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## WORSHIP AND ECOLOGY

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The Anglo-American poet, Denise Levertov, offers an image of the incarnation of the Word in the coming of God out of compassion for a sinfully proud humanity and taking on the flesh that has been tainted by pride. The Word is sent at the moment when “we have done the worst we can”. What is this worst our kind has done, that from which only grace may save us? Not only are there millions who suffer poverty and injustice but the world and civilization as we know it is faced with a severe and threatening ecological crisis. When we turn to God in worship, can we carry this devastated world with us to the throne of heaven, to put it in the hands of Jesus Christ who sits forever at God’s right hand, interceding for that world of which in his flesh and in his suffering he became one? There are many wonderful prayers whereby we praise and thank God for the works of creation, such as the prayer of the three children in Daniel 3, or a multiplicity of psalms or verse after verse of Wisdom literature. They risk being hollow however unless prayed by those who are immersed in a time and a place where they feel a oneness with the other works of creation, where they have an animated relationship with earth, fire, water, sun and moon.

At the source of the harm done to earth and cosmos is a way of viewing things. In 1981 writing of the liberation of creation, the author Gibson Winter pointed to the tendency to use resources of the earth as though it offered an inexhaustible supply of energy and wealth. He named this a crisis of spirituality, distinguishing between a

mechanist approach to nature and an organistic and symbolic one which suggests a symbiotic mutuality between nature and humankind. While in the way of using earth's resources in western countries he detected a largely mechanistic approach, to guard and guide the relation to earth's fruits (agriculture, ore, water, forests) he deemed it essential to recover a symbolic sense of the communion between human and creation, something still it seems alive in many cultures but practically extinct, even among religious believers, in the West.<sup>1</sup>

To grasp that starting place for the gift of a world renewed, with in view the extent and dimensions of the issues at stake, the crisis needs to be given a localized as well as a global setting. When nature is exploited so are human beings and communities, with the most severe results for those whose inheritance and culture are inextricably allied with their relations to their immediate environment.

#### Jubilee

In face of this wrought reality, when he convoked the Jubilee of the year 2000 in memory of the mystery of the Incarnation John Paul II recalled as its foundation the Jubilee of the Israelite covenant. Every seventh year was to be a sabbatical year and every fiftieth a Jubilee. These were years when the people to whom it had been confided were reminded of the need to care for the earth, not to overuse it, not to exploit it beyond its natural giving. They were also years when communities were to be mindful of the poor, when land was to revert to those who may have lost it, when the command was recalled of letting the poor live from the land that landowners tilled and reaped, from the olive

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<sup>1</sup> Gibson Winter, *Liberating Creation. Foundations for Religious Social Ethic* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 97-111.

groves and the vineyards which they dressed. This sense of jubilee, the Pope asserted, besides providing the meaning of the Jubilee of the year 2000 is inherent in the Christian era to every Sabbath gathering, to every coming together for the Day of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

In his World Peace Day message of 1990 he pointed specifically to two things.<sup>3</sup> The first is the need to promote a proper care for the order of the cosmos and its riches. As he puts it this is a “cosmos endowed with its own integrity, its own internal, dynamic balance”, possessing an order which he insists “must be respected” (no. 8). The second thing to which he pointed is the obligation to promote eco-justice in behalf of the poor who are the most vulnerable to the effects of improper uses of the earth’s resources. He defends the understanding of the earth as a common heritage, the fruits of which are for the benefit of all. Combining both perspectives, he says: “Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness - both individual and collective - are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence”.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (Boston: St Paul Books & Media, 1994), nn. 9-12.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, World Day of Peace, 1990. Accessed April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009, at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp\\_ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp_ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html). For a summary of important Church teaching, see Sean McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth. The Christian Vocation to promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 103-110.

## Jubilee and the Mission of Jesus of Nazareth

To remember this is keeping Jubilee as Jesus kept it in the synagogue at Nazareth, projecting the advent of a new time, of a season of grace, when hopes might well yet be fulfilled. When we remember Jesus and his mission, we remember the beginning of his mission to the poor at Nazareth in Galilee. This is to be understood in light of Jubilee, of the prophetic proclamations of Isaiah which looked forward to the fulfilment of the Jubilee promises given in the Covenant. When Jesus spoke in the synagogue of Nazareth, announcing that “today” these promises were fulfilled, the time for the people of Israel was one of great affliction. Isaiah in speaking of the poor had in mind those who suffer from invasions and exiles, those who suffer from consequences of non-observance of Law on possession of land, on the care of the poor in the way that land is used. It is their redemption which is to be given its “today” through the preaching and the work of Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

In the preaching of Jesus we have insight into what was happening among the people of Galilee: absentee landowners, dependence on day labourers, the lot of hired servants, the imposition of levies and taxes by Caesar, Herod and Temple Priesthood. None of this is according to the LAW or the traditions of the people who should have been able to live decent lives from their family holdings and on occasion of Jubilee or Sabbath year rectify any injustices which had crept into social life and into the proper care of the land. Such is the lot of those to whom Jesus proclaims the blessings of the poor: first and foremost are

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<sup>4</sup> On the Gospel to the poor in the mission of Jesus against the background of the covenant with Israel, see James G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 516-525.

those who suffer under such an unjust regime, just as in the days of Isaiah it was the poverty caused by structural injustice which entered into the promises made to the poor and the promises of the restoration of Israel.

Of Christian liturgy it is said that it is ever the Today of the promises given and assured in Jesus Christ. It is to be celebrated now among peoples whose impoverishment in the misuse of land and earth's resources can be compared to that of the Galileans in the time of Jesus. Now as then, land and people are to be remembered and saved together. Today, what is promised is to be fulfilled.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF THE UNIVERSE: GLOBAL AND GLOCAL

As Jesus was of Galilee and saw and felt what the unrighteous had done there to earth's resources and to his sisters and brothers in the process, so do we see the reality which we bemoan from given points in time and place, that is to say from the glocal, place and people here and now suffering from the play of larger global forces.

When nature is exploited so are human beings and communities, with the most severe results for those whose inheritance and culture are inextricably allied with their relations to their immediate environment. In our own country some fifteen years ago a group of North American Bishops related the harm done to ecology to the fate of local communities. A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, 1995, called "At Home in the Web of Life", was written in face of the harm done to local people and to the environment by indiscriminate mining practices.<sup>5</sup> It proposed a pastoral policy of what is

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<sup>5</sup> Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *At Home in the Web of Life. A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities in Appalachia* (Webster Springs, WVA: Catholic Committee of Appalachia), 1995. See also from other parts of the world: CELAM Plenary Assembly,

referred to in the subtitle as the building of sustainable communities. These are described as communities based on a locally generated sustainable economy, made possible by restraint in mining practices that are exercised with care not to promote destruction of the environment. As the letter says “the rooted path” of sustainable communities is one which looks for new ways of living together and of communion with the earth, “based especially on the full community of all life, including love of all nature, and love of the poor”. Such communities “will conserve and not waste, be simpler but better, keep most resources circulating locally, create sustainable livelihoods, support family life, protect the richness of nature, develop people spiritually, and follow God’s values”.<sup>6</sup>

It is remarked across the world that as advanced techniques are used in agrobusiness, in mining, and in logging, profits are not distributed to the advantage of Indigenous Peoples but benefit either global corporations or the few rather than the many among the people. Since these practices take over large tracts of land, peoples are displaced, not only with effects on their material conditions but also upon their cultural way of life. The earth itself is exploited to excess so that the environment suffers in many

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Aparecida, 2007: [www.celam.org/celam.info/Documento\\_Conclusivo\\_Aparecida.pdf](http://www.celam.org/celam.info/Documento_Conclusivo_Aparecida.pdf); Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, *What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land? A Pastoral Letter on Ecology*. Accessed at [www.cbconline.net/documents/1980s/1988-ecology.html](http://www.cbconline.net/documents/1980s/1988-ecology.html). This is also available in Sean McDonough, *The Greening of the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 207-216.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 14. In support of a faith perspective on this there is some appeal in the letter to biblical traditions of relation to land, but this is undeveloped. <sup>6</sup>

respects, not only because too much of its wealth is extracted but also because agricultural land, waters and forests are destroyed or polluted and ecological equilibrium is not maintained. With this in view, the pastoral goals of the Church enunciated by a number of episcopacies are to live by the Church's option for the poor and to support sustainable communities, made possible by promoting sustainable economies that respect people, their culture and the environment in which they are embedded. These soundings unveil concerns which are integral to a Christian and Catholic perspective on liturgical celebration or on worship practices. Even as they are done in remembrance of Jesus Christ, they must respect the abiding sense of humanity's kinship with creation, or with the other inhabitants of the earth and with the whole cosmic environment.

#### LITURGICAL AMBIGUITY

This is said without denying the fact that historically pastors and religious practices have shown some ambiguity in how natural disasters and environmentally related human disasters such as famine are breasted. In the prayers which we have inherited from liturgical traditions, when face by our boundedness to the things of creation we vacillate between expressions of repentance, exorcism and gratitude. The scale of the ambiguity in the face liturgy puts on nature can be illumined by the contrast between the emergence of Rogation Days in the Spring and of Ember Days every quarter. There are only vestiges of these in today's liturgy but the mark of the perceptions they embody is constant.

The development of Rogation practices has to do with fear of natural calamities. This story and their eventual placement at regular spots in the Spring within the Church's

calendar is a good example of early Christian attitudes to nature.<sup>7</sup> The beginning of the rogation practices is usually dated back to Mamertus, bishop of Vienne, who around the year 470 convoked the people to fast, prayer and procession when they were threatened by severe natural catastrophe. These litanies of supplication, or rogations, thenceforth formed part of the annual liturgy in Gaul.

A comparable tradition was started in Rome when in the sixth century Gregory the Great called for the chanting of the litanies with its attendant ceremonies to alleviate a pestilence spread by rotting corpses left around the city and suburbs in the wake of flooding caused by the breaking of the banks of the Tiber. These Roman litanies came to be celebrated on St Mark's Day (25 April). Generally scholars relate these observances to the pagan festival of Robigalia, which called for processions through the land to preserve crops from mildew, which was one of the dangers of the season. The pagan festival was robust and was marked by much feasting and drinking and takes its name from the God Robigus (rust) who had control over the red mildew that tainted crops. If the connection is correct it is an example of a Christian practice that developed Christian observance to counteract the hold on the populace of pagan customs and traditions.

On a whole homilies for these days that are extant have a marked eschatological perspective for whether the land prosper or not the people are exhorted to live in the expectation and hope of eternal reward and to obtain this to be ready to face the day of judgment. The goodness of creation is contrasted with the spoliation of the land which is the punishment for human sin. Over all they are less concerned with celebrating earth and

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<sup>7</sup> For a historical summary see Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year: its History and Meaning after the Reform* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 173-191.

its bounty than with seeking protection against natural catastrophe, which they are all too ready to ascribe to punishment for sins and sinful ways. What this reflects of social conditions and of the extent to which social conditions engendered the precarious existence which people led in their reliance on the land and its fruits we are left to speculate but we have some idea from the tradition of blessings of things which continued after the efforts to root out traditional religions. People who struggled with the land and with earth's resources, or who profited little from its wealth, continued to see evil powers at work in nature or to be worried about God's wrath.

On the other hand Leo the Great in sermons for Ember Days<sup>8</sup> shows how penance as purification and thanksgiving for creation as gift may be united. These days are linked with the seasons and with the cultivation of the land, for people whose livelihood depended on good weather conditions. Though their exact origins are unclear they are well established as a distinctive Roman tradition by the time of Pope Leo the Great (d. 461). Leo treats of Church fasts to mark the four seasons of the year, each concluding with the assembly for the vigil from Saturday evening to Sunday morning. Leo teaches that in winter in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Spirit we fast so that "we may learn from the constantly recurring annual cycle that we are in constant need of purification." The element of gratitude is however marked and Leo sees even the December fast as an expression of gratitude for the harvests of that year, the fast being "a fitting sacrifice of abstinence that is offered to God the giver in gratitude for the now completed harvest of all the fruits of the soil."

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 186-188.

The ambiguity continued into the Church's tradition of blessings. People who struggled with the land and with earth's resources, or who profited little from its wealth, continued to see evil powers at work in nature or to be worried about God's wrath. While blessings often sound prayers of thanksgiving the ritual of popular blessing, even indeed of the blessing of baptismal water, contains exorcisms in abundance. While this may be associated with superstition even by sophisticated writers such as Charles Taylor, it is much better understood from its social and ecclesial implications. Communities that enjoyed little property and little power in the control of their lives in face of the struggle to bring forth fruit from the earth sought some beneficent power from exorcism and from the patronage of saints to keep some hope alive, a hope that might accompany them in their burdened lives.

As the Roman Liturgy developed, it retained prayers and Masses for times of pestilence, famine, earthquake and the like which savoured of belief in divine anger, promoted dependence on acts of divine providence and inspired penance. Besides the Masses for Ember Days and Rogation Days, the 1570 Missal of Pius V has votive prayers for asking fine weather, for repelling tempests or storms, and whatever calamity or affliction may befall a people and these prayers have a placatory tone. The Roman Ritual in the revised form of 1614 that complements the 1570 Missal on the other hand is quite positive in its blessings of the land and its produce. For example, while the blessing of fields and pastures includes a petition against the infestation of demons, on the whole it

expresses thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth and asks that the people may rejoice in the benefits God gives them and that the poor and needy may be fed.<sup>9</sup>

#### READING SCRIPTURAL TRADITIONS: RECOVERY OF COVENANT<sup>10</sup>

There is no doubt that the trend to see disaster as divine punishment on a faithless or sinful people can be read from many Old Testament texts. However when we put the ill fortunes of the Israelite people into the context of God's covenant we see how infidelity to the precepts of the Law concerning the place of Israel among the nations and concerning the poor and concerning care of the land could readily lead to disaster. To speak of it as punishment for sin may well be done once we become aware that it is the sin itself which wreaks havoc, either because it causes the havoc of imbalance or because

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<sup>9</sup> *Rituale Romanum Pauli V Pontificis Maximi jussu editum*, Appendix, De Benedictionibus no. 36. There are also blessings for bread, wine, cheese, beer, grapes, bees, water sources and various animals. Apart from specific acts of public worship, Saints such as Francis of Assisi and Hildegard of Bingen can be cited for their appreciation of nature and their spiritual and warm closeness to all created things which they could address in familiar and personal style and for which they blessed the God who created them.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> From the extensive literature, I would reference: Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant. Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* ( London: Sheed & Ward, Ltd, 1992); Daniel Hillel, *The Natural History of the Bible. An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

it ignores those precepts which taught people to live in solidarity in face of natural disasters or in combating the problems of living with unpredictable natural forces as a people.

The creation narratives of Genesis and all that pertains to the gifts of the earth belong in the context of the struggle with the land, and the struggle over the land, experienced by the people of Israel. They fit into a covenant tradition, with its granting of the land to the people and the commandments to tend it for the future. Living among a people of many deities and spirits Israel knew the one God first as their saviour and deliverer. While other peoples sought protection from their deities in their attempts to make the land fertile and in face of natural disasters, the Israelites were taught to see the creator of all things in their saviour. While they might be tempted to go to other gods to seek help in need they were taught to see all created things as good, coming from the hands of the one God. They also learned to see that while at times it was difficult to wrestle a living from the earth and they had to contest its possession with others, God wished human beings to live in harmony with the rest of creation. In other books of the Old Testament the people are invited to see the wisdom of the creator God in things over which they had no control (e.g. Job, Wisdom, Psalms), or indeed they are led in lament by their prophets when they see the land devastated and reduced to ruins because of the way in which it is treated (e.g. Lamentations 5, 1-5).

The work of Robert Murray may exemplify the placement of concern with and responsibility for creation within a covenant context. In a significant chapter he reads three texts that are decisive of how God's relation with the people subsumes their relation to the earth and their covenant responsibility towards it in serving a rule of peace and of

justice that embraces the impoverished.<sup>11</sup> These texts are Hosea 2: 2-23, Gen 8:1-9:17 and Isaiah 54:7 – 55:4. In the first of these passages the image of marital fidelity serves to express the covenant pact between God and Israel and the image of fertility is extended to include the earth so that in Hosea 18-23 peace includes reconciliation among peoples and preserving the rich fertility of the land, the two being interdependent. The story of the Flood and the restoration of the earth in the days of Noah in Gen 8 and 9 is attributed to the priestly writer. Murray contends that it emerges from kingly rituals of restoration but that the writer has demythologized the ritual and instead given us an epic narrative of a cosmic covenant in which the ruin visited on the earth is a consequence of human sin and the justice meted by God to the small remnant includes a covenant of preservation and restoration with the earth itself. The third text evoked by Murray, Isaiah 54, is one oft quoted by writers concerned with Israel's and humanity's ecological responsibility. Humans have their part in bringing about ruin of the land because of their disobedience to the covenant, inclusive of its prescriptions about the land and about the poor, but they are also recipient of the promises for the restoration of a kingdom of peace under God's wise servant and kingly ruler. Murray again perceives elements of kingly responsibility and cult in this text, now however transposed into a prophetic and eschatological proclamation.

He thinks that rituals which invoke creation included curses, blessings, prayers, stories and symbolic acts. Believing that social and communal ritual are vital to embracing shared responsibility in maintaining a tradition and in a special way for times when challenged by great evil affecting the whole order of things, he asks how a retrieval

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 27-37.

of the images and metaphors of the people of the Church as kingly people might be the ground for a new consciousness of responsibility for humanity's deference to earthly and cosmic order. Understanding the Church in this way allows communities in their liturgies to give more attention to covenant and cosmos and to highlight the above mentioned elements, centred around the Eucharist as memorial of the story of covenant in all its vicissitudes and of its eschatological realization in Jesus Christ, whose messianic character is described in both servant and cosmic metaphors throughout the New Testament.

The concerns of Israel in its cult with the community's relation to the land provide the symbolic dynamic that needs to be retrieved within Christian worship in face of today's tragedies. Relating to creation in mutuality and kinship rather than through domination is necessary and instead of stressing the command to dominate it is this which is to be taken from the reading of Hebrew traditions. Likewise we need to have new perspectives on the power balance needed among people is land is not to be exploited from profit and the needs of the poor, whatever the causes of poverty, are to be to the fore in the communion which Christian worship celebrates.

The cultural aspects of these transitions, well confirmed by today's abundant anthropological literature, is put by the biblical and Judaic scholar Daniel Hillel in his study on *The Natural History of the Bible* in these words: "culture is conditioned but not determined by attributes of natural environment: difference between long term and short term expectation of regional fixture; influence of personalities, of need to order social

relations both political and religious, of charismatic and prophetic leaders or voices; link between social and environmental; overlap in ritual roles”<sup>12</sup>

#### ECOLOGICAL SENSITIVITIES IN CURRENT SPIRITUALITIES

While these are not necessarily given liturgical expression, the spiritual response to earth’s cry within Christian spirituality is frequent though diverse. Much is encouraged within a development of the life of the Spirit that takes account of humanity’s place in the whole order of creation. The need for this is evoked first of all by a sense of solidarity with the poor and suffering in the pursuit of what is sometimes called eco-justice.<sup>13</sup> While the relation to creation may not be thought through in the same way by all a common concern is an orientation to justice for the poor and the eschatological vision of the restoration of the peaceable kingdom. When Christians consider the Incarnation they see it as an amazing condescension of the Word in identifying with humanity in this vastness of God’s creative work. Taking on human flesh, for the sake of humanity and of the created world, the Word is present by a creative act in every part and every movement of creation. Within the awareness of nature and cosmos that science has given us there is surely a fresh hearing of what is said of God’s presence in creation in the Book of Job or of the wonder expressed in many of the psalms, a wonder directed first to a contemplation of God’s works and then to a wonder that within this cosmic universe God

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<sup>12</sup> Hillel, *Ibid.*, 23/24.

<sup>13</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: a New Paradigm (Ecology and Justice)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

has looked upon humans with such particular and un-calculating love.<sup>14</sup> If there is reason to bemoan sin it is the sin of hubris, of the proud determination to dominate the universe.

Beyond the kind of eco-justice which favours a distribution of goods in favour of the poor and protests exploitation, there is the desire to forge a new sense of human peoples' relation to earth and cosmos. Without having to retrieve what look like naïve visions of God's actions in the cosmos the quest is to go beyond subjectivist perceptions and to promote the sense of being one with earth, on which account some appeal to the imagery of Gaia. This has its origin in the scientific world in order to explain how everything in the cosmos is intertwined in one living relationship. Religious writers on a whole do not enter into the scientific arguments, except to find in them a foundation for a grasp of the threat to environmental and human life by reason of human manipulation of natural resources. Gaia is thus a useful metaphor to ascribe an independence to the world's movements free from the effort of human domination to control while yet being affected by "his" mismanagement, bringing attention to how much the human in its historical manifestations is enmeshed in the movements and realities of nature.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See David N. Power, *Love without Calculation. A Reflection on Divine Kenosis.* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 149-157

<sup>15</sup> Something comparable to this is pursued in the Reformed tradition, with a point of departure in John Calvin's theology of creation and his idea that God is reflected in the beauty and wonder of creation. Well-known authors who have pursued this line of thought, such as Jürgen Moltmann and the Anglican scholar and scientist John Polkinghorne look to the whole of creation, in its splendorous and vast expanse, as the place for the working of divine energies.

In taking up anew retrieving a covenant tradition and the image of Gaia Rosemary Radford Ruether<sup>16</sup> and *aliae/alii* look to the intertwining of the human and nature which requires a keen human submission to this rather than the exercise of domination over ecological systems which are much beyond human ken. With this there is allied a retrieval of a Wisdom or Sophia portrait of Jesus which sees the relation between his death and his judgment on religious, political and economic forces that betray the elements of covenant regarding land and creation and the lot of the poor, of women and of minorities. Nothing less is needed than the redemption and restoration of a covenantal order which is comprehensive affecting both relation to earth and social ordering. This calls forth an eschatological hope for greater communion with energies in the universe, in a communion with God at the heart of things. Within this effort to live more deeply the relation between humankind and nature some advocate wilderness experience, which would lead us to a better appreciation of God's love for other beings and not allow us to look on everything only as it relates to human life<sup>17</sup> Ruether and others however want to see changes in the paradigm for modelling these relationships and believe that this requires a critique of the patriarchal conception of man's domination in the four areas of Christian theology which have to do with creation, judgment, sin and redemption. What is needed is a sustaining rather than dominating and destructive membership in the communion of all creatures.

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<sup>16</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecological Theology of Earth Healing* (HarperSanFrancisco 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Susan Power Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife. The Original Desert Solitaire* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 1993).

It appears in different forms of liberation theology that a redemptive sensitivity to nature is often rooted in the communities of the poor or the less affluent who live close to nature day to day, the kind of community which we have seen described as a 'sustainable community'. The aim is one of solidarity but focused on the particular, on the cultural reality of peoples in particular places with their own particular histories. In other words it pursues the sense of respect for persons and peoples in their particular location, looking to the kind of relationship they have with nature through their activities. It learns from their vision of the nature that surrounds them, peopled as it were by the life which holds things in being and which draws persons and communities into itself, so that human being is a communion in the being of all that the environment holds. Though in its missionary work the Church has long been suspicious of the religious view of *los indios*, that is of indigenous peoples, because of their way of seeing nature as animated, what may now be appreciated is the consciousness of life in all that surrounds human habitats and the sense of communion in life that belongs to the human person's own reality.

The eschatological horizon of belief is challenged by the findings of science but it is crucial just as prophecy in Israel spoke in eschatological terms of the coming kingdom. The vision of the new heaven and the new earth has to be reconciled with the understanding that the universe will outlast human habitation on earth and yet is acknowledged as God's continuing creative act: where does continued human consciousness and the promised resurrection relate to this vision? Our efforts to be respectful of nature and to steward its resources is important but it will not be a guarantee that the order known to us will survive the movement of cosmic energies. Yet we keep on

believing that human destiny is intertwined with the destiny of the universe and that Christ's Lordship, or our vision of the Cosmic Christ, embraces the whole of reality within the single love of the Creator God. Whatever the future of the cosmos or of the human race on this planet, the promise of God's love and of God's life is given to us in the covenant give in the person of Jesus Christ as he lived among the people of Galilee in their struggle with nature and with the powers of this earth that threatened their existence while pronouncing them blessed.

### WHAT OF LITURGIES

From all this it should be clear that integrating ecological consciousness into the practices of worship, or the pertinence of worship to environmental and human sufferings, struggles and hopes is not a matter of the conscientized writing new liturgies. It is rather a question of retrieving old traditions and symbolic harmonies with current perspectives once a community is aware of the environment, of human relations to it and of the need of caring for it.

A specific appeal to the ecological implications of Christian liturgical tradition is exemplified by something Benedict XVI said in his exhortation on the *Sacrament of Charity*:

The liturgy itself teaches us this, when, during the presentation of the gifts, the priest raises to God a prayer of blessing and petition over the bread and wine, "fruit of the earth," "fruit of the vine" and "work of human hands." With these words, the rite not only includes in our offering to God all human efforts and activity, but also leads us to see the world as God's creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be

utilized simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:4-12). The justified concern about threats to the environment present in so many parts of the world is reinforced by Christian hope, which commits us to working responsibly for the protection of creation.<sup>18</sup>

This should lead first to a fresh appreciation of the sacramental, that it is through the things of nature that impact human lives that Christ's presence and grace are offered and rendered operative. Much needs to be done, and can be done, to give tangible corporal reality to bread, wine, oil and water and to allow them be in truth fruits of the earth and work of human hands.<sup>19</sup> Their blessing in the name of Christ and their placement through the Spirit within the drama of salvation occurs when God is blessed for those things which nourish lives on earth and speak of a lived communion with nature. In appreciating their true reality as things of the earth and of communal life the nature of the liturgical assembly is brought into evidence for it is the assembly of those who live together sharing a common life in the hope of sustainable community. When communities in their varied places bring before God fruits of the earth and the work of their hands, they are

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<sup>18</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacrament of Charity. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist* (Vatican City: Vatican Polygot Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> The *General Instruction on the Roman Missal* (GIRM) 74 is indicative of the ambiguities of a liturgy distanced from its context. How can the offerings of bread and wine retain the significance which GIRM attaches to them when as it acknowledges they are no longer their own resources, no longer what the people themselves grow and make.

presenting the whole of human life in its symbiotic relationship with creation, its energies and its sufferings, so that by the work of the Spirit all this may be assumed into the mystery of the Incarnate One whose memory they keep.

At the root of this sacramental awareness there is the knowledge and remembrance of Christ's flesh and of his descent into hell, into the abode of death. However much death is taking hold of the world because of humanity's proud or even greedy exploitation there in our midst, there where clean waters no longer flow, there where floods destroy habitat and environment, there where people go hungry, there is Christ. Present in his love but present through his members, whom he asks to drink with him of the chalice of suffering. The invitation is not only to compassion in the heart but to compassion in deed. The worship of remembrance in dry wafer and sour wine is an impulse to a charity which sinks into the middle of an unjust world to speak there of the redeeming blood of Christ, that blood of which his followers drink whether the sacramental signs are present in abundance or in their very scarcity.

There is also a chanting in the heart of the hymn put on parchment in the letter of Paul to the Church of Colossus. These people it would seem were troubled by the hold on their lives that they attributed to earthly and to various heavenly powers, to what Paul calls the "powers of this age", powers that is of which people are held captive in fear when they do not know the promises given to them in Jesus Christ. But there is no need to be thus held captive for the Risen One is the Lord of creation and the Lord of the Church, in him and through the shedding of his blood the human family and the whole of creation are renewed and given peace.

What is however so often missing from Christian worship and its rituals is sensitivity to the global, to how in every day reality communities are bound in their own fate with the fate of the things around them of which they are a part. From worship traditions much is to be learned about blessings and small rituals associated with them. At Rogation times, celebrated in the season appropriate to each country, blessing of the fields and of animals with outdoor procession could do with revival. Apart from that there is ample room for including blessings within a Sunday liturgy, blessings of things of the earth that belong to daily life. Even in urban areas where keeping gardens is taken as a response to ecological failure this has its place. Members of both rural and urban community could present seeds and fruits or the bread and drink made from them for blessing and from these siphon off what goes to the care of the needy. The blessing of water also belongs in the liturgy and this is important when there are problems about access to healthful waters. There is a fine blessing in the 1614 Roman Ritual which is a blessing of a spring or other source from which people draw water for common use.<sup>20</sup> It asks that the water drawn therefrom and freed of demonic incursion may be to the good health of all who draw from it for drinking or for other uses and that God may grant that they enjoy its sweetness and that God acclaimed as saviour and sanctified may be blessed in its use. Such a blessing could actually be prayer within a liturgical assembly if water is brought from a living source and offered to be shared by those present. This kind of blessing is particularly pertinent when communities struggle together to procure safe drinking and cleansing water.

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<sup>20</sup> *Rituale Romanum*, Appendix 28.

At times performative ritual act could be attached to blessings. In *African Earthkeepers* for example Marthinus Daneel writes of the practice of planting and blessing a tree before the Eucharistic celebration in a place that has suffered much from deforestation.<sup>21</sup> Blessing and sending out fishing fleets accompanied by the prayer of the assembled community would be appropriated where fisheries are under threat, as would blessing of the, sometimes unfortunately polluted, sources and rivers from which people draw water. In his book *Passion for the Earth* Sean McDonagh writes of liturgies and devotions practiced among peoples seeking to create sustainable communities in time of travail.<sup>22</sup>

The prayer to which the memorial of covenant and of Christ invites worshippers is one of hope. Some biblical texts indeed indicate how repentance, hope and praise come together. Psalm 80/81 for the solemn renewal of the covenant starts as a call to praise for what God has given but turns to repentance for infidelities in the Law's observance. At Meribah in the desert the people complained against God when they had no water and when times were difficult they turned quickly to foreign gods, reverting no doubt to worship of deities and spirits at shrines throughout the land. This is an invitation to repentance for those today who deal badly with water resources or who fail to recognize how much failure to live the covenant of love in care for the poor and care for the land has brought on the disasters from which the world suffers. Those however who pledge

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<sup>21</sup> Daneel, *Ibid.*, 175-200.

<sup>22</sup> McDonagh, *Passion*, 147-154.

themselves to live by the covenant can hope for the promise that God will “feed them with finest wheat and fill them with honey from the rock”. In a similar way the canticle of Isaiah 12, 1-6 in its invitation to draw water from the wells of salvation belongs in a natural setting in which people needed to be careful about the waters destined to common use. In trust in God and in ever renewed and when necessary repentant fidelity to the covenant lies hope for the future.

The above are but some examples of what it is to celebrate mindful of the conditions of life, of what is offered in the biblical Word and what we learn from anthropological insights about the sensitivity of worship traditions to the immediacy of place and to the earth and environment in which cultural communities are embedded. Such insights are now of new importance for a world that has lost environmental sensitivity and for communities that struggle for their place in a more just global society. It is communities themselves which will map the ways in which ecological care finds its place in their corporate worship.

### Conclusion

Of Jesus Christ, God’s Son anointed with the Spirit, Word made flesh vibrating still in the world by this same Spirit, we keep remembrance and in doing so our sensitivity to the realities and resources of creation may be enhanced. We remember him as the prophet of Nazareth in Galilee, of the one who in face of poverty and earth’s impoverishment by the “powers of this age” dared to pronounce the “today” of the promises of his prophetic forerunners. We remember him in his descent into hell, in the self-emptying of his obedience when in testifying to the Father’s love he testified against those who would in their conceits and hubris hold the world in thrall. We remember him

Risen, first-born of humanity to a new life in God, first-born of all creation when it too is given the splendour of being the wondrous artefact of the loving relationship of Father, Son and Spirit, whose energies are ever at work in the hope that all things will when the day comes be subjected to the Father and all will know the peaceable kingdom.