

Theological Themes in a Warming World:

Judgement, Redemption and Coming Home

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Claims that regular record-breaking weather events are harbingers of worse to come may seem somewhat surreal, like a medical diagnosis with poor prognosis, but showing only minor immediate symptoms with which we may still comfortably live. However, we are now at the stage where concern about future impact of climate change has moved far beyond informed scientists and environmental activists. It is taken very seriously by many governments and by global financial bodies, which see it as likely to greatly increase geopolitical instability. Whatever our perspective, how best may we live in the present in order to prepare for the future in a warming world?

From its beginning, Christian faith has been future oriented. The promises of the presence of Christ 'to the end of the world' and of the already-present but yet to be fully realised reign of God call us to live with future orientation. The reign of God is about how we live now, and the visions of God's presence and God's future by which we live. Forgiving, being forgiven, reconciled and healed depend on change of heart, or metanoia, towards Christ, and prepare the way to being 'at home' with God. This paper explores the themes of judgment and redemption, reconciliation and coming home, in the context of the warming world.

Truth and Reconciliation as a model for ecological soteriology

Earth is our home, shared with myriad and diverse forms of life. In the scientific story of evolution we are all members of transient species in the flow of evolutionary becoming. We share common ancestry in deep history and uncertain destiny in a partially imaginable future. For a short time in cosmic history Earth is home for humankind but, as Ernst Conradie asks, are we at home on Earth?¹ At one level, this is a question about the place of humankind within global ecology, amenable to insights from research across all sciences. However, Conradie asks it as a Christian theologian. Where, he asks, is a 'suitable point of departure for a Christian anthropology' which can 'do justice to the soteriological thrust of the gospel?'² How may the gospel speak of homecoming for humankind when our finite Earth-home is under radical threat from a global economy driven by 'a suicidal compulsion to growth...a fallen Power',³ as Tim Gorringe describes it? How may the gospel speak to all creation, when our human ways

¹ Ernst M. Conradie, *An Ecological Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005

² Conradie, *An Ecological Anthropology*, p. 10

³ T. J. Gorringe, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 238

of living on Earth are causing many other species to go extinct through loss of habitat, and the Earth is steadily becoming less hospitable for those that have survived so far? What judgment must we come under in order for soteriological change to take root sufficiently widely so that the journey towards being at home on Earth becomes more hopeful, and our interdependence with all life on Earth is nourished by truth and justice?

To be at home is as much an expression of relatedness as of location. Whether or not we are at home depends on the dynamics of our relationships, with their capacity to be creative or destructive, to nurture or to oppress, to heal or to hurt, to reconcile or to alienate. For Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, being at home is grounded in trust and memory.

Home is about belonging, connectedness, and shared memories. Home involves relationships of trust. To be at home in the world, indeed to be at home within ourselves, we must be in a home that is shared. Home is a matter of community...Home is always rooted in memory. Indeed, there is no vision, no future-directed hope, apart from memory.⁴

For the most part, our immediate experiences of being at home are shaped by the relationships which make up daily life. These form an inner circle within which we are more or less at home in ourselves, with those around us, and with our daily environment. As we are reminded from time to time, that inner circle of relationship is entirely dependent on a vast global network of relationships, with deep evolutionary roots and a future with both hopeful and fearful possibilities. The question of whether we are at home on Earth is local and global, and may be asked at every level from the inner self to the total community of life. Could we ever really be at home on Earth in the midst of the suffering which is so inherently part of the evolution of life, and so intractably part of human affairs? Intimations of transcendence, journeys of faith, and inheritance of faith traditions expand the context of the question further. Could we be at home with God without being at home on Earth, or could we be at home on Earth, despite the prevalence of suffering, because we are at home with God?

The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are about journeying towards being at home with God. As in other traditions, myth and memory give identity and meaning, providing roots from which 'future directed hope' may grow. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh observe that:

it seems there is indeed something universal about narratives of exile and return, of homelessness and the perilous journey back home. Humans are incurable storytellers, and our stories seem to be preoccupied with home.⁵

In the Hebrew Scriptures the Israelites make the journey to an earthly home, a land promised by God

⁴ Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2008, pp. xi, xii

⁵ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, p. 11

where God will dwell with them. The narratives of wilderness, settlement and kingdom tell of how the 'land of homecoming devolves into a cursed and idolatrous land of expropriation and homelessness'⁶ as the people turn away from God. As the monarchy era drew to a close, Jerusalem became less and less a place for people to be at home with God until, in Ezekiel's vision, God's Glory finally departed.⁷ The prophets emphatically affirmed that the death and destruction which followed were God's just retribution for sins but, terrifying as that was, there was still hope—hope beyond disaster and against all appearances. God would restore a remnant with renewed heart to a renewed Jerusalem, to live rightly with each other and towards God. The narrative of journey has become one of judgment, of decimation, exile, renewal and return. Today we too face existential threats, particularly in the forms of climate change and potential for massively destructive warfare. As these threats overshadow life on Earth today could the biblical memories of failed relationships, denial, judgment, decimation, exile, renewal and return form a fearful template for the future of humankind in the next few centuries? Rowan Williams captures the human dimension of suffering which could lie ahead:

Not the least horror of our present circumstances is the prospect of a world of spiralling inequality and a culture that has learned again to assume what Christianity has struggled to persuade humanity against since its beginning—that most human beings are essentially dispensable, born to die.⁸

It does not have to be so. What would it take for the story of the next few centuries to unfold as a time of progressive peace and of reconciliation, people with people, and people with the world-wide web of life? How could we progress towards living together amidst a thriving creation in reverent awe at our very existence, the mystery of our Creator? What has Christian memory and hope to offer in this present time of denial and of fear?

Israel's story forms the background of Christian imagination. In the Christian Scriptures, homecoming is imagined in widely differing ways some of which are, at least prima facie, in extreme tension with each other. The apocalyptic visions in *Revelation* resonate with Israel's story of exile and return. However, this time the people of God are re-defined, and so too is Jerusalem. The new people of God are coming home to the New Jerusalem in New Heavens and a New Earth. The images are highly divisive, bringing hope and consolation to 'God's peoples', but there are also those who are not 'God's peoples' and who are consigned to terror and exclusion.⁹ Violent biblical images even include images of the destruction of the Earth itself. As Ann Primavesi observes, it is an:

'inconvenient truth' that certain readings of sacred texts, and traditional images based on them, have both provided and sanctified violent images of God which have in turn sanctioned

⁶ Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness*, p. 19

⁷ Ezek 10

⁸ Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, London, Bloomsbury, 2012, p. 181

⁹ A particularly vivid example is found in Revelation 21.1–8

violence of all kinds.¹⁰

In contrast, the main soteriological thrust of the gospel is about God's love for the world, and God reconciling of the world to God through Jesus. Jesus' parables of the reign of God include homecoming expressed in homely images of God as loving parent welcoming home a lost child, of a residence with place for all, and of abundance of generous hospitality.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus contends with those who hold that God's way gives precedence to retribution rather than to reconciliation and healing of relationships. He tells them 'you have heard that it was said...but I say to you', and goes on to insist that reconciliation must precede coming to God.¹¹ Heather Thomson describes Jesus as:

engaged in an argument about God—what God is like, what God requires of us, what God's justice is like and what God's desire is for reconciliation. This became for him an argument to the death.¹²

Thomson's concern is with the gospel as the power of God for reconciliation amongst peoples who have a bitter history of oppression and conflict. Her examples include Northern Ireland and South Africa, where deeply divided people share the same space but often are far from being at home with each other. Exposing and naming evil done, hearing the stories of victims and perpetrators, and opening the door to forgiveness can and sometimes does bring deep reconciliation and healing. When the course of justice is pursued with priority given to restoration rather than retribution, truth is told, anguish is shared, and reconciliation is possible. Thomson proposes that transition, rather than retribution, is a better way of approaching what God's justice is like.

While divine justice has long been associated with retributive justice, I am suggesting that divine justice may be better thought of as transitional justice, enabling a move from the regimes that govern this world to entry into the reign of God. This reign is epitomised by Jesus, the Prince of Peace.¹³

The 'soteriological thrust of the gospel' finds practical outworking in truth-telling and reconciliation as healing process. Conradie's aim to bring the 'soteriological thrust of the gospel' to the human journey towards being at home on Earth may also be thought of in terms of truth-telling and reconciliation expanded to include the whole web of relationships which make us human. Thomson identifies the myths ('as in falsities') of difference and superiority/inferiority we have about 'others' as drivers of

¹⁰ Anne Primavesi, 'Transforming the Theological Climate in Response to Climate Change. Jesus and the Mystery of Giving', in *Nature, Space and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. S. Bergmann, et al., Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p. 22

¹¹ Mt 5:21, 22.

¹² Heather Thomson, *The Things that Make for Peace*, Canberra, Barton Books, 2009, p. 6

¹³ Thomson, *The Things that Make for Peace*, p. 5

violence and violation of relationships.¹⁴ Exposing and repudiating these myths is a necessary part of truth-telling and reconciliation. When humankind is imagined to be superior to the rest of creation, it tends to legitimate environmental destruction. The Earth, however, is not simply an acquiescent home for the benefit of humankind. Ecologically, humankind is not 'other', but is integrally part of the total Earth community. We are as dependent on the Earth and as much part of it as the brain is to the whole of the body. We have the capacity to think, plan, and to reflect on meaning and shape the future, all of which ends in frustration if the body as a whole is in decline. However, the body-brain analogy is at best partial. Without humankind, the community of life would continue on its evolutionary journey. Theologically, too, the Earth independent of humans is still the good creation of a loving Creator. It is an 'inconvenient truth' that readings of the sacred text which have God giving to humans 'dominion' over the rest of creation have often led to environmental violence. Like other readings which have been used to legitimate violence, such readings have to be rejected when the reign of God is understood to be about ecological justice, healing and reconciliation.

A 'truth and reconciliation' approach to destructive alienation of humans from the rest of the global environment requires that the Earth be given voice. Norman Habel laments that in Enlightenment thought 'Earth and creation are not considered living entities with voices to be heard' and that 'The many biblical references to land, sea, forests or fauna lamenting their plight have been interpreted as irrelevant poetic metaphors'.¹⁵ Such interpretations are alien to Habel's own exegetical focus, which is on biblical interpretations which 'read Earth as a subject rather than an object in the text'.¹⁶ In doing so, he sees 'The Principle of Voice' as one of six fundamental 'Ecojustice Principles'.¹⁷ Poetry and metaphor have a long history as language of empathy, including with the Earth. Whatever language is used, sensitive awareness of our interconnectedness within creation is highly relevant to shaping how we live on earth. The responsibility to hear, understand and articulate what the Earth is saying falls on mediators, advocates and visionaries from within the human community. As Habel says, such people 'are summoned, like the prophets of old, to confront and comfort, to represent Earth and the creatures of Earth to all in our community'.¹⁸ Their prophetic witness draws on the most ancient to the most modern modes of awareness of Earth. Indigenous peoples, although often marginalised and ignored, have deep bonds with 'country' which lie at the heart of identity and spirituality. They are uniquely aware of what Earth is saying, and grieve at what they hear.¹⁹ Scientists represent the most modern mode of environmental truth-telling, and are more likely to be heard in the corridors of Earth-destroying power. However, to break the hard shell of anthropocentric utilitarianism, we also need those whom Rosemary Radford Ruether describes as 'scientist-poets who can retell the story...in a way that can call us to wonder, to reverence for life, and to the vision of humanity living in community with all its sister and brother

¹⁴ Thomson, *The Things that Make for Peace*, pp. 74, 75

¹⁵ Norman Habel, *Rainbow Mysteries: Meeting the Sacred in Nature*, Kelowna BC, Wood Lake Publishing Inc., 2012, p. 125

¹⁶ Norman Habel, ed. *Readings from the Perspective of Earth, Vol. 1, The Earth Bible*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, p. 34

¹⁷ Habel, *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Habel, *Rainbow Mysteries: Meeting the Sacred in Nature*, p. 134

¹⁹ Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, Hindmarsh, SA, ATF, 2007, pp. 42–54. Randy Woodley gives a North American indigenous perspective: Randy S. Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2012

beings'.²⁰ Of course one does not have to be a scientist, a scientist-poet or a traditional story-teller to listen to the Earth and advocate for Earth with truth and power. It is a calling confronting anyone who sees and has heart-felt understanding of how the Earth is changing under human influence.

For environmental reconciliation to take place, truth needs to be told and heeded at many levels. There is the empirical, evidence-based truth which tells us as accurately as scientific resources permit what is happening to Earth as a result of human activity, and what is likely to happen in the future. This is truth based on reason and, despite the denials of those who see it as a threat to their interests, it is achieving a wide measure of intellectual acceptance. The next level of truth is living true to what is known and understood. Living in truth is concerned with the vastly more complex area of human behaviour, attitudes and beliefs and, as Williams insists:

If we are to find any realism or truth in our engagement with the accelerating crisis of our environment, we need more than reason—or at least, more than reason defined in the professedly neutral way that modernity has sought to understand it.²¹

One meaning of truth which Robert Schreiter describes is 'coherence among a set of beliefs and practices'.²² Agreement on how to articulate truth and on what is reasonable becomes more difficult when multiple sets of belief and practice are at play. However, when beliefs are put into practice, truth may become embodied and expressed in living relationships which have potential to transcend diversity of belief. Words may fail, but inter-personal, inter-communal and international responses to need, 'doing to others as you would have them do to you', are living signs of a deeper truth which is shared by many of the 'myths' by which people of widely different beliefs live.²³

The embodiment of truth is central to Christian thought, most explicitly in John's gospel. In the gospel, Jesus declares he is 'the way, the life and the truth'.²⁴ John confronts the reader with supreme irony when Jesus stands before Pilate and declares the very purpose of his life is 'to testify to the truth'—provoking Pilate's response 'What is truth?'²⁵ In the gospel, the creation comes into being through the incarnate Word, so in Christian thought creation is inseparable from God's creative Word who is Truth. As Williams describes it, creation flows as gift from the relational and self-giving heart of God:

To put it at its strongest, what this theology claims is that what most deeply and basically is the self-giving action of God; everything that happens to exist, everything that belongs

²⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*, New York, Harper Collins, 1994, p. 58

²¹ Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 176

²² Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1998, p. 117.

²³ Lk 6:31 Similar statements of this 'golden rule' are found in many faith and secular traditions. See, for example, M. J. Joseph, 'The Golden Rule of The Asian Religions', *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol 26, No 1, 2012, pp 131–139

²⁴ Jn 14:6. This text goes on to say 'and no one comes to the Father but by me', which is dangerously open to being used to justify attitudes which exclude others. Thomson's understanding of Jesus having an argument to the death about what God is like is particularly relevant.

²⁵ Jn 18:37, 38

in the interlocking pattern of the intelligible world, is, and is the way it is, in virtue of this underlying reality which is God's giving. This reality is eternal and self-sufficient in the life of God as trinity, as the everlasting exchange of gift between Father, Son and Spirit; but by God's free decision it is also the ground for what is not God.²⁶

As creatures made in the image of God, humankind is called to respond in truthful relationship with God and all creation. We are gifted to live as a conscious and responsible part of creation, supporting one another and all creation in light of all being gift from God. Williams takes up what understanding creation as gift implies:

To understand creation as a gift from God, as something that makes relation with God possible, is also to become able to make creation a gift—to receive it from God in blessing and thanksgiving, to offer it back to God by this blessing and gratitude (that is, to let go of the idea that it is just there for our use), and to use it as a means of sharing the divine generosity with others.²⁷

He describes understanding creation as gift as a 'truthful "myth"' by which to live. We then 'shall only tell the truth about the world as and when we treat the world accordingly'.²⁸ When any part of creation—human and non-human—is treated as something to be exploited for exclusive and selfish use, then true relationship is violated, and violence is perpetuated. Truthful, restorative justice is necessary to break this downward spiral. Reconciliation, justice and truth are inseparable, as Schreiter points out: 'Reconciliation, as I have tried to show, is about truth. The violence perpetrated against victims is fundamentally a lie about their existence and how they stand before God. That is why truth is essential to justice.'²⁹

A truth and reconciliation approach to soteriology affirms the ongoing interdependence of the parties concerned. Transitional justice has no place for objectifying the 'other', seeking some economic or technical solution to the problem of alienation, and then disengaging. This recognition of interdependence makes truth, reconciliation and transitional justice particularly applicable to ecological soteriology. We simply cannot disengage from the Earth, because we are part of it and our future is part of the Earth's future. In Christian soteriology, reconciliation and healing in our earthly relationships are an expression of the journey towards being at home with God. They are signs of a new creation, and the already present reign of God into which we are drawn through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Thomson describes the atonement in terms of transitional justice:

The atonement was characterised by mercy and forgiveness overriding the usual demands

²⁶ Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 178

²⁷ Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 177

²⁸ Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 179

²⁹ Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies*, p. 99

of justice to allow the conditions for reconciliation to be created. It was a work of grace that allowed for a peaceful transition from old rules (living under sin and death, living over against others as rivals)...into a new rule, the reign of God.³⁰

Although high levels of international cooperation have enabled a basic level of environmental truth-telling to be widely accepted, 'living over against others as rivals' stands as a formidable barrier to the cooperation required to adequately address global warming. Fossil carbon remains the currency of energy geopolitics, bestowing power and advantage to those who control it. Wars have been fought over access to oil, and nations continue to exert leverage on each other using it.³¹ Such rivalry is tenacious and ultimately Earth-destroying, standing as it does in the way of living in truth in light of knowledge about fossil fuel use and climate futures. These rivalries reflect 'forms of structural violence deeply embedded in social patterns'³² and are a continual brake on progress towards social and ecological reconciliation and healing. They are not true to the creative patterns of Earth, which in Christian faith perspective reflect the relational glory of God.

As Conradie notes, global warming is having both unifying and divisive effects:

I would argue that the dangers of climate change can only be addressed on the basis of some form of reconciliation which would facilitate cooperation between people from different continents, cultures and religions. Although climate change necessarily requires a collective effort from the international community, it has also put a new spin into old rivalries and lead to further polarisation—between East and West, between North and South, between (over)-industrialised and so-called 'developing' economies, between gated communities and (environmental) refugees, between previous generations and coming generations and between the interests of humans and of other species.³³

The Christian good-news is about peaceful transition from 'old ways' of rivalry, injustice, and structural and personal sin to 'new rule' of the reign of God. The transition is characterised by movement towards greater mercy, grace and generosity towards all humankind and all creation. Carol Dempsey describes this as change to 'hospitality of heart... the motivating principle of justice' which prepares the way for a new heaven and a new earth.³⁴ In rendering justice, the transition requires naming of injustice, confession, repentance and forgiveness. It includes transcending the rivalries and healing the polarisations which Conradie names. Ecological transitional justice radically challenges the global economic structures and habits which are driving the growing ecological debt underlying these polarizations. As Northcott insists:

³⁰ Thomson, *The Things that Make for Peace*, pp. 90, 91

³¹ Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: the New Landscape of Global Conflict*, New York, Metropolitan, 2001

³² Ernst Conradie, 'The Salvation of the Earth from Anthropogenic Destruction: In Search of Appropriate Soteriological Concepts in an Age of Ecological Destruction', *Worldviews*, Vol. 14, 2010, p. 118

³³ Conradie, 'The Salvation of the Earth from Anthropogenic Destruction', p. 129

³⁴ Carol J. Dempsey, *Justice, A Biblical Perspective*, St. Louis, Chalice Press, 2008, p. 51

Only when the rich confess the ecological harms, or 'ecological debts', with which they burden the poor and other species through the deregulated global economy will it be possible for the poor to gain justice and for climate debts to be justly redeemed.³⁵

If greenhouse gas emissions continue on their present course,³⁶ pressure on resources and places to live will rise dramatically, and people's inclination to be generous and sacrificial will be stretched to the limit. Without sacrificial generosity, Williams' warning of the likely horror of those privileged with power in a world of spiralling inequality leaving large numbers of others to their fate in a warming Earth will become a hellish reality.

'Worst-case scenarios' due to global warming are sufficiently well understood for major world economic bodies to be sounding alarm,³⁷ and for increasing urgent efforts to be made to envisage how the worst can be avoided. In the next section, some of these secular attempts to redeem the situation are brought into conversation with the biblical themes of judgment and redemption, righteousness and peace on Earth.

Righteousness, Judgment and Redemption

When James Lovelock uses his scientifically informed metaphor of Gaia for the self-regulating Earth, he sees Gaia as angrily threatening devastating judgment on humankind:

Unfortunately, we are a species with schizoid tendencies, and like an old lady who has to share her house with a growing and destructive group of teenagers, Gaia grows angry, and if they do not mend their ways she will evict them.³⁸

By using this metaphor, Lovelock captures the judgment of cause and effect. Human activity which is causing global warming will inevitably make Earth less homely. Eviction is death; death of non-human species and, in a worst case scenario, death of a large number of humans. It is a shocking metaphor, and meant to be so. In using the Gaia metaphor, Lovelock does much more than capture the cause and effect of climate change. The metaphor provokes questions which cluster around judgment. Who, in justice, should be judged guilty and held to account? Who and what will be first to experience the eviction of death? Is there time for those judged guilty to mend their ways? What obligations do those judged guilty have towards all life on earth, human and non-human? How do such obligations to the creation reflect obligations to the Creator?

³⁵ Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007, p. 43

³⁶ Daniel Cusick, 'Fossil Fuel Use Continues to Rise', *Scientific American*, 25 October 2013, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/fossil-fuel-use-continues-to-rise/>

³⁷ World Bank, 'Climate Change Overview', <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/climatechange/overview> (accessed 1 May 2014)

³⁸ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, London, Allen Lane, 2006, p. 47

In Christian thought, these questions may be explored in terms of 'righteousness' and cognate ideas.³⁹ James Dunn argues that in the Christian scriptures, the meaning of 'righteousness' is informed more by Hebrew thought than Greek thought. It is more about lived relationships than an objective ideal:

In the typical Greek worldview, "righteousness" is an idea or ideal against which the individual and individual action can be measured... In contrast, in Hebrew thought "righteousness" is more a relational concept—'righteousness' as the meeting of obligations laid upon the individual by the relationship of which he or she is part.⁴⁰

Commenting on Romans 5:1, Joseph Fitzmeyer similarly identifies the importance of Hebrew thought to the meaning of righteousness. The peace which is the result of righteousness is not simply an individual state, but embraces all in the peace of God:

"Peace" is to be understood, not in the sense of peace of mind or conscience about sins forgiven... but in the positive sense of shalom, the fullness of right relationship that is implied in justification itself and of all the other bounties that flow from it.⁴¹

Righteousness understood in this relational way may be thought of as an expression of humanity being shaped in the image of God, living as a creative part of shalom of God.⁴² Unrighteousness works against shalom, and in an ecological context absence of shalom is a consequence of ecological sin.⁴³

Brueggemann describes shalom as 'the substance of the biblical vision embracing all creation. It refers to all those resources and factors that make communal harmony joyous and effective.'⁴⁴ It is much more than peace, in the sense of absence of conflict. Randy Woodley sees shalom as God's new order for the world:

God's preferred order of existence for our world is shown by such images in Scripture as the garden of Eden, the Sabbath system, and Jubilee. Other shalom descriptions come to mind from the prophets, such as God's Holy Mountain and the Great Day of the Lord. Images of shalom in the Second Testament concern the advent of the Messiah, the Kingdom of God, and the church.⁴⁵

³⁹ The Greek root is *dikai*. Derived words are typically translated into English as 'righteous', 'justified' and related words. See, for example Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible, New York, Doubleday, 1993

⁴⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998, p. 341

⁴¹ Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, p. 395

⁴² Conradie says of the image of God, it is 'a dynamic longing which constitutes creaturely personhood, a longing for the participation in the peaceful life of the eternal triune God' Conradie, *An Ecological Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, p. 173

⁴³ Conradie, 'Towards an Ecological Reformulation of the Christian Doctrine of Sin', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Vol. 122, 2005, p. 16, where Conradie refers to several ways in which other theologians have attempted to describe ecological sin

⁴⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Peace Living Toward a Vision*, St Louis Chalice Press, 2001, p. 14

⁴⁵ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, p. 11

In both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, divine judgment falls on peoples who are unrighteous, living in violation of the right relationships on which the divine blessing of shalom depends. In today's world, the decline in global ecological peace and well-being may be thought of as the ecological result of unrighteousness. Dale Patrick defines judgment 'as the deliberative procedure dedicated to determining guilt and innocence with respect to social norms.'⁴⁶ This definition may be developed to define judgement in an ecologically more comprehensive way. The norm against which judgment is made may be taken as ecological shalom, in the sense of all-embracing relationships which support the thriving of life, both human and non-human, in all its beauty and diversity. Woodley describes those who live in harmony with this norm as 'Jesus' shalom-keepers', living in 'a Sabbath way, a Jubilee lifestyle, and a shalom way of being in, with, and for the community of creation'.⁴⁷

The 'deliberative procedure' in ecological judgment has many dimensions. Among these are attentive listening to the Earth, a relentless commitment to critical assessment of how humankind is living on Earth, and placing all within a frame of reference in which the immanent call to live righteously in the here and now is placed within a vision of shalom which extends to the deep future. This expanded form of ecological judgment may be used to deliberate in both secular and theological frames. There is much common ground between secular and theological ecological judgment, but there are also profound differences. Each is concerned to expose how humankind is causing ecological degradation, and each seeks to identify and judge the particular agents doing so. Each is also concerned to bring about individual and communal change of mind and habits so that there is a way forward towards a more hopeful future. The differences lie in the absence or presence of belief in God, which determines where ultimate accountability is located, what horizons of hope are imagined, and how the means and power to effect change are understood.

Lovelock's Gaia metaphor is visionary and despite using an ancient Greek religious image, it is essentially secular. Ultimate accountability is to the natural world and judgment evolves impassively and relentlessly under the forces of nature. If the ecologically precarious situation of humankind is to be redeemed, sufficient of humankind will have to mobilise the will, ingenuity and energy to 'mend their ways'. If there is transcendent hope, it lies in sufficient people now and in the future transcending the constraints of thought and will which so easily make energy-intensive growth models of the global economy seem normative. The Gaia metaphor is a broad one, imagining the destiny of all humankind within the community of the Earth as a whole. Likening how humankind is living on Earth to debt and living beyond one's means is a more immediate way of describing ecological judgment. This analogy brings it 'close to home', which Alistair Hannay sees as critical to public engagement.⁴⁸ Naomi Oreskes, describes climate change as being:

about a way of life that does not reckon the true cost of living, an economics that does not

⁴⁶ Dale Patrick, *Redeeming Judgment*, Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2012, p. 3

⁴⁷ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, p. 40

⁴⁸ Alistair Hannay, *On The Public*, Abingdon, Rutledge, 2005, p. 62

take into account environmental damage and loss. Climate change is the ultimate accounting: it is the bill for a century of unprecedented prosperity, generated by the energy stored in fossil fuels. By and large, this prosperity has been a good thing. More people live longer and healthier lives than before the industrial revolution.⁴⁹ The problem, however, is that those people did not pay the full cost of that prosperity. And the remainder of the bill has become due.⁵⁰

Woodley bluntly describes the modern age as 'Dead on Arrival'. It is a human project which has a dualistic and anthropocentric philosophical foundation, driving alienation from creation as a whole, and inevitably leading to disaster. 'The industrial age and neo-colonialism, following the era of colonialism, have written a check to our world that has insufficient funds. We are doomed to die if we don't change course.'⁵¹ A minority of humankind has taken out a mortgage on the Earth, the home to all living creatures. As the debt accumulates and repayments are few, judgment is already at the door. Is it ever possible to redeem this environmental debt? It may be tempting to refinance the debt by taking out a new loan, in the hope of going on living on Earth in much the same way as at present, including ongoing large-scale use of fossil carbon. Geo-engineering is one such possibility. Could we not intentionally modify the atmosphere to reflect some of the sunlight, or modify the oceans to absorb more of the carbon dioxide? Clive Hamilton exposes the danger of geo-engineering is such ways, and forewarns against it.⁵² Could we not capture the carbon dioxide from fossil fuel combustion and store it underground?⁵³ A brief respite might just be possible,⁵⁴ but in the end the cost could be even greater with stored gas leaking back into the atmosphere, laying the burden of deeper environmental debt on future generations.

There are many ways of attempting to manage the mortgage and move more hopefully into the future without engaging in speculative and potentially dangerous intentional modification of the atmosphere, the land and the oceans. It is a task of enormous complexity, demanding innovative multidisciplinary research which brings together multiple influences on the Earth. This 'Earth System Analysis' is being

⁴⁹ Oreskes' assessment that 'by and large this prosperity has been a good thing' raises questions of 'for whom?', and about the ambiguity of fossil carbon and how its use brings both blessing and curse.

⁵⁰ Haydn Washington and John Cook, *Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand*, London, Earthscan, 2011. Forward by Naomi Oreskes, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁵¹ Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*, p. 64. Also see pp. 61, 62, where he gives an eight point assessment of critique of philosophy underlying 'western' modernity.

⁵² Clive Hamilton, *Earth Masters: Playing God with the climate*, Crows Nest, NSW, Allen and Unwin, 2013, p. 51 on reflecting sunlight, and pp. 20-50 on carbon dioxide removal.

⁵³ This possibility is advocated by the Australian Coal Association, Low Emissions Technology. See 'Australian Coal Association Low Emissions Technologies', www.acalet.com.au (accessed 1 April 2014).

⁵⁴ Writing in the *Financial Review*, 12 July 2013, Tony Woods states that 'Integrated CSG remains unproven at a commercial scale. Lack of industry advocacy or policy support means that CSG development is almost hopelessly behind the projections of the International Energy Agency and Treasury modelling of the last few years.' http://www.afrc.com/p/australia2-0/carbon_capture_cure_no_one_wants_7wHJJaWFEQ9aIDzMLuJslieM (accessed 8 July 2014).

described as a 'New Copernican Revolution'⁵⁵ and is the focus of extensive international co-operation.⁵⁶ The sheer scale of required transition away from fossil carbon as primary energy source is daunting, but technological innovation already is making alternatives financially competitive. Substantial substitution already is occurring in some industrialised economies, setting an emerging pattern for much more widespread change. In an environment as complex as the global economy, global-scale transformation could occur quite rapidly, even in face of opposition from interests concerned to maximize return on current enormous investments in fossil carbon and its exploitation.⁵⁷ Visionary leadership, technological change, movements from within populations, and the actual growing impact of changing climate will all play a part in making the transition politically possible. In the meantime, as we continue to drive global warming, there is increasing likelihood that runaway positive-feedback mechanisms may make global warming even worse than current modelling suggests.⁵⁸ Climate-related disasters and consequent geopolitical strife would then make Earth increasingly difficult to be at home in. Gaia's judgmental 'revenge' will become a harsh and ongoing fact of life, and evidence of judgment will literally be at the door.

Secular judgment on who is causing climate change can be passionate, as people perceive threats to prosperity, and fear for the future. In the Bible, particularly in the Hebrew Scriptures, many narratives of threat from extreme weather events or from the geopolitics of the time are widely interpreted in terms of divine judgment. When God is believed to be acting through disasters, whether they are at first sight due to human or natural causes, passions are aroused to a new level. People speaking in the name of God are not presenting reasoned analysis, although they may use them. They are proclaiming ultimate indictments. In the Biblical narratives prophets proclaim that God purposefully intervenes in nature and in human affairs in order to bring about judgment on the unrighteous. Dale Patrick observes that: 'The contemporary theologian is not obliged to adhere to the concept of direct supernatural intervention. All that is required is to accord certain events the status of divine punishment or interdiction.'⁵⁹

Patrick's suggestion is a dangerous one. On what basis may a contemporary theologian decide which events have such status? When disaster strikes, populist preachers may rush in to proclaim that the disaster is because God is judging the nation for some perceived godless immorality against which they have been preaching.⁶⁰ Their zeal deflects from more searching analysis of social, political and

⁵⁵ H. J. Schellnhuber, 'Earth System' analysis and the second Copernican revolution', *Nature*, Vol. 402, No. 6761, 1999.

⁵⁶ L. Brito, L. and M. Stