern environmental movement, the simultaneous disregard for God and his mandate to care for creation was identified in broad brush-strokes, but with poignant precision, by social commentator Gilbert Chesterton (1874 - 1936). He describes the motivation to exploit creation as arising not from any biblical command but from the humanistic desire to be heteronomous and independent. This is especially evident in the thinking of the enlightenment philosophers of the late 18th century around the time of the French Revolution:

It was generally assumed that Liberty was not merely a good thing, but the one and only origin of all good things. The man living according to Nature, the Natural Man or the Noble Savage, would find himself immediately free and happy so long as he never went to church...Then after the political revolution came the industrial revolution; and with it an enormous new importance attached to science...The second atheist philosophy was founded, not on the fact that Nature is kind, but on the fact that Nature is cruel; not that fields are free and beautiful, but that scientific men and industrialists are so energetic, that they will soon cover all the fields with factories and warehouses. Now there was a new substitute for God ... It was now positively stated that economic liberty, the freedom to buy and sell and hire and exploit, would make people so blissfully happy that they would forget all their dreams of the fields of heaven; or for that matter of the fields of earth. And somehow that also has been a little disappointing. (Chesterton 1950, 75)

An accurate summary of the biblical teaching on creation and its ecological interconnectedness was described nearly five centuries years ago in Luther's response to the first article of the creed. It includes the confession that 'I believe that God has created me together with all creatures...and still preserves them' (SC II, 2). It is to be noted that the emphasis includes 'me' together with 'all creatures'. Humankind is not alone here

⁶ Bumper sticker distributed by a Baptist church in Boise, Idaho. See online article: Dennis P. Gordon "Duty of Care", *The Plain Truth*, Oct. 26 2009, <http://www.wcg-indo.com/> (accessed December 10 2012).

⁷ Mark Trabant, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 6, 2007. Cited in Ackerman (2007, 259).

⁸ Online article by Todd Strandberg, no date, "Bible Prophecy and Environmentalism", <http://www.raptureready.com/r-r-environmental.html> (accessed 10 Dec 2012).

(anthropomonism), nor is it to be self-focused (anthropocentrism⁹), but interconnected with 'all creatures' including 'sun, moon and stars in the heavens; day and night', which share the same creator. Christianity cannot refer to creation without the creator and redeemer being at its centre (Col 1:16-20) and is therefore Christocentric.

In Luther's response, the last thought on his mind is 'what can I snatch for my own advantage' or 'how can I elevate myself above nature'. Mindful of the tendency of fallen humanity to deny God and ingratiate self, Luther makes clear that God imparts this dignity 'without any merits or worthiness' on our behalf but 'only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy' (SC II, 2).¹⁰

Modern critics who align the biblical position of human 'dominion' with exploitation and subjugation fail to consider the rebellion of humankind against God. It will be shown in Part I of this study that Scripture is not a hindrance to the proper care of creation but foundational to identifying the root cause of the current ecological crisis. Part II examines how we are to proceed into the future given the biblical foundation for the responsible dominion of creation and its governance according to the Lutheran doctrine of God's twofold reign.

PART 1: THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION TO CARE FOR CREATION

From the outset Scripture makes it clear that it is God that created all things 'in the beginning' (Gen 1:1), not nature. God does not diminish the value of his creation, rather it is given value in its own right and according to his purpose. In fact, ten times he makes the declaration that all he created was 'good'.

The assertion of Genesis 1 is that God is not synonymous with 'nature'. While nature can not only be beautiful but also terrifying it is not to be worshipped. Only God is to be worshipped, only He is Holy. Only He can save.

3. God entrusts his creation to the dominion of humankind

a. God's vice-regal representative

In Genesis 1 humankind is divinely appointed to undertake an extraordinary position and function in the order of creation. Man and woman are created in 'the image of God', as the apex of the whole creation. This 'image' is to be understood exclusively in relational terms rather than as consisting of constituent qualities. Their relationship with God is addressed positively by God in the form of blessing, and negatively in the form of command. Firstly, they are to act as God's vice-regal representative, with magisterial responsibility over creation (Gen 1:28). This context alone implies that they do not have absolute rule. While humankind is entrusted with power and privilege, this also entails service, labour, duty and accountability. Humans are granted the unique capacity to reflect on their stewardship of creation and be morally responsible agents. Unlike other creatures, they have the ability to transcend their own needs in this task. Secondly, the man and woman are forbidden to eat of the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil'

⁹ This is contrary to the thesis of Guzman (2009). Guzman makes the erroneous claim in his chapter 'The Anthropocentric Luther' that Luther is anthropocentric in his emphasis on God being *pro me*. Luther and the Lutheran Confessions are definitely re-orientated away from self to Christ. The focus is not on self, but how Christ deals with selfishness, which is a uniquely human problem. Unless we first recognise the need for our Saviour, our sin will get in the way of how we treat the 'other'. Unfortunately, Guzman follows the thesis of Lynn White and fails to distinguish essential theological differences that exist between Augustine and Luther, especially in regard to justification and the sanctified life.

¹⁰ Elert makes an important observation regarding the catechetical confession when he writes: 'It is God's gracious Word that constitutes the promise – not the object to which the promise refers. That He promises me anything at all – this is the revelation of His love, and since the promise is proclaimed to me and thus also applies to me, it is a way of stating that He forgives me my sins' (Elert 1962, 450).

(Gen 2:16) or 'you will die'. They are not to presume that they have equality with God, and this uniquely defines humankind's sphere of operation in exercising its dominion over the other creatures.

The text makes clear that 'before God' (*coram deo*) the creation is 'very good' and has its own intrinsic value bestowed on it by the creator and that this is to be respected by humankind as it exercises its God-given dominion over creation. Psalm 104 rejoices over God's care for both animals and humans at the same time. The Noachic covenant was made not just with humankind but with all creatures (Gen 9:10). The care to be shown to the animals (Deut 25:4; Prov 12:10) indicates that they are not here just to serve human needs. A boundary is set on the human use of bird life (Deut 22:6–7). Trees are not to be destroyed but used appropriately (Deut 20:19–20). The land is to be rested in the seventh year (Lev 25:1–7). When Jesus declares a human is more valuable than the sparrows (Matt 10:31), it is implicit that the sparrows are also valuable.

b. The Fall and our redemption in Christ

By eating of the forbidden tree, humankind has taken divine matters into its own hands to construct a religion of its own making. It now desires to worship itself instead of the creator. Instead of fixing its attention on the revealed God and his saving action in history, it speculates on matters of eternal security over which it has no control. In going against what God prohibits, it subverts God's role. Instead of order, it brings disorder. Instead of freedom it brings enslavement to the 'self'. If I put myself on a pedestal to be 'as God' (Gen 3:5; Jud 21:25), I become unstable and topple. Those who want to gain their lives by making them an end in themselves, lose both (Matt 10:39; 16:25; John 12:25). In its aspiration to 'ascend' above what God has ordained, the humans become entrapped in a downward spiral that draws in fellow creatures so that they also suffer (Isa 24:4–7; Jer 12:10–11, 44:22; Rom 8:19–22).

God must take the initiative to rescue humankind from wanton self-destruction and restore his original intention for the proper dominion of creation. The Torah finds its true meaning in Christ (John 5:46; 7:19); that in him, *all things* were created through him and for him, and only in him do all things hold together (Col 1:16–17; Job 12:10; Rom 11:36; Heb 1:2; 2:10). Only in him can dominion be as God intended it to be (Heb 2:8). The Son of God and Mary's Son takes our nature and becomes like us and one with us. He goes to the cross to triumph over sin, death and evil. In him, God the Father was pleased to reconcile the world to himself (Col 1:20; 2 Cor 5:19) in his unique plan for the fullness of time, to unite 'all things' in him, and under him as head (Col 1:18; Eph 1:10, 22). Through the preaching of the gospel and the work of the Spirit, Christ 'makes all things new' (Rev 21:5). Through him, we see the sin that blemishes our dominion (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8) and we see afresh the 'new creation' (2 Cor 5:17) that he would have us be.

c. God's relationship to the creation as revealed in scripture

God actively provides for and blesses both the non-human and human creation,¹¹ including believer and unbeliever alike (Matt 5:45; Ps 145:15–16; Acts 17:28), and he protects us all in times of danger.¹² He does all this through his performative word.¹³ God speaks and summons the non-human creation (Ps 50:1, 4). But for the human creation this speech often falls on deaf ears (Isa 1:3, Jer 8:7) and God must speak specifically through Zion, his church (Ps 50:2). He gathers the church, the community of baptised believers, and calls them to be a 'royal priesthood...declaring the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet 2:9).

¹¹ Gen 9:3; 1 Kings 4:25; Ps 23:6; 104:3–30; 147:8–9; Job 12:10, 38:41; Mat 5:45, 6:25–27; John 5:17; Eph 1:9–11.

¹² Ps 145:15–16; Job 10:12; Rom 8:28; Lam 3:22–23; Is 49:15; Mt 2:13, 26:53; Heb 13:5; see Ps 91:11, 34:7.

¹³ Ps 50:1–4; 147:15–19; Isa 55:10–11, 45:22–23, 46:9–11; Jer 1:12, 10:13; Heb 1:3.

The non-human creation worships God by functioning as God intended it to be, his creatures in their creatureliness enacting the speech act of his performative word for his glory. The church joins the rest of creation to praise God and gives thanks for all his benefits (Ps 96:11–13; 19; 148; 149; Isa 44:23; etc.); the only exception being unrepentant humankind.

d. God's revelation in creation

Although God's work in creation is not naturally deduced by humankind, it is clearly evident (Rom 1:18–21). Furthermore, the absolute dominion of the triune God over all his creation is powerfully affirmed throughout Scripture (e.g. Gen 1:1–2:3; Ps 104; Isa 46; Rom 1:18–22) and this sets it apart from all other religious, mechanistic and philosophical worldviews.

But ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you;
or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:7–10 ESV)

4. Nature and the sacred

a. How is God present for us in nature?

Beginning with Genesis 1, Scripture declares nature is not divine. It is never referred to as divine, especially in its concrete form. Rather, it is the fulfilment of the divine task of God's creative activity and has no creative power of its own. The Bible views the creation as exclusively creaturely, 'it is in no sense divine or semi-divine, nor does it contain a divine element within it...even the powers at work in it, whether atomic, gravitational, biological, or intellectual, are wholly other than divine' (Stek 1990, 253). God is the only creator. All other personal and impersonal powers of the creation that we think of as causes are secondary or instrumental causes.¹⁴

Unlike panentheism,¹⁵ Luther declares that God is in everything and at the same time outside everything. Luther describes God's omnipresence in creation as 'outside, below and above every creature...heaven is his throne, yet earth is his footstool' (Isa 66:1) and yet 'he ascended up far above the heaven that he might fill all things' (Eph 4:10).¹⁶

God endorses the creation and confirms its goodness, incarnationally, in the divine act of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, and, sacramentally, in the simple elements of water, wine and bread. This is in opposition to the gnostic tendency to regard the material world as spiritually inferior (Scaer 1993).¹⁷ Unlike pantheism and panentheism, God is independent of his creation yet he is deeply committed to it, to the point of sending his Son into the world to redeem it and to reign over it in ascended glory (Heb 1:1–3; 2:6–10).

¹⁴ WA 40^{III}, 210f, 215; cited in Althaus (1962, 107).

¹⁵ Panentheism claims that although divinity transcends the world, both are mutually dependent on each other. In fact, it substitutes the transcendent for a 'hyper-immanence' (Horton 2011, 73).

¹⁶ WA 2, 1742 (Tischreden).

¹⁷ See also Green (2006, 205), who finds the theology of creation in Calvin and Barth was hindered because of neo-Platonic presuppositions.

Of itself, fallen humankind does not look to Christ as its source of eternal hope and comfort but to what has been created;¹⁸ as with animism, pantheism, and panentheism, Luther states that while God is everywhere, including 'in, with and under'¹⁹ all creation, he is not everywhere for us:

He does not want you to look for him everywhere. Look for him rather where the word is, and there you will lay hold of him in the right way. Otherwise, you are tempting God and committing idolatry.²⁰

Luther explains that 'God's omnipresence is beyond our understanding', and 'the seat he likes best is a contrite heart' (Isa 66:2). He adds, reason cannot find this God.²¹ Rather, he is properly revealed in Christ, the incarnate wisdom of God (John 1:1–34; Matt 11:19; Col 2:3), the truth, and the Word made flesh (John 1:14; 14:6), both creator and creature (John 1:1–3, 14; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2, 10).

In his earlier life, perhaps influenced by mysticism, Martin Buber suggested that because God is immanent in the world, 'the world becomes—in a general sense—a sacrament'.²² Such a designation is inappropriate in Lutheran teaching. What determines a sacrament is not that visible and material things function as a sign or mediate the things that are invisible and spiritual, but more concretely, a sacrament is 'the command of God, to which the promise of grace has been added' (AC XIII). While God's creation provides us with all our physical needs, it does not give salvation; indeed, often the natural world does not even appear to be kind to us.

The proper knowledge of God that is given to us 'in, with and under' the sacrament is not the same as the general or natural knowledge of God from creation (Althaus 1962, 13–20). To avoid speculative natural theologies that distort our view of creation, such as panentheism, this distinction is of decisive importance.

b. If nature is not divine, then is it sacred?

In Scripture, the entirety of creation is never referred to as 'sacred' even in a general sense. In the Hebrew Scriptures, what God designates as *qadesh* (קֹדֶשׁ, holy or sacred) is to be set apart from the profane (Lev 10:10; Ezek 44:23). This was the cognitive worldview of the Ancient Near East (ANE), whereby specific objects were personified and considered to have sacred functions (Walton 2011:44–46). Even for the pagans, nature was not always sacred. The fact pagans designated certain groves as 'sacred' implies that other were not sacred (Wybrow 1991, 114). While Mt Sinai was sacred to the Hebrews, it did not make other mountains sacred (*ibid*). When a pagan king clear-felled forests to sell timber to Solomon (1 Kings 5:6–9), it appears there was little concern for their 'sacredness'.

The sacredness of anything in the Scriptures is established by the 'effective word' of the Lord which 'kills and makes alive', and 'does not return empty' (Isa 55:11). As a worshipping community in which the Lord is present in its midst, the Israelites are a holy people set apart by God (Lev 11:44–45), 'for I Yahweh, I who sanctify you, am *qadesh*' (Lev 21:8; cf 21:15; 22:2). The Lord God is thrice *qadesh* (Isa 6:3) and only what he calls and establishes is *qadesh*. This includes: the nation of Israel (Ex 19:6), Mt Sinai (Ex 19:23), the Sabbath (Gen 2:3; Ex 20:8; 31:14; Ne 13:22), the first-born (Ex 13:2, 12), places and objects for cult (Ex 29:44; 30:29; Lev 6:16, 26; 8:11; Num 7:1), the office of priests (Ex 28:41; 29:1–9; Lev 8:12, 30; 21:1–22), garments (Ex 28:2), utensils (1 Chro 9:29; 22:19; 2 Chro 5:5), the ark

¹⁸ Jer 2:11; Rom 1:23, 25; Mt 6:24; 2 Tim 3:4; 1 John 2:14, 15; Hos 4:7.

¹⁹ See LW 37:57. Luther writes 'God is present in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power'.

²⁰ LW 36 342 (tran alt); see LW 37:56–58f.

²¹ LW 21:331.

²² Buber (1946); cited in Santmire (2000, 72). See also Tillich (1948).

(2 Chro 35:3), human seed (Ezra 9:20), offerings (Ex 29:33–34; 1 Sam 21:5), the sacrificial animals (Ex 29:27; Lev 16:8).

The New Testament clearly avoids the notion of the sacralisation of the environment because of its pagan connotations of divine power inherent in nature which must be rejected as idolatrous (see Schrenk 1964, 229). The use of 'sacred' or 'holy' (*hieros, hagios*) is limited and refers only to the 'sacred writings' (2 Tim 3:15), the 'holy city' (Matt 4:5), the 'temple offering' (Matt 23:17, 19), the 'holy nation' (1 Pet 2:9)—'be holy for I am holy' (1 Pet 1:16)—the Mount of Transfiguration (2 Pet 1:18), and the entirety of the Christian faith (2 Pet 2:21). It is significant that Paul avoids the use of 'sacred' when referring to special days not sanctioned by God (Rom 14:5).

There is little need for creation to be designated as 'sacred' in order for it to be valued. The creation was pronounced 'good' and 'very good' by God in the beginning (Gen 1; 2). Calling something 'sacred' does not necessarily prevent it from being misused. This is evident from the comparative ecological study by Chew (2001) of Christian and non-Christian cultures. The problem lies within humankind with its hostility to God, and a desire to either exploit or worship the creation rather than exercise responsible dominion.

In Genesis 2:15, God establishes such dominion by placing Adam in the Garden of Eden 'to serve and guard it.' He is to serve and protect what is not his but belongs to God and is entrusted to him. Severian of Gabala observed that Adam's sacred task of guarding the Garden is not just physical but includes a sacred call to protect it against spiritual disorder by wilful obedience to God's commands:

'Protect it' from what? From himself. Do not lose it by transgressing the command. Instead, he is to keep the commandment and in so doing keep himself in paradise (Severian of Gabala, 'On the creation of the World' 5.5; cited in Louth and Conti 2001, 60; trans alt).

The use of the two Hebrew verbs *abad* and *shamar* are complementary. Their juxtaposition is indicative of a more fundamental basis for human activity than simply agricultural activity (Jacob 1974, 18). Adam is called upon to be a participant in exercising responsible dominion over creation, to serve, guard, maintain and, when necessary, to restore the order of creation—cosmic, social and cultic (Gorman 1990, 230–231). In this way, the order of creation is protected from the forces of cosmic chaos and balance is maintained (cf. Walton 2001, 174). Adam is not created simply to exist, but through ritualized daily activity his sacred calling by God is enacted, bringing meaning and order to the world. Prior to the fall, there is no hint of humankind's vocation being burdensome.

In Scripture, 'sacred' is used dynamically, under Gods' command, rather than statically, as an arbitrary self-appointed attribute of creation itself. Even the Garden of Eden, while a paradise, is never referred to as 'sacred.' Rather, 'sacred' is used to refer to the divine appointment of Adam's proper dominion over the creation. It anticipates the need to listen to the word of God rather than the serpent. Adam was to live by 'every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'; that was his sacred calling, but instead he placed himself over God's word and decided for himself what was good and evil. He fell for 'the lie' to be 'like God' instead of being content to be 'in the image of God'. Consequently, he sets himself against God as humans do today. Instead of preserving the order of creation, this brings disorder and chaos and ultimately stands behind the ecological crisis we are presently witnessing.

In Adam, all humankind fell and failed in its duty to protect the creation against disorder, both spiritually and physically. Although Adam failed, the second Adam succeeded (Matt 4:4; 1 Cor 15:45f) and attained redemption for all (Col 1:17–20; see Rom 8:19–21). If we are to succeed in our sacred calling 'to serve and guard' the creation, it will only be because we are 'in Christ'; we will never do it by ourselves.

It is clearly evident that the use of 'sacred' in Scripture is never ambiguous in its reference to God as the origin of spiritual content. Secondly, its use nearly always anticipates redemption. Manifest in God's word, what is sacred or holy is always active against idolatry and promotes spiritual well-being. It is dynamic and relational. In this way it is to be distinguished from pagan usage which is static, self-referential, spiritually harmful and condemned by God (Mic 5:13; Ex 23:24; 34:12–17; etc).

The positivistic usage of the term 'sacred' by Durkheim²³ is simply the rationalistic development of the pagan conception whereby the mandate for 'setting apart and forbidding' is articulated in the tangibility of the ritualised enactment of the 'collective consciousness' (Durkheim 1995).

In its pagan and positivist forms, the veneration of the 'sacred' can be just as intense, perhaps even more so, as for the baptised believer. Nevertheless, what is utterly critical here is the distinction between what is divinely mandated and what is not. This is of utmost significance for fallen human nature which will tend to objectify whatever it deems to be 'sacred'. This is evident in Adam's desire to seek spiritual power in forbidden fruit rather than God's word. The human crisis that has led to ecological destruction is not existential but relational.

c. Some inappropriate designations of the term 'sacred'

In recent years, there has been an increasing tendency for eco-feminist theologians to refer to a generalised 'sacredness of nature' (T. Berry 2009; S. McFague 2008; P. Santmire et al. 2011).²⁴ This can be identified with the 'static' use of the word sacred that has its origin, not in the divine mandate, but in a rationalistic ontic commitment. Given the biblical distinction between sacred and profane, it seems out of place to be using the term sacred to refer to the single reality of creation. This incongruity most likely stems from the positivism of Durkheim and indicates a confusing and idealistic syncretism of biblical and pagan conceptions of the sacred. Such non-biblical usage will tend to focus on the immanent rather than the transcendent and in the process the immanent will ultimately be diminished. In other words, we will continue to lose our 'creatureliness' and the creation will suffer further.

God's word reveals that the 'heavens declare the glory of God' and 'the skies proclaim the work of his hands', 'daily pouring forth speech' (Ps 19). This is not necessarily an audible vocalisation but one that occurs when the creature reflects God's goodness in its 'being' and by enacting what it was created to be (Bauckham 2002, 176–177). Only a sheep can be a sheep and it does this better than any other creature. Only a volcano can be a volcano, etc. In being what it was created to be and do, each part of the creation works together with the rest, giving glory of God and witnessing to his goodness and power. Regrettably, it is fallen humanity that fails in what it was intended to be and do, that is, to live in original righteousness, giving glory to God in liturgical praise and faithful witness through discharging its sacred responsibility.

As fallen creatures, we plug our ears as we glory in our own power to manipulate the creation for self-advantage. The audibility of creation, 'animated' by the creative word of God, was to be reduced to the mere metaphorical in the rationalisation of the Newtonian world and thus made irrelevant in a process of 'de-vocalisation' (Ong 2000, 72–73). There is no need for us to resacralise the environment as suggested by Bauckham (2010:86,191).²⁵

²³ For Durkheim, for instance, the sacred is that which the individual recognises as having ultimate authority, as being other than himself and greater than himself (Douglas 1999, xiv).

²⁴ McFague (2008, 133) also states the 'world is a sacrament of God.' Her worldview is panentheistic (Horton 2011, 327).

²⁵ Nor is there any need to 're-enchant' nature (or 'Earth') by personification as 'mother'. While Scripture describes God creating the first humans and all creatures from the soil of the earth (Gen 1:24; 2:7; 3:19), and

In the following section we will see that poorly supported religious aspirations have been the problem, not the solution. The failure to acknowledge humanity's enslavement, the captivity of the human will (FC SD II)²⁶ and its corresponding need for redemption, has led to the egocentricity and anthropocentrism that Lynn White contends is the cause of the modern ecological crisis. Only when the will is bound to Christ, is the believer truly free to serve the neighbour and care for creation (John 8:36). Properly understood, the sacralisation of the creation is a divine act and does not occur by our doing; rather it becomes evident through our redemption in Christ and is vocalised in our praise of God and witness to creation.²⁷

5. The will to power

a. Augustine's view of the fall

All human attempts to attain holiness—whether represented by Eastern or Hellenistic religions, neo-Platonism, Pelagianism, theosophy, pietism, etc.—are founded on the erroneous notion that communion with God can be attained by the accomplishment of good works. Augustine taught that the image of God is the power of the soul located in the memory, the understanding, and the will.²⁸ Although Luther identified this view as fatally flawed, it had a significant influence on scholastic theology. According to the Augustinian view, the unregenerate human will does not of necessity do evil and rebel against God. Instead, it is only seen as weakened and defective, and its imperfections can be overcome by meritorious and compensating good works.

Peter Harrison²⁹ identifies a pervasive desire within several strands of Western Christian society, at least since the time of Augustine, to 'overcome the effects of the fall'. This is the result of a superficial and often moralistic understanding of the effect of sin on the human condition. Consequently, it was thought that the effects of the fall could be 'overcome'³⁰ or even 'ameliorated'³¹.

While this view appeared at first glance to be advantageous for humankind and its operation in the world, it failed to take account of the radical nature of sin and its corrupting effect on the human will. The critical issue under examination is not human performance but human inability to do what God expects. Sin operates at a much deeper level than merely at the intellectual or even moral level.

Augustine correctly taught the inability of a person to change apart from the power and grace of God. He even made the salvation of a person totally dependent upon God. However, this was fatally distorted when he taught that in *justification* God *heals* us of the disease of sin and *makes us righteous*. According to this view, God's grace transforms us inwardly and brings about a moral change. Luther, on the other hand, says that our inner change and transformation is preceded, logically (but not chronologically), by what God

then even likens the maternal womb to a chthonic womb (Ps 139:15; Job 1:21; 10:9), it never says that the earth 'is' our mother. Mother is used not as a title but as a metaphor, and a limited one at that. The earth may be 'like a mother' but it is not 'our mother.' It has no personal authority or power over us (as in pagan socialism, shamanism, etc). Instead, we serve the creation out of freedom in Christ. Chesterton cautions us: 'Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother, you discover that she is a step-mother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate...Nature is a sister, and even a younger sister: a little, dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved' ('The Eternal Revolution' first published in 1908; see Chesterton 2000). For a feminist critique on the female personification of nature, see Merchant (2008, 739f).

²⁶ See also Luther's treatise, *On the Enslaved Will* (also known as *The Bondage of the Will*; *De Servo Arbitrio*), LW 33.

²⁷ See also Kleinig (1996).

²⁸ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book IX and Book XI (cited in LW1:60-61). See also Westermann (1994, 149).

²⁹ Harrison (2007).

³⁰ Harrison (2007, 6,81).

³¹ Harrison (2007, 81,92,158, 171).

does outside us (*extra nos*), where the forgiveness that Christ acquired for us on the cross is now mediated to us by the external, oral word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Augustine agreed that justification is by grace through faith, teaching that justification is being 'made' righteous, thereby confusing it with sanctification (Heckel 2004, 98–100).³² Augustine's failure to identify the bound will meant that he believed the infusion of sacramental grace made the individual able to co-operate with that grace and so to advance to perfection in the Christian life. For Augustine, justification is transformative, it commences through a work of grace that renews the person inwardly, and continues by grace stirring us to keep the works of the law outwardly (ibid, 95). This creates an attitude of 'other worldliness' whereby the individual is drawn away from the things of this world into the inner self and then to transcendence (Bayer 2003, 28). The Augustinian view was to go largely unopposed in the Western theological tradition until Martin Luther rediscovered the apostolic teaching of justification by faith that happens outside us (*extra nos*), on the cross and through the proclaimed word and the enacted sacraments.

Neo-Platonic traditions such as the Augustinian teaching of transformative regeneration was to stimulate leading advocates of Renaissance humanism and provided justification for their views (Trinkaus 1970, xx, xxiv). Such views were inclusive of neo-Platonism, Hermetic and a wide variety of esoteric traditions. Synergism is evident in the distorted interpretations of biblical texts. It is argued by Trinkaus, for instance, that Genesis 1:26—God said, 'let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness'—was critical to this period. However, salvation was no longer the result of God working inwardly by grace in the Augustinian sense, but was now said to be the result of moral striving and the self-realisation of our divine-human potential.

b. The Renaissance influence on the ambiguity of human potential

The potency of reason and technology combined with the instability of a human nature seeking its own rewards was a bomb waiting to be ignited. This occurred not through the biblical understanding of dominion over creation, but more through the fruition of humanistic developments during the Renaissance, utilising the insights of Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and René Descartes (1596–1650).

The justification to subjugate the creation and overcome the limitation of fallen human nature came through the syncretism of Platonism with Augustine's underestimation of the effects of the fall. Without reckoning with the biblical teaching of the bound will, human potential remained ambiguous. Not only did human freedom have the will to good but also the will to do evil, to become 'as God'.

The Renaissance Platonist scholar and priest, Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), optimistically asserted that for humans to 'become God' was an admirable progression which he believed was achievable by the perfection of the intellect and will:

Our soul by means of the intellect and will, as by those twin Platonic wings, flies towards God, since by means of them it flies towards all things. By means of the intellect it attaches all things to itself, by means of the will, it attaches itself to all things. Thus the soul desires, endeavours, and begins to become God, and makes progress every day. Every movement directed towards a definite end first begins, then proceeds, then gradually increases and makes progress, and is finally perfected...Hence our soul will sometime be able to become in a sense all things, and even to become God. (Ficino, *Theologia Platonica* XIII.3, in Shaw et al. 2009, 243).

³² See also Dierks (1938), Neve (1926, 50, 423) and McGrath (1997, 442). For Augustine we are *simul iusti et peccatores*, but this is in the sense of *partim-partim*, not *totus-totus* (Eno 1985, 125; Koenker 1967, 113–115). The teaching of the early church on justification as being 'declared' rather than 'made' righteous was almost lost. Although Augustine sought to shed his neo-Platonism, this 'other-worldliness' still had a profound influence on his theology and in turn influenced much of Christendom.

He related this aspiration to divinity to the subjugation of 'all things':

The immense magnificence of our soul may manifestly be seen from this, that man will not be satisfied with the empire of this world, if, having conquered this one, he learns that there remains another world which he has not yet subjugated...Thus man wishes no superior and no equal and will not permit anything to be left out and excluded from his rule. This status belongs to God alone. Therefore, he seeks a divine condition (Ficino cited in McKnight 1991, 48).

Yet another highly influential humanistic scholar of this time was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) whose synergism mixed together many diverse religious teachings, including cabalism. In his 'Oration on the Dignity of Man', illegitimately impersonating God, he writes:

I have given you, Adam, neither a predetermined place nor a particular aspect nor any special prerogatives in order that you may take and possess these through your own decision and choice...You shall determine your own nature without constraint from any barrier, by means of the freedom to whose power I have entrusted you. I have placed you at the centre of the world so that from that point you might see better what is in the world. I have made you neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal so that, like a free and sovereign artificer, you might mould and fashion yourself into that form you yourself shall have chosen.³³

Neo-Platonic syncretism is also evident in the Swiss alchemist Paracelsus (1493–1541; see Wybrow 1991, 170). Although Italian humanism took biblical concepts such as the 'image of God' and 'dominion' to mean unlimited mastery over nature, this was contrary to what Scripture permits and radically different from the apostolic teaching.

c. The will to power: Bacon and Descartes

Bacon was confident that the effects of human error, the diminishment of the intellect and loss of dominion following the fall, could be partially overcome. He writes:

Through the fall, humans fell at the same time from their state of innocence and from their dominion over creation. Both of these losses however can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by arts and sciences.³⁴

Bacon made the assumption that nature was impersonal and inert and could—indeed should—be dealt with in an objective manner (Wybrow 1991, 174). He identified the practical benefits of repeatable, verifiable, experimental science over the alchemy and scholastic speculation of his day.³⁵ Through his 'hypothetico-inductive' methodology of reasoning, the ability to predict natural phenomena was considerably improved. However, the problem was that it saw nature in reductionist terms and merely as an artefact of God's hands rather than having a divine functionality assigned to it. Nature was seen to have no other purpose than to be systematically utilized for the needs of humankind. This was justified on the grounds that the human condition could be considerably improved by 'interrogating' the natural world to 'reveal its secrets' and using our knowledge to conquer and exploit it, and in so doing alleviate human suffering and promote happiness. While Bacon's project may arguably have been well intentioned it lacked safeguards against the enslaved will that would utilize his method for secular reasoning and self-advantage.³⁶ Overconfident optimism in Bacon's methodology to ameliorate the effects of the fall only exacerbated ambiguities around the human will's capabilities of doing good.

³³ Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, cited in Sheehan (2003, 20); trans alt.

³⁴ Bacon, *Novum Organum* II, §52, in Bacon and Rawley (1858, 247–248).

³⁵ See Bacon, Francis, 1620 '*Instauratio Magna*' (The Great Recovery).

³⁶ Mathews (1996) argues that Francis Bacon has been misrepresented. For instance, it had been proposed that the rhetoric of Francis Bacon implied the constraint and even the torture of nature (Merchant 1980, 168, 172). But see Merchant (2008). Although Bacon's writings may often sound pious and appealing, they lack any reference to the captivity of the human will and Christ's redemptive work when describing the stewardship of nature. For instance, '*Valerius Terminus: Of The Interpretation of Nature*', 1603.

d. Cartesian striving: 'to make ourselves masters and possessors of nature'

With René Descartes (1596 - 1650), an anthropocentric view of 'being' was established. By demolishing the theological presuppositions of Anselm's worldview, he reworked Anselm's ontology to erect his own edifice to venerate humankind.

In Anselm's writings, certainty about God is primary and deductions about 'self' and all else follows. In Descartes, the converse is true: the 'I' arrogantly presumes certainty and this is taken as the basis for establishing all other certainties. Hence the bold assertion, *Cogito, ergo sum* ('I think, therefore, I am')³⁷, rather than the more reasonable re-phrasing '*I am, therefore I think*'. What had previously been granted in the biblical order of creation is rejected and replaced by a very different perception of our relationship with nature.

According to Descartes, by acquiring knowledge of all the entities of the natural world we can go the extra step and 'thus render ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature' (Descartes 1998, 32) Humankind no longer sees itself as accountable before God for its use of nature and is thus no longer restrained and responsible.

e. The new world

What emerges out of Bacon, Descartes and Renaissance humanism is not simply that we have an understanding of nature and our place in it, but that we have power over it. This rephrasing of human identity was to have a decisive impact on ecology.

Renaissance humanism cultivated a radically more aggressive attitude to the unlimited subjugation of the creation. It sought to justify itself by pointing to the Bible, but this link was very weak and tenuous. Instead, its reductionist methodology created a dualism whereby God was seen as non-sacramental and kept at a distance. It robbed our understanding of creation as the divine speech act of the spoken word and thus it set the stage for what was regarded as sacred to be pushed away all together and replaced with the poor substitute of human aspirations. This is not surprising given Renaissance humanism's failure to recognise the captivity of the will'. In its desire to serve its own ends, there was little resistance to a certain 'progressivism' that would prove disastrous to the biblical understanding of humankind's dominion over creation (Leiss 1994, 50f).

While Christianity remained a societal component in Western civilization, its ethical agenda was increasingly overtaken by secular interests focused simply on 'the good of humanity'. Richard Bauckham writes:

Bacon's recognition that nature's laws must be understood if nature is to be exploited...and the Renaissance sense that humanity has unlimited creative power to unleash nature's potentialities have both fed into the modern project, investing science with hugely utopian expectations but also inspiring the hubris that overreaches its capacities and brings unforeseen and disastrous consequences into being. In the late twentieth century it became more and more obvious that the Baconian dream had a powerful element of unreason hidden in its apparent rationality (Bauckham 2002, 167–168).

German Enlightenment philosopher, Ernst Cassirer (1874 - 1945), describes the emerging new perspective on human nature in the Renaissance with its capacity to dominate creation by presuming that fallen human nature could be overcome with one's own creativity, intellect and skill:

Man is a creature; but what distinguishes him above all other creatures is that his maker gave him the gift of creation. Man arrives at his determination; he fulfils his being, only by using this basic primary power (Cassirer cited in Wybrow 1991, 169–170).

³⁷ Descartes (1998, 17).

Claiming the gift of creation as humanity's primary power was never within God's mandate to humankind. Here we see an emergence of the subtle blurring of the distinction between creator and creature and the self-chosen title of 'co-creator'.³⁸ This attempts to subtly blur the distinction between creator and creature. God creates and preserves everything, and nothing exists without his doing. Scripturally, we are called to be responsible custodians or managers of God's creation (Gen 2:15), 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4:24), but never 'co-creators'. Luther affirms this:

We shall be like him, but not identical with him, as Pythagoras thought. For God is infinite, but we are finite creatures. Moreover, the creature will never be the creator. Yet we, too, shall live. God is righteous. Therefore, we too, shall be filled with righteousness. God is immortal and blessed. Therefore, we too, shall enjoy everlasting bliss, not as it is in God but the bliss that is suitable for us (LW 30:268; Lecture on 1 John 3:2, 1527).

6. Not 'my will' but 'your will be done'

a. Luther corrects his teacher

While Luther owed much to St Augustine, he emphatically rejected Augustine's view that the image of God lies in the power of the soul located in the memory, the understanding, and the will (LW 1:60–61; see Westermann 1994, 149). Luther asserts that each of these attributes are not lost but are used for corrupt purposes. The will does not want to trust in God by faith alone, reason does not want to know God and is in fact utilised by our fallen nature to go against God.³⁹ This leads to a worldly indifference, not just to God but also to the creation, either out of ignorance or wilful self-advantage, or both.

Luther insisted that what was lost in the fall of Adam was not reason but the image of God.⁴⁰ The image of God is not to be found in our knowledge or works; rather, the object of the image is faith in Christ alone, so that we 'may fear, love and trust God above all things'. The image is not based on constituent qualities. Scripture gives us no such qualities as 'knowledge' by which we can measure this.⁴¹ It is not the *gratia infusa* (infused grace) of Rome but exclusively a relational entity that is to function 'vertically' in relation to God and 'horizontally' in relation to the whole creation.

The consequence of the fall of human reason is not so much quantitative but qualitative. Reason is used either in unbelief, as a steadfast weapon against God, or in faith, according to God's commands. There can be no intermediary in this category of proper use. Unfortunately, Harrison (2007, 54–59) falls under the spell of Augustine and others when he fails to understand the proper influence of sin on human reason.⁴² This is evident in his critique of John Calvin (*ibid*, 59f) and his misinterpretation of the Lutheran position regarding original sin and the effects of the fall.

Luther is often misinterpreted as having a low view of reason. This generally arises because of a failure to identify the context he is addressing (Becker 1982, 69f). When reason confines itself to its God-given limits, humankind is able to exercise responsible dominion

³⁸ The designation of humankind as 'co-creator' by Hefner (1984) is categorically inappropriate and appears to be based on the speculative neo-Platonism of Teilhard de Chardin. The affirmation of Hefner's proposal by Peterson (2004, 239) is similarly hindered by a neo-Platonic worldview which becomes evident in his mixing of categories when he states, 'A full, genuine (theological) anthropology must necessarily take the soteriological risk, to which the sciences can only incompletely contribute'. For a critique on the notion of 'theotic union' with Christ, see Clark (2006, 309–310).

³⁹ Following the fall, nothing is left in humankind but 'a depraved intellect and will, that is hostile and opposed to God's will—a will that thinks nothing except what is against God' (LW 26:174; Galatians, 1535).

⁴⁰ See LW 34:137 (The Disputation Concerning Man, 1536). In fact, the devil may well have such attributes (memory, understanding and will) to a far higher degree than we do, but, as Luther states, they cannot comprise the will of God (LW 1:61–62; Lectures on Genesis, 1535). See also Becker (1982, 71).

⁴¹ For 'even the demons know God exists and shudder' (James 2:19).

⁴² FC SD I, 8–11; SD II: 9,17–19; Apol IV:7–12, 21–27. See also LW 33 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

over the earth (Gen 1:28; 2:15) and feels 'no shame' (Gen 2:25). In fact, Luther sees reason as 'the very gift of God',⁴³ praising it as 'something divine'. He is astonished that despite sin, reason has not ceased to reign as 'the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines, laws, and whatever wisdom, power, virtue and glory [humans] possess in this life' (cited in Bayer 2007, 242).

Sin operates at a much deeper level than merely the intellectual or even the moral level. It becomes particularly insidious when its influence on reason is either dismissed or denied, and individuals determine, according to their own will, what pleases God and merits his mercy. When reason speculates on the things of God that are not revealed to us, or is used as a weapon against God, 'it makes nothing but mistakes'.⁴⁴ By divesting themselves of their allegiance to God and separating themselves from Christ, they open themselves to a deceptive power which has perverted the order of creation and captured people's reason and ambitions. In this context, Luther understandably regards reason as 'a blind guide', 'the enemy of faith'.⁴⁵

The use of reason for self-advantage is particularly deceptive when it takes on a pious façade. Under an outward guise of Christian 'civility' or 'ethics', the intellect can too easily be used for self-advantage, even usurping spiritual control. This makes individuals more of a burden to themselves and creation, and 'even more brutish than the beasts' (Erasmus in Rupp and Watson 1969, 93). St Paul reminds us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness (Eph 6:12; 1 Cor 6:12) that operate close to the heart of all people. Baptised believers, who are simultaneously total saints and total sinners, are always faced with a dilemma, whether to serve Christ or the self in its quest for autonomy. There are two masters but we cannot love both (Mat 6:24). Since Jesus Christ has become our new master in Baptism, we are called to serve him alone and to turn our back on the other satanic master (in league with the old self) from whose clutches Christ has set us free (Rom 6).

b. Lutheran opposition to self-ascendency

Lynn White contends that our current ecological crisis has its roots in 'Christian axioms'. On the contrary, it has arisen through the capitulation to anthropocentric humanistic axioms, the transcendent dimension being reasoned away to nothing more than an autonomous ethical goal.⁴⁶

The claim of a person to have achieved something before God which secures his position with God means nothing other than to put one's self in the place of God and designate one's self as god, creator and master over nature. For Luther, this is the equivalent of the blasphemous saying: 'It is not God who made us but we ourselves' (WA 40^{II}, 466). This is essentially idolatry, because it simultaneously worships one's own achievements and self. In the vocational sphere, it ends up seeking not the creator's will for the care of his creation, but rather one's own aspirations, viewing the creation simply as a resource for gaining personal advantage.

Augustine was well aware that the law fulfilled by the powers of reason does not justify, but he was of the opinion that if the Holy Spirit were added, then we could say that the works

⁴³ Luther writes: 'Reason is the very gift of God. Its value cannot be measured, and those things which it wisely ordains and discovers in human affairs are not to be despised' (WA 40, 3, 611; cited in Becker 1982, 70).

⁴⁴ WA 19, 207 (1526, *Jonah*) cited in Becker (1982, 52).

⁴⁵ WA 51, 130; 16, 42f; 40, 1, 204 cited in Becker (1982, 1).

⁴⁶ This is corroborated by Hermann Sasse who writes: 'The Reformation does not consist, as the late Middle Ages believed, and as has been believed in wide circles of the Protestant world, of an ethico-religious correction, of a moral quickening and a spiritual deepening throughout the church. It consists, rather, according to its own peculiar nature, of the revival of the preaching of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake' (Sasse 1979, 69–70).

of the law justify⁴⁷. According to Luther and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, this is not correct. Justification comes freely, through faith in Christ alone, and this is apart from the fact that fallen humans cannot fulfil the law. While good works are necessary in civic life, any desire to seek merit from God by presenting him with 'our works' is the same as a lie and dishonours God as the giver and creator of all things (LW 12: 397, on Psalm 51). Furthermore, the one who does this 'despises Christ and seeks his own way to God, contrary to the Gospel' (AC IV, 1–3; AC XX, 9–11). Good works used in this way to promote one's spiritual ascendancy actually hinder salvation.⁴⁸

c. To be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'

The Christian reluctance to be concerned about environmental issues may stem from Paul's warning regarding the urgency of the end times, not to be engrossed in the things of this world 'for the present form of this world is passing away' (1 Cor 7:31). None of the activities that Paul describes in this context are wrong or sinful activities *per se*, but are good and normal. But like any good gift from God, if it is used as a substitute for God, it becomes an idol, and we lose sight of eternity. Paul is not saying that we need not be worried about this creation, because we have a better one coming. Rather, we are no longer children of this age, but children of God, born anew from above. The freedom of the baptised believer is that we can now live and work as people who are 'in the world but not of the world' (see John 17:14–18). We are not to let the world squeeze us into its mould (Rom 12:2).

Rather than a neo-Platonic escape from the world, Luther understood the 'new creation' to be a return to the world. Oswald Bayer writes:

Augustine was wrong to say that his (God's) voice draws us away from God's creatures into the inner self and then to transcendence. Counteracting Augustine's inwardness in its withdrawal from the world, Luther emphasizes the penetrating this-worldliness of God. God wills to be the creator by speaking to us only through his creatures (Bayer 2003, 28).

d. The 'new creation'

The advent of the new creation occurs not through an Augustinian contemplative vision but through the proclamation of God's word into this present age. As yet the new creation is not visible for 'we walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor 5:7). Renewal begins with the Spirit's regeneration of sinners calling them into union with the Son through preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Trusting in Christ's death and resurrection, clothed and fed with his righteousness, the believer prays for guidance in this world: 'your will be done', not 'my will be done.'

The Spirit is not simply a resource at our disposal by which we 'confirm our pious experience' or even implement an 'ethical kingdom' (Horton 2011, 557). Although he profoundly effects these things, the focus of the Spirit's work is to draw humankind away from itself and back to God; 'to convict the world of its guilt in regards to sin and righteousness and judgment' (John 16:8–11). The Spirit comforts us with Christ's imputed righteousness (*extra nos*) which leads the contrite into all truth as it is in Christ (John 16:13–15). More succinctly, God first of all destroys what we possess, namely, our focus on self, thereby creating room for his gift of forgiveness and renewal. Luther refers to this as the way of God's 'alien work' in order to do his 'proper work' (e.g. LW 14:335). In his creative activity, God hides his work under its opposite: 'the Lord kills and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up...he humbles and exalts' (1 Sam 2:6ff).

⁴⁷ WA TR 1:85 cited in Althaus (1966, 121).

⁴⁸ LW 31: 42 (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

e. Our identity as God's creatures 'in Christ'

In an attempt to avoid being labelled 'anthropocentric', some Christian traditions have adopted the humanistic concepts of 'biocentrism' or 'ecocentrism'.⁴⁹ However, this only perpetuates the problem by avoiding the primary issue of original sin and autonomy from God. We do not look upon nature as a platform by which humanity inaugurates a new age of higher consciousness and self-identity. Rather, our true identity is in Christ.

In his analysis of the place of humans in global ecology, Paul Hannola concludes on ethical grounds that biocentrism in its reaction to a human domination over nature 'closes the door to the unique capacity for humans as a distinguished and called species within God's creation to care for the planet. In both cases, a responsible human ethic of nature is denied' (Hannola 2009).

Because of their strong emphasis on Scripture, the Lutheran confessions function with a Christocentric rather than an anthropocentric doctrine of creation. First, the Confessions recognise the fundamental tendency of the enslaved will to focus on self (FC SD II)⁵⁰ and humanism's tendency to present salvation as achievable through human effort or ingenuity (see 1 Cor 1:18ff). Secondly, our interconnectedness with creation is confessed in the Catechism where there is an emphasis that includes 'me' together with 'all creatures' (SC II, 2). Thirdly, the Confessions note that the free and gracious gift of salvation and hope for creation comes only in Christ.

Having died to self and risen 'in Christ', the grace of God captivates one's whole self, frees it from its wilful bondage to self and re-orientates the action of senses, reason and temporal endeavours to life anew, relying only upon the Saviour who justifies the ungodly. Luther says:

Few reach the point of completely believing that He is the God who creates and makes all things. For such a man must have died to all things, to good and evil, to death and to life, to hell and to heaven, and confess from his heart that he is able to do nothing in his power (WA 24:18; cited in Althaus 1962, 118).

For Luther, the highest expression of our faith is: 'I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth' (ibid). The power to act as God's redeemed creatures using our reason to acknowledge and discover the interconnectedness of his creation and our care of it, is not from us. It comes as a gift to be used for his purposes. Luther states that we are already

in the dawn of the life to come, for we have begun to recapture our knowledge of the creatures that we lost with Adam's fall. We can see creatures properly now more than was ever possible under the papacy...Beginning with the grace of God, however, we can know God's wonderful works and miracles even from the little flowers, when we consider the divine omnipotence and the divine goodness. We thus laud and praise and thank God. For we see in his creatures the power of his word, how mighty it is. He spoke and it came to be (Ps. 33:9)—even in a peach stone, for in due time the very hard shell will open up for the soft core that is within. Erasmus completely misses such things. He does not consider them. He sees the creatures as a cow sees a new barn door (WA TR 1:574, 8–19, no. 1160).

According to Scripture, our entire physical and spiritual existence, and the world around us and its preservation, are because of God's doing, not our 'mastery of nature'. The creation is not simply an aggregation of static objects for our exploitation, nor does it exist as something to be feared and worshipped. There is no room here for deification of self (as in humanism and neo-Platonism) or the deification of nature (as in pantheism). In this regard Elert writes:

⁴⁹ 'Biocentrism' denotes a value system which considers all living organisms as having a good of their own and is independent of other organisms (e.g. humans). 'Eco-centrism' recognises that ecosystems have a good apart from that of their constituent organisms (Attfield 2003, 10–11).

⁵⁰ See LW 33: 1525, The Bondage of the Will, 1525.

Lutheranism's close connection with the earth is no religion of nature. Here there is no deification of nature. What is said about nature always pertains first of all to us. But neither can there be any hostility to nature here. Nor can there be even an estrangement from nature. With nature we share death. With us nature shares life (Elert 1962, 451).

7. Responding to some modern critiques of the biblical position

a. Earth as 'a platform for heaven'

Eco-feminist theologian, Sallie McFague, sees the biblical dualism which separates heaven and earth as harmful to our care of creation. She believes this can be averted by simply designating nature as 'sacred.' If only it was that easy. While she envisages a monistic paradigm, it is in fact panentheistic and presupposes an anthropocentric 'mind-body' dualism that overlooks the depth of human sin with an optimistic casuistry. When we do not recognise our fundamental separation from God and the need for redemption in Christ, there is no hindrance to conflating the creature with the creator. When both these categories are confused, the integrity of both is endangered. This ends up with the imagined divinisation of nature (as in paganism) and its mystical enslavement whereby the creature loses its 'creature-likeness'.

McFague's monistic paradigm has become foundational in more recent proposals for an 'ecological hermeneutic.'⁵¹ These proposals attempt to avoid the trap of 'anthropocentric bias' in dualisms introduced into Western thought that have 'reinforced a human superiority over nature'. Such dualisms are Platonic in nature, setting the 'spiritual' above the 'physical'. This paper agrees that such imposed hierarchies are damaging because they fail to recognise our alienation from God and instead assert spiritual aspirations hostile to him and his word. The issue is not with dualism (better: duality) *per se*, but the type of distinction being made, especially if it is self or creation being worshipped rather than the creator. While such a distinction does engender a respect for the creation, it is unable to prevent it from being deified. This is a crucial point. Our fallenness necessitates distinctions of reality to be redemptive and transcendent. St Paul recognises biblical polarities that are redemptive in nature when he contrasts 'this present age' with the 'age to come', being 'in Adam' with being 'in Christ', 'bondage' with 'freedom', 'deeds of the flesh' with 'fruit of the Spirit', 'creation under the dominion of sin' with that 'under the dominion of righteousness'. Unless our distinctions are redemptive, our attitude to creation remains anthropocentric and our reading of Scripture legalistic.

b. Does God's word really say to subjugate and dominate?

White (1967) argued that the recent ecological crisis is to be blamed on Christianity, because of its alleged 'anthropocentrism', and especially on the biblical command to 'subdue and have dominion' (Gen 1:28).⁵²

The mandate to 'subdue and have dominion' (Gen 1:28) cannot be used as a justification for subjugation or trampling down animals and plants.⁵³ It is given by God only to serve his order and was never intended as a command to legitimate the exploitation of the earth. Löning and Zenger (2000, 110–113) discuss the translation of the two verbs *kabash* (to subdue) and *radah* (to have dominion over). Luther translates *kabash* as 'to place one's foot on'. According to Ancient Near Eastern tradition, this word, and others used in

⁵¹ See Habel (2012, 101) who cites Plumwood (1993, 43).

⁵² Lynn White, Jr. asserts that: 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen' and insists 'that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends'. He links this exploitive attitude to the particular emphasis that Christianity has placed on biblical events such as Adam's separate creation from clay, his naming of the animals, an act that thereby establishes his dominance over them, being made in the image of God, mankind having a share in the transcendence of nature in Christ, and so on (White 1967, 1205).

⁵³ Such activity is more akin to the fourth beast described in Daniel 7:23 which 'will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.'

association with it, has parallel meanings. Often it refers to the gesture of taking possession of property by placing one's foot on it. Pictures and statues from Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia portray their rulers with their foot on an object, symbolising their dominion over it (ibid, 110). Rather than a struggle against creation, it is a struggle for creation, against all that threatens and destroys its harmony (ibid, 111).⁵⁴

Harrison (2006) attempts to defend White's thesis in face of such criticisms from various authors (eg Steffen 1992, 63–80, Gowan and Schumaker 1980, etc.). He argues that this thesis:

is not concerned with the true meaning of the (biblical) text...rather what the text was taken to mean in particular periods of history, and how it may have shaped attitudes and motivated particular activities. In sum, White's contentions are impervious to the assaults of biblical criticism, for his thesis is historical rather than hermeneutical (Harrison 2006, 18–19).

In support of White, Habel (2009) asserts that the meaning of texts such as Gen 1:26–28 are precisely the problem and comes to the conclusion that 'the Bible is an inconvenient text' (ibid, 115). Gen 1:26–28 is labelled as 'a grey text—a text that is ecologically destructive, devaluing Earth and offering humans a God-given right to harness nature.'⁵⁵ Such texts are 'anthropocentric and view nature primarily as a resource for humans to exploit' (ibid, xviii).

However, the real culprit is not texts such as Gen 1:28, but rather anthropocentrism properly understood as the masterful striving to be 'as God'. It includes the use of such texts to validate a 'mastery over nature' and the failure to observe the biblical mandate of responsible stewardship. It is important that such erroneous interpretations of 'dominion' and 'subdue' within the creation account are rectified so as to avoid the perpetuation of the misreading of this important text.⁵⁶

c. Are exploitative attitudes uniquely Christian?

It is also proposed by White that the invention of the deep plough provided evidence of exploitative attitudes arising from the teaching of certain 'Christian axioms' (White 1967, 1204). While the desacralising of nature is unique to Judaeo-Christianity, this is not true of the exploitative use of technology.

The inclination to use technology to exploit flora and fauna resources has been a fact of human existence, since its very beginnings as *homo faber* ('creator' of tools). The use of tools provided greater control over the environment but often with little regard to the consequences. One of humankind's first triumphs was its discovery of fire as something to be mastered. Large scale deforestation was already occurring in India, China, and the Mediterranean, 2000 – 3000 years ago (Worm 2008). The Late Pleistocene arrival of the first humans in Australia coincides with significant megafauna extinctions and ecosystem change. The latter has been associated with burning which suggests human involvement in addition to climatic factors (Miller et al. 2005 cited in Surovell 2008). Large-scale megafauna extinctions coincides with the spread of Neolithic people and their advanced tools (Barnosky 2004; Shapiro et al. 2004; Goebel 2002). Further extinctions occur with the human colonisation of Madagascar around 2000 years ago, and New Zealand about 1000

⁵⁴ Likewise, the verb *radah* is related to the Akkadian *radu* to 'guide, lead, command' and, as we see from neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions, it is often used in relation to the authority and power that is necessary for the kingly function of juridical ordering (Löning and Zenger 2000, 112). While some usage of the verb *radah* occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures with aggressive overtones (e.g. Lev 25:43, 46, 53; Isa 14:16), in each case it is qualified with a specific modifier for that purpose. This is neither the context nor the case for Gen 1:26, 28. For other examples of context-dependent usages of *kabash* (e.g. Num 32:22,29 and Josh 18:1) and *radah*, see Barr 1972, 20–24 (as cited in Wybrow 1991, 146–148).

⁵⁵ Habel (2009, 115) states that that such a text 'confronts the reader with the need to choose between grey and green texts as preferred expressions of the voice and mission of the church.'

⁵⁶ (Habel 2009, 119) sets Scripture against itself when he eliminates 'grey' texts (such as Gen 1:26–28) and recognises only 'green texts' (such as Gen 2:15, John 1:1–14 and Rom 8:17–27).

years ago. Here the extinction of the Moa is clearly related to human activity (Holdaway and Jacomb 2000; Surovell 2008, 1374). Similarly, islands in the Mediterranean, Galapagos, West Indies, Pacific, and Caribbean also suffered extinctions of a wide variety of mammalian, reptile and bird species following early human colonisation (ibid, 1373).

Wybrow (1991) demonstrates that the ancient pagans were no different from the ancient Israelites in assuming that they were to utilise the natural world as they required. In ancient times, throughout the Mediterranean region, the Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans sought to modify their environment and transform it for their benefit (Wybrow 1991, 62, 197). For example, the fact that there were some sacred groves of trees meant that all other trees were profane and therefore had no right of preservation. They were to be put to use for constructing ships, siege-works, Roman roads, buildings, etc. (Wybrow 1991, 52–53). Sacred groves themselves were felled and used by invading armies without discrimination (ibid, 54). Human indifference to the plight of the environment still continues in most technologically advanced societies, despite the widespread media coverage of the ecological crisis.

The 'promised land syndrome' suggested by Habel⁵⁷ can be equally applied to the possession of inhabited lands across Eurasia by the Mongols, the colonisation of parts of Europe by the Vikings, or the invasion of the Holy Land by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:6ff) and later by the Romans. The Maori are presented as our exemplar 'as they come onto the land they hear the cry of Mother Earth: will you be my guardians?' (Habel 2009, 77). Yet the Maori invaded and enslaved the Moriori people in the Chatham Islands (Shand and Mair 1904, 155). All these invasions are well known for their brutality, but they had nothing to do with Christianity.

The biblical command to have 'dominion' cannot be used as a scapegoat for environmental problems which are just as prevalent in those parts of the world that neither subscribe to nor follow the Christian worldview. This is evident in recent decades in the toxic industrial pollution of secular countries of the Soviet bloc and the People's Republic of China, and in the burning of the Kuwaiti oil wells. In both socialist and free market economies of the post-Christian Western world, there is a prime dependence on human material wants and desires. Moreover, this trend appears to continue in these countries despite a prevailing secularism and ecological awareness.

d. Do modern exegetes sanction the exploitation of nature?

It has been noted above that Harrison fails to address White's misuse of Genesis 1:26–28. He is also mistaken on historical grounds when he claims that 'early modern exegetes' of the first chapters of Genesis 'play a central role' in sanctioning 'the material exploitation of nature' (Harrison 2006, 26; Harrison 1999, 97).⁵⁸ For instance, his reference to individual views on dominion, such as the Latitudinarian Joseph Glanville (Harrison 2006: 25–26) can hardly be taken as representative of Christianity. Harrison also misconstrues the attitudes of noted Christian exegetes such as Calvin and Luther.

When discussing Calvin's comments on Genesis 2:15, he is clearly selective when he omits the following exhortation:

Custody of the garden was given in charge of Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition that, being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain...let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all

⁵⁷ The 'promised land syndrome' is a phenomena suggested by Habel (2009, 31). He writes: 'Derived from the book of Joshua (it) provides a divine charter for invasion, destruction and annihilation. From the perspective of the inhabitants of the land, this "promised land syndrome" abuses their rights as fellow humans, and totally suppresses alternative traditions about their future in the land. The rights of the land itself are also totally ignored'.

⁵⁸ Harrison clearly misunderstands Luther's hermeneutics when he conflates Luther's literal reading of Christ's words of institution with a literalistic reading of Gen 1:28.

things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved (Calvin 2003, 1:125).

Harrison misrepresents Luther's rejection of Platonic escapism to imply something different when he claims: 'Luther insisted that rather than emulating the indolence of cloistered monks the true Christian will "use" the world: "to build, to buy, to have dealings..."' (Harrison 2006: 25). In fact, the actual words of Luther say quite the opposite and speak against abuse of 'this world' through lack of restraint and obsessiveness:

In short, a Christian must be one who, as Paul says (I Cor 7: 29–31), uses this world as not abusing it, who buys and possesses as though he possessed not...by accepting the fact that the Christian's attitude toward this earthly life is the attitude of the guest; that in such capacity is he to build, to buy, to have dealings and hold intercourse with his fellows, to join them in all temporal affairs—a guest who respects his host's wishes, the laws of the realm and of the city and the customs of the inn, but at the same time the Christian refrains from attesting his satisfaction with this life as if he intended to remain here and hoped for nothing better (Luther 1983, VII:172; Third Sunday after Easter; 1 Peter 2:11–20, Jubilate).

Luther's commentary on the passage in question gives no such construal of sanctioning 'the material exploitation of nature'. In fact, Harrison overlooks Luther's own commentaries on the matter which censures any notions of greed and exploitation. For instance, Luther explains responsible dominion on several occasions:

Adam and Eve heard the words with their ears when God said: 'Have dominion'. Therefore, the naked human being—*without weapons and walls*, even without any clothing, solely in his bare flesh—was given the rule over all birds, wild beasts, and fish (LW 1:66).

For God said (Gen 1:28): '*Have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the earth with everything that it contains'. Among these gifts are also gold and silver. Make use of these, but in such a way that your heart is good, that is, without greed and without harm to anyone else. In the first place, provide for the livelihood of the people of your household, 'so that you may not be worse than a heathen' (1 Tim. 5:8). In the second place, use these things for the advantage of others (LW2:33).

Luther is well aware of human arrogance that regards 'dominion' as superiority and right to assert itself over others in all manner of being. When our trust in God is compared to the animals, it is clearly inferior. In a sermon, on Matthew 6:24–34, Luther writes:

Ay, shame on you now, that the little birds are more pious and believing than you; they are happy and sing with joy and know not whether they have anything to eat. This parable is constantly taught to our great and burning shame, that we cannot do as much as the birds. A Christian should be ashamed before a little bird that knows an art it never acquired from a teacher (Luther 1983b, V:114; Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity; Mat. 6:24–34).

Following White (1967), a number of authors maintain that Christianity has elevated itself over nature. However, they fail to recognise that this was not the message of Martin Luther, who like Augustine and Calvin, also had a significant influence on Christianity. Luther asserted that fallen humankind has failed in its vice regency of creation. This failure cannot simply be regained by the intellect. Humanity's vice-regency can only serve creation as the creator intended when reason is used obediently under God's word.

e. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the anthropocentric exploitation of natural resources, while widespread within the technologically savvy, Western Christian tradition, is by no means unique to it and is clearly evident in other non-Christian cultures as well. Lynn White's assertion that the 'roots of our present ecological crisis' are to be found in an 'anthropocentrism' ascribed simply to Christianity can no longer be sustained. The problem lies much deeper in humankind's fallen condition and the humanistic quest for 'mastery over nature'.

PART 2: OUR RESPONSE TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

8. A Lutheran framework of response

Despite the law always pursuing and reminding us of our failure to care for God's creation, the refreshing promise of the gospel is that sin has been atoned for by Christ. He went to the cross and willingly bore the Father's anger for our misuse of all that he has given us dominion over. This does not mean that there will be no earthly consequences for our actions, but it does provide certainty of forgiveness before God, salvation and eternal peace. The believer may now begin life afresh in Christ. God's will is that humankind does not live out of servile fear but turns spontaneously to fear, love and trust God in filial obedience.

While the care of the creation is the duty of all citizens, the Christian does this out of freedom because of the gospel, and to give honour and praise to God for Christ's sake. As Christians, we receive the vocational orders (church, government and home) into which God has placed us as a gift. We do this in faith and obedience, in thanksgiving and repentance, knowing that the ultimate resolution of all our conflicts comes through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, the only saviour of humankind.

He desires that the community of baptised believers be in the world but not of the world, that they be mingled with unbelievers, as wheat is mixed with the weeds (Matt 13:26ff); that having been justified in Christ, they bear witness to their faith by doing good works (Eph 2:8–10).

a. God's providence in a fallen creation: the twofold reign (Luther)

When it comes to contentious issues such as the environment and climate change, the world is not to be divided simply between Christianity and the scientific community, believers and non-believers. Throughout history, the majority of government leaders may all have prided themselves on their own programs and autonomy but they too have all been factored into the divine plan. According to Lutheran theology, this plan comprises Christ's twofold reign that governs all society, both believers and unbelievers. Here Luther sees a clear distinction, yet holds them together under God's left-hand and right-hand operation:

For this reason, one must carefully distinguish between these two governments. Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds. Neither one is sufficient in the world without the other. No one can become righteous in the sight of God by means of the temporal government, without Christ's spiritual government. Christ's government does not extend over all men; rather, Christians are always a minority in the midst of non-Christians. Now where temporal government or law alone prevails, there sheer hypocrisy is inevitable, even though the commandments be God's very own. For without the Holy Spirit in the heart, no one becomes truly righteous, no matter how fine the works he does. On the other hand, where the spiritual government alone prevails over land and people, there wickedness is given free rein and the door is open for all manner of rascality, for the world as a whole cannot receive or comprehend it. (LW 45: 92; Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed, 1523)

Through the right-hand reign, the gospel creates faith which makes us righteous before God. The left-hand reign does not make us right before God, but enables sin and evil to be outwardly restrained. The former is a passive righteousness before God; the latter is an active righteousness before the world. Both are necessary and not to be confused. For instance, righteousness before God is not accomplished by worldly government apart from the church's ministry, and it is not the function of the church to rule either believers or unbelievers by force. Luther goes on to describe how the two reigns of God intersect in the life of the Christian:

In this way the two propositions are brought into harmony with one another: at one and the same time you satisfy God's kingdom inwardly and the kingdom of the world outwardly. You suffer evil and

injustice, and yet at the same time you punish evil and injustice; you do not resist evil, and yet at the same time, you do resist it. In the one case, you consider yourself and what is yours; in the other, you consider your neighbour and what is his. (LW 45: 96; 1523).

While God's right-hand reign is familiar and to be expected, his left-hand reign is hidden and peculiar. It is imposed by God after the fall to contend with the ubiquitous hardness of the human heart that rejects God's will and purpose and puts 'fear and dread' into every creature (Gen 9:1b–2).⁵⁹ To prevent humans from destroying themselves and 'all creatures', sin needs to be limited by force (Gen 9:6). This necessitates a legal governmental order which God has established (Rom 13:1–6). Despite unbelief within his hidden left-hand rule, God establishes governmental order by using the elements accessed by the fallen world (e.g. power, glory, force, reason and compulsion, etc.). This enables the proper functioning of government in matters such as politics, law, economy, scientific research, etc. Through his providential care as the creator, God is able to preserve his creation from spiralling into chaos and nothingness because of unbelief.⁶⁰

b. God's twofold reign: distinct but not separate

The two reigns of God are distinct but they do not exist as two separate 'kingdoms' which Christians travel between as though they were territorial;⁶¹ rather they live in both simultaneously. The God's two reigns intersect in their vocation, where they are called to be 'in the world' but not 'of the world'.

In each of the left and right hand spheres of God's operation, Christians are clear on where their active and passive righteousness lies. Under God's left-hand reign, Christian farmers market their produce to provide others with good quality food and earn an income enabling them to live and remain viable. Taxes are paid and the state provides protection in cases of emergency. Under God's right-hand reign, Christian farmers go to worship, not to market their produce, but as sinners to receive the forgiveness of sins through the gospel and body and blood of Christ in the sacrament.

Under God's left-hand reign, scientists go to work to engage in high quality research in order to help the neighbour by protecting and enhancing life, solving problems, and providing better products, while at the same time earning an income so that they can pay their living costs and provide for their families. When under God's right-hand reign, scientists receive the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper in and with the consecrated bread and wine, there is no need to try to rationalise this mystery or explain it away. Rather, they simply believe the bodily presence of our Lord and his words, 'given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins' (1 Cor 11:27–29; Matt 26:28).

Under God's left-hand reign, Christians go to work as farmers, economists, physicists, or politicians, clinging to their baptisms as forgiven children of God under the protection of God's holy angels. They go to work praying not 'my will be done' but 'your kingdom come, your will be done', while at the same time doing all that they can, with God's help, to hinder what is evil and promote what is good.

⁵⁹ In the Noachic Covenant following the recession of the flood, a new beginning had dawned in a manner resembling the original creation with a new promise and commands being announced. Humanity is once again given charge over the earth, but this comes with an explicit wariness, because the 'evil inclination of the heart' remains unchanged (Gen 8:21).

⁶⁰ However, because of the reliance on force in a fallen world, the state is potentially unstable and operates in two modes. This occurs firstly in the order of this world that God desires, and secondly, what the state in the hands of fallen humankind administers and enforces. In totalitarian regimes, the latter reaches its highest expression as a demonic manifestation (see Rev 13). Here the destructive forces lurking within the microcosm of fallen humanity are amplified in the public realm or macrocosm of the state, with its passion for power rather than justice and mercy.

⁶¹ This is the mistaken view which is still prevalent. See Green, 2006, 200.

c. Is science a legitimate left-hand activity for the care of creation?

It should be remembered that in human hands the elements used to establish civic order remain limited because of the human ambition which asserts itself over God's word. It follows that such elements may supplement but must never be permitted to abrogate God's commands.⁶² For instance, science is to be used as a tool, but never as a weapon against God and his will for society.⁶³ Scientific research is classed also as a legitimate left-hand operation where it logically observes and evaluates physical phenomena. Here God uses reason to alert and assist believers and unbelievers alike to physical realities within a fallen world. Scientific findings are never absolute but are always provisional and must always be open to new data. Legitimate scientific research as a left-hand operation occurs where all information is subjected to further independent scrutiny by other qualified scientists in that field before being published in proper scientific journals. Over time, the best case is that which survives further critical inquiry.

Science is not an autonomous artefact. To function it presumes a pre-existing order and consistency in the laws of nature which God has provided. In God's twofold reign we see his providence bring benefit and blessing to all creatures as He intended in the beginning. It ensures we do not sever our dependence on God as humanism and Cartesian philosophy previously had done and continue to do in their 'will to power'.

Given the immense influence and presence of all forms of media in today's world, and given so much access to technical information through the internet, it is difficult to know who should be trusted. By being scientifically accountable, consensus by logical argument achieves a more reliable outcome than a consensus gained simply by political action, even if it is a democratic vote. This is because of its systematic analysis of falsifiability and error.

The important task of ecology and climate science is limited to the left-hand reign where governments need to carefully consider the best scientific advice available to them, to promote, to the best of their ability, the physical well-being of their country. As a church we respect their significant and important role in this task.

The function of good government is the protection of citizens against harm and danger, and this includes the accurate detection and attribution of climate change. In our country, this task occurs through Commonwealth funded research institutes such as the CSIRO, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Antarctic Division (the Commonwealth Government's Department of the Environment), and the universities, using well-qualified climate scientists of international reputation who have made substantial contributions in this field (e.g. Allison et al. 2011). For some it is their Christian vocation. These research organisations conclude that the warming since the 1970s is especially significant and related to an increasing rise of carbon dioxide and other anthropogenic greenhouses gases. Warming is also evident in a significant loss of land ice from alpine glaciers and the Polar Regions, and rising sea levels. This issue of further change is of great importance to humanity.

9. Going forward into the unknown

Many people are concerned about the state of the earth as we move into the future. The unprecedented occurrence of extreme climate events in recent years such as the European heatwave in August 2003 that caused 35 000 deaths (Stott, Stone, and Allen

⁶² This is evident in Jesus' teaching on divorce to preserve the sanctity of marriage (Mat 5:31; 19:1–12).

⁶³ The division between these two spheres of God's left-hand and right-hand reign is epistemological not historical or political. Creation does have an inbuilt theological direction towards salvation. Because of fallen human nature, any order of preservation (such as the state) that exercises force will be provisional and limited. Conversely, the creative and redemptive acts of God are absolute and not merely provisional.

2004) is just one example of significant concern. Here we consider two questions that are frequently asked.

a. Doesn't the covenant God made in Genesis 9:11,15 (see 8:21–22) mean that we need not be concerned about the threats of ecological instability such as the contribution of melting glaciers and ice caps to rising sea-levels?

First, it must be noted that although such changes have the potential to cause major societal upheaval, no scientist claims that such catastrophes will cause the earth to become non-functional.

Secondly, while the above passage speaks of God's promise not to bring about another such cataclysm, it does not guarantee an end to human ecological damage. It would be imprudent of us to use this covenant as an excuse for complacency and to insist that we are impervious to ecological catastrophe. Luther argues that 'when Noah foretold the Flood' it was precisely such an attitude as this that was held by 'the Cainites as well as the ungodly descendants of the godly generation'. They rejected his preaching on the basis of God's command to Adam and Eve 'to rule the earth' (LW 2:98). Therefore, Luther warns against a self-serving use of God's word: 'One must not trust in the things that are at hand and in one's possessions, even though they were promised by a divine word; but one must pay heed to the word itself and rely on it alone' (LW 2:98).

Given this caveat, we can be assured here that while ecological disasters have occurred and will continue to occur this side of eternity, they will eventually come to an end. Moreover, they are not on such a scale as to obliterate all creation before Jesus' returns 'to judge the living and the dead', when there will be 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Rev 21:1; 2 Peter 3:10–13).

b. In the face of ecological hardship: is God with us?

How can God be active and in control when our stability gets shaken, and when order has become disorder? By faith, we believe that God is just as active and in control today as he was at the beginning when he brought order out of the chaos (which he still continues to do). Because we think we are the ones who are the source of order, we have little reason to look for a higher ordering of things by which we can fathom what is unfathomable to us. It rattles us when we find our own ordering is not permanent and never can be. Why do we get so shaken? Where does the cause of our trouble lie?

It may be the case that in the midst of disaster, when we are forced to re-evaluate our priorities and to re-consider what comes first in our lives, we realise that God is more in control and active than we could ever imagine. Even in the midst of apparent turmoil, there can be a re-ordering that occurs according to God's scheme of doing things, and not ours. But this is perceptible only to the eyes of faith.

Facing the destructive forces of Nazi invasion in January 1940, the Norwegian Bishop Eivind Berggrav, in his book *With God in the Darkness* writes:

Disturbance always comes from the ground beneath us. When our life-supports begin to totter, a mood of panic leaps up—as when a mass of people standing on thin ice suddenly realize that it is beginning to give way beneath them and infect each other with panic. If we are able to give strength to one another, we must have firm ground to stand on.

Consequently, we do not clutch at straws, or cry out to be saved, or seek evasions, or look for chances to escape. No, we take it for granted that something will be happen—we know not what—something which will demand a lot from us, perhaps deprive us of the dearest things we possess. We can, for that matter, look the worst in the face...

It is not by avoiding the possibilities that we shall win our peace. We will, on the contrary, look everything straight in the face. ...

The gospel is this, that God, despite everything, is there for us...

I do not give up in resignation; I do not let things slip. Nor do I lose myself in God—that would be Buddha's not Christ's way of thinking. But all that is me is absorbed in God, so that He is the greatest, and He embraces all that is me. So the ground which supports me consists not of material things, not even the finest, the most blessed values we possess. God embraces me not only in the sense that He gave me all these things; He embraces me also when all these things are taken from me. God is not contingent on these things. He represents not only the gifts, but also the suffering when these gifts are torn away. God is also in the darkness which then covers me. If God is with us, who can be against us? If you have God, what can you lose?

God's struggle always has a perspective beyond the present, beyond the suffering. It is the way to something new. So not even to-day must we drop our hands in dismay. We must not think today's happenings are final...all the time we must look forward, for with God there is always a reason. So long as we do not see it, we believe. We think in faith, act in faith, suffer in faith, and practice kindness to each other. To go in the darkness with God means not only safety, but action. (Berggrav 1943, 17; translation altered).

Faced with the dread of environmental catastrophe, as Christians we are challenged to look beyond the things that bind us to ourselves—that come between us and God, 'where moth and rust consume'—to the things eternal. This is not a giving up on the world, or an Augustinian 'other-worldliness', but going forward into the world through our vocations with the eyes of faith. We go about our daily work, using our reason and senses in the best possible way, but knowing that the only firm ground we stand on is Christ Jesus our Lord. It is Christ who has overcome death, and 'is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb 11:1). God has reconciled this fallen world to himself in the death of Jesus and does not count our sins against us; in Christ he works life in the midst of death. We are his body, the church, 'a city set on a hill', a 'light for the world', reflecting the one who is the light and life of all. We are assured that 'nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom 8:39).

10. Listening critically to ecological issues, especially the climate change debate

a. Media wars and the battle for public opinion

Because of the enormous social and economic issues at stake, the debate concerning anthropogenic global warming has become political and partisan, as is evident in the media. On one hand, there are those who zealously attribute any freak weather event, be it drought or 'ice-shelf' calving episodes, to climate change; on the other hand, there are the cynics who all too easily poke holes in these allegedly flimsy assertions and claim that climate change is a myth.⁶⁴ In this arena, accountability is lacking on both sides of the debate resulting in massive confusion in the public mind.

The politics of aggression captivates the fallen nature's will to power in Christian and non-Christian alike. This aggression suppresses the truth, not only the truth of valid scientific conclusions but especially biblical truth, by obstructing debate and silencing its opponents. There is also continuous recycling of flawed and obsolete arguments or propaganda. When scientists become mere ideological functionaries ('toeing the party line'), no longer having any right of enquiry of their own and are expelled from legitimate participation within the scientific process of peer-review, then the proper order has been perverted and the situation has certainly become as demonic as that of scientism itself. The campaign by a small group of politically motivated scientists to misrepresent the basis of global warming, along with other public issues (e.g. acid rain, effects of smoking, etc.), has been well documented (Oreskes and Conway 2010). The mismatch between scientific

⁶⁴ Thus a 'straw-man' argument.

consensus on the anthropogenic cause of climate change⁶⁵ and the acceptance of this finding by the general public (which shows much less support) is indicative of the level of politicisation of the debate.⁶⁶ The reason for this disjunction between public perception and scientific understanding is not only poor science education generally but the debate, as it is presented in the media, too often gets distracted by 'celebrity' figures who fail to be authoritative guides in the complexities of this question.

b. The misuse of God's twofold reign

i. The failure to act

One of the dangers of Luther's doctrine of the 'two kingdoms' is that it seems to allow the secular sphere of government its own autonomy in which the citizen or even the church chooses not to participate, on the grounds of a lack of competence and confidence to speak publically. This may even lead to the dissolution of public discussion altogether.⁶⁷ The inherent instability of the left-hand realm as a rule of force means that it can too easily become a repressive, authoritarian power (*exousia*; e.g. Col 2:15; cf. Dan 7:1). This occurs when the church fails to call the government to account, as for example, when it pressurises Christians to transgress God's commandments or when it flagrantly abuses its mandate to preserve life and the common good.

It occurs when we neglect our responsibility to care for the creation; when we complacently accept the inevitable (e.g. the demise of the environment). This is a distortion of Luther's understanding of God's twofold reign where the civic realm (the government) fails to do its duty by not caring for the citizenry or the environment. It amounts to no less than a giving up on the world as a whole when we place ourselves in only one of the two realms, 'wanting Christ without the world or the world without Christ—and in both cases we deceive ourselves.... There are not two realities, but only one reality and that is God's reality revealed in Christ in the reality of the world'. (Bonhoeffer et al. 2005, 6:58)

Too often we bypass ourselves as the underlying cause of the present ecological crises. We look for a scapegoat in Christianity and even in various ideologies such as consumerism. Niedner (2008) reveals that:

It gives us permission to say that there's nothing we can do, for example, about this or that failure to stand up for our so called convictions. 'Not me, God, but THE MARKET made me do it...'.

The capitulation to the aggressive proselytizing of market forces and values is evident in Wendell Berry's description of European expansion into the new world:

The evangelist has walked beside the conqueror and the merchant, too often blandly assuming that his cause was the same as theirs. Christian organisations, to this day, remain largely indifferent to the rape and plunder of the world and of its traditional cultures. It is hardly too much to say that most Christian organisations are as happily indifferent as most industrial organisations to the ecological, cultural, and religious implications of industrial economics. (W. Berry 1993, 94)

The escape or withdrawal of the church from the world and from taking a stand against false utopias and ideologies is precisely what Satan wants, so that the world becomes a blasphemous impersonation of divine attributes and Christian worship (Rev 13).

⁶⁵ The recent study by Anderegg et al. (2010) of 1,372 climate scientists and their publications show that 97 to 98% of the climate researchers most actively publishing in this field here support the tenets of anthropogenic climate change as outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

⁶⁶ The intense politicization of the debate is demonstrated by the forced redundancy of Australia's head climate scientist Prof. Graeme Pearman for speaking out against government policy. This incident is described in: 'Transcript of Janine Cohen's report 'The Greenhouse Mafia'. 'Four Corners', ABC television, 13 February 2006. (URL: www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2006/s1568867.htm; accessed 10 December 2012).

⁶⁷ This of course opens the door to extremists who will use any opportunity to dominate the public discussion.

ii. Mingling both kingdoms by conflating them into one

The other distortion is that we fail to distinguish the *modus operandi* of each kingdom and conflate them into one, as in most all-encompassing ideologies, such as Stalinism, Nazism, communism, etc. The autonomous or even syncretistic clinging to utopian ideals, or even millennial theories, cannot save the world. It also occurs in the conflation of church and state through theocratic rule; 'thereby becoming people in eternal conflict...who ever and again present ourselves as the only form of Christian existence that is in accord with reality' (Bonhoeffer et al. 2005, 6:58).

Within their vocations, Christians are constantly called upon to assess the manner in which their use of reason abrogates God's proper will. For instance, the scientific facts surrounding one's calculations may be mathematically correct but mistakenly applied through one's attitude to the use of those facts. If the articulation of this knowledge is merely to espouse the triumph of 'cutting-edge' climate science, then it presumes an orientation of 'mastery over nature'. It takes on a spiritual character that competes with the biblical teaching on dominion. It is a return to Baconianism rather than the humility and privilege of being entrusted with God's creation. In an attempt to put myself above God, I paradoxically become more curved in on self and more of a liability to others and the creation, because I have seized the power of knowledge for my own elevation and advantage.

There is no doubt that a concern for the environment is more than just a scientific conundrum, or even an economic, or political issue; it also has a spiritual dimension, irrespective of whether an individual is Christian, pantheist or humanist (and the latter will influence one's approach and motives). While science is the most effective method we have for detecting climate change and its attribution, ecological issues such as this are not a purely scientific concern. Care of the environment potentially affects much of the creation, and thus spans a diversity of disciplines within God's twofold reign. Thus as we approach this issue as Christians, we need to operate legitimately within each realm, especially within the public spheres of church and government.

c. How do we know who is right?

Given the seriousness of potential impacts of estimated anthropogenic greenhouse warming, especially in regards to public health, governing authorities are required to make important decisions and policy choices about climate change in the absence of perfect knowledge. As we move from the physical sciences to the social sciences, such as the economics of carbon pricing, there is increased subjectivity and room for error. At the individual level, where there is a poor understanding of the issues involved, there will be a tendency for our fallen human nature to fill the gaps with religious language. For instance, we may say that 'I believe' or 'I don't believe' in climate change, or 'I have faith' in this scientist over that one. To avoid making a 'new religion' out of climate change or its negation, we need to remain objective in each of the appropriate spheres of God's twofold reign.

Firstly, as a Christian reflecting on God's word and in prayer, have I considered what Scripture says on the matter? Simply by reflecting on the Ten Commandments there is much we can say about ourselves and our orientation to God as creator and redeemer, and also to the issue of ecology or climate change. Do I acknowledge God as maker and preserver of all things, including my reason and senses? Do I use science as a weapon against God's word, or as a servant in God's so-called left-hand realm? Do I really care for his creation which is under my stewardship? Is there any of it which I hold too lightly or want to escape from? Do I fear, love and trust in God above all things? Do I look to God for spiritual direction in such matters, or to my own insights and aspirations? Do I honour God in all that I say and do? Do I despise others who hold a different opinion on this

matter? Do I respect the authority of others, especially those who govern or do I insult and slander them? When I disagree with the opinion of those in authority (e.g. the government), do I do so with respect and integrity? Do I indulge my own speculations and base desires? Do I neglect my neighbour and his or her needs? Do I bear false witness by misrepresenting others, including scientists, politicians and church leaders? Do I forgive others as Christ has forgiven me? Do I hunger and thirst for God's righteousness which he gives me through faith in Christ's (Eph 1:7–10)? The list could go on as we examine ourselves in the light of God's commandments.

Secondly, as a Christian, how do I go about responsibly assessing the truth of scientific claims and counter-claims? Do I use my God-given reason and senses to the best of my ability for the benefit of others? If someone asserts that the climate is either warming or not warming, do I ask whether the source of the claim is expert and objective, given that having scientific credentials in and of itself does not necessarily guarantee the truth of the claim? Is the claim based on a peer-reviewed publication? Has it been substantiated by additional peer-reviewed studies and widely accepted by the relevant scientific community? Are there conflicting scientific views? Who holds these views? And how many are there, and of what level of appropriate proficiency? And what is the criteria for concluding that one view is right and the other is wrong? Am I prepared to use my reason and abilities to ask these questions, or am I content merely to speculate?

11. When does the issue of climate change become a new religion?

a. Maintaining the unity and distinction of God's twofold reign

Climate science is a well-established left-hand field of research that is the essential basis for future climate projections and planning, and is a vital component of public debate in this complex and challenging area. Science quite often guides public policy on health and safety issues, such as wearing seat belts, tobacco smoking, alcohol consumption, immunisation, building regulations, etc. In most cases, people accept the science because it seems reasonable and they are willing to trust the consensus of scientific opinion.

A problem occurs at the personal level, when people are not convinced by the science or don't understand how its conclusions are made. This is especially the case when their experience tells them otherwise, no matter how localised or limited it is. This is compounded by the sense of a compulsion to change lifestyle, giving up certain comforts and implementing seemingly insignificant practices like not leaving unused appliances in 'standby' mode. Science being a left-hand activity has no competence in matters of personal preference.

If drastic societal changes are enforced, this can be the seed of its own destruction, as coercion never changes the heart. Societal expectations and pressures working through the secular realm instead inculcate idealism, a new form of self-righteousness and conformism to achieve certain goals, or 'political correctness'. It becomes an imitation of the right-hand reign of God, attempting to pervade every corner of our existence with a moral ethic we're not convinced of. If this is the case, we need to re-examine the questions in the preceding section and ask whether we see the left-hand rule as being a legitimate activity of God.

For unbelievers, this perception obviously is not the case and so the impetus to recycle or use solar energy may well become a 'new religion'. However, this should not stop believers also taking care of the environment as part of their Christian vocation of caring for the creation entrusted to them. The significant point here is the freedom that the Christian has to be part of such activities in their wise use of time and resources and in their compliance with government regulations. Nevertheless, it is important that such regulations are

established on the basis of testable scientific methods and procedures, not simply 'political correctness' which can easily become an end in itself.

Objectivity is severely diminished when climate change is treated as a new religion. When God's twofold reign is not identified and the *modus operandi* of each realm is not distinguished, humankind's participation will inevitably be governed by its own spiritual aspirations. The efficacy of such participation becomes relativized by the futility of the capricious ends to which it has submitted itself. This is evident when the case for anthropogenic global warming is told in a triumphalist way that is intended to confirm the 'mastery of science' or used it to achieve a short-term political point. This would be a case of a left-hand operation claiming a certainty it is not entitled to claim. Any position on the issue is misinformed and mistaken if it becomes a utilitarian ideology that ignores God's word and his sovereign rule.

The true role of the church, God's right-hand governance, is to proclaim the certainty of his word. It is not simply to spiritualise ecological issues, such as climate change, which is the Cartesian approach. Rather, we are to proclaim his word 'in season and out of season' and to let God deal with our sin of failing to be good stewards through his ordained means of grace. In fact, it is to be 'salt and light' in the world, to make known that the worst drought of all, is the drought of God's word. It is to pray and be vigilant that good government is not usurped, and that the freedom to express our opinion, even if it is a minority opinion, is protected and preserved.

The muddling of both spheres of operation into the right-hand realm occurs through the ideologising of Christianity either by the state or political movements so that the church ends up proclaiming a worldly 'gospel', other than Christ crucified (Gal 1:6–12). This is the worst perversion of all. Faith and eternal hope can be manipulated to induce allegiance to a particular set of values, reforms, axioms, etc.⁶⁸ Such influences may even acknowledge a 'faith' but only so that it can create desirable outcomes. This obscures the true object of faith, that is, Christ, the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world. This is an end to which anthropocentrism naturally does not want to go.

b. The treatment of ecological issues in the parish

While the proper place for proclaiming God's gift of creation, and our care of it, is from the pulpit, this is not the place for advocating a particular political or scientific opinion on ecology and climate change. Such issues may well be better addressed in a discussion group. Here any misunderstandings, prejudices, resentment or ignorance may be brought to the surface and receive due pastoral care as Christians minister to one another. This allows the dynamic of the gospel to be applied to the individual and its practical implications for our Christian stewardship of God's creation to be discussed.

How does the farmer, biochemist, politician, mother, engineer, or whomever, contend with their own sinful condition? They cling to their Baptism, the proclaimed word and the body and blood of Christ given and shed for the forgiveness of sins. They pray not 'my will be done' but 'your kingdom come, your will be done...forgive us our trespasses...deliver us from evil'.

How the individual Christian responds to different and often complex public issues is certain to vary dramatically not only between non-Christians but even among believers. Christians are called to put their love for neighbour into practice in the manner they see fit, according to vocational criteria such as employment, position, competence, etc. To that end, this love must do away with the prejudice or ignorance that is a stumbling block to such love and that prevents our obedience to Christ's governance in each 'realm'. The problems of dealing with the difficult social issues confronting us must not be under-

⁶⁸ This is evident in the so-called 'Christianity' referred to by White (1967).

estimated and the role of the church is not simply to face such difficulties by imparting 'the cold hard facts' of the matter but to seek the truth in love and to love the truth.

12. Recognition of primary producers' deep concern for the land and the earth

For many farming families, the land (and its connection with climate) holds a special place in their heart because of its profound value, the farms often having been handed down from one generation to the next. For these families, their land is the place their forebears settled when they came out from Europe in the 1800s on a sailing ship, to forge out a living. Here they worked hard, enduring drought, flood and bushfires.

From an early age, most farmers have had instilled into them the need to tend and take care of the land and the animals. They know well that if they don't, the family won't eat and the farm won't survive. Moreover, they know that they might not be able to pass onto their children what had been passed down to them. For most farmers, it made good sense to let the paddock rest every few years, and the working horses every Sunday.

The steadfast and persistent inter-generational nurture in each case is intertwined and closely connected to the creator's blessing in the beginning (Gen 1:28). Husband and wife give of themselves in the ecology of daily vocational living—family, work, community and church—because of what God has first given them. It continues despite the effects of human sin (Gen 8:21). They know with St Paul that, theologically, there is nothing that we have that we did not receive (1 Cor 4:7).

The farmer is entrusted with an accumulated knowledge of climate and harvest yields, successes and failures, extending back nearly a century or more in this country. This is laid out in dutifully kept records of daily rainfall, exceptional temperatures, frosts and other major weather events. All this has been their commitment to the welfare of future generations. Environmental imbalances from rabbit plagues, dryland salting, soil erosion, prickly pear, etc. have taken their toll, but, assisted by government research, local land-care groups, etc., a good farmer is astute enough to take up what needs to be done for the proper care of the land.

In fact, over the past century, there has been an upward trend in Australian crop yields through improved cropping practices (Carberry et al. 2010). This has been achieved despite farming on fragile soils in a highly variable climate. In the past three decades, wheat yields have almost quadrupled because of improved management of the soil and its fertility (through stubble retention, crop rotation, etc.), combined with improved quality of crop and pasture varieties, which include disease resistance. Farming practices have also changed to cope with the highly variable nature of the Australian rainfall.

Unfortunately, with economic pressures, such as milk pricing, many a farm that has been in the family, dutifully passed down from generation to generation, is now being subsumed into larger holdings with more sophisticated machinery, high in energy consumption, and with more demand for chemicals. Rural communities are dwindling and in the process the intimate care that farmers used to show to the land has gone missing as their farms have been sold out to corporate interests under intense economic pressures in the global economy. Overall, there is an increased industrialisation and a consequent loss of intimacy with the land, the community, and the environment.

Further, in the last two decades, there has been an increased tendency to look to technology as an answer to personal hopes and aspirations, rather than to God. Humans seem to be more and more dispensing with their responsibility in the right-hand reign of God as they think they have found a new 'saviour' in whom they can now 'rest'. This is not so much the god of the latest 'technology', per se, but the 'promise' of it being 'cutting edge'! The 'idol' is not technology. Strictly, technology and science can be seen as God's

good gifts. Rather, the idol is our love of its deceptive promises that distract us from the righteousness of God's right-hand reign. Encouragingly, many Christians are able to live a frugal but informed lifestyle with godly contentment through their vocations in less affluent rural communities. The contribution of the church in such a context must never be underestimated as Fred van Dyke emphasises:

The conservation community has too often approached the church as a sorry, ignorant audience that needs to be enlightened or, in worst cases, manipulated to do 'the right thing' for saving biodiversity and reducing global pollution. It never occurs to many conservationists that the church might have wisdom to provide about the nature of the conservation effort itself, that the very manner in which conservationists are pursuing the effort is part of the problem. (Van Dyke 2010, 238)

13. Conclusion

The biblical care of the environment is a function bestowed on us by God for his purposes, not ours. This means it is not an end in itself, a new religion or mysticism for us to follow. Likewise, we reject the idolatries of consumerism and hedonism that degrade not just ourselves but cause the creation to suffer and 'to groan' inwardly (Rom 8:20–22). These are inappropriate uses of his gifts that God had never intended but which rebellious humankind chose for themselves (Rom 1:18–25).

As we look at the impact we are having on the creation and the wasteful use of resources in our society, we are called to simplicity, not as an ethical demand, nor as a Franciscan asceticism, but in the 'freedom of the Christian'. Through the crucified, risen, and regnant Lord, believers are sovereign lords over all things but are also free to be humble servants of everything and everybody.

God's blessing of responsible dominion has always been there, bestowed on humankind at the beginning. We, though, have not always listened to God's word and the call to be what he intends for us. We have rejected him and taken our own path to have our own way with the creation entrusted to our care. We have served mammon and not God.

God calls baptised believers to be responsible stewards, using their dominion over creation no longer for selfish purposes but as the creator intended, to be God's vice-regents in the world and to advocate a sober and responsible use of the world's mineral, gas, and oil reserves, as well as its farming lands and forests, and to do all we can, collectively, to prevent an increase in global warming, as much as it lies in our power. Christians can no longer be complicit or disinterested in the destruction of creation and the pollution of the environment. Our sacred responsibility has been from the beginning to serve and protect it (Gen 2:15).

In a world where the individual is becoming profoundly alienated from a sense of interconnectedness with all creatures, and helpless before the sheer momentum of technological power, we Christians need to re-affirm both the goodness of God's creation with joy and thanksgiving, and our need for a Saviour in Christ. God's ultimate will and purpose is only to be found in the crucified and risen Jesus, the Word made flesh, who dwells with us and takes on the suffering of this fallen creation. In Christ alone, all creation is invited to share in the promise of salvation. He is the head of all creation (Eph 1:22), and through him all things were created and hang together (Col 1:16–20; Acts 17:24–28). Even when it continues to reject, mock and ignore him, Christ (through his twofold reign of church and secular government) continues to reconcile the entire fallen world to himself (Col 1:20).

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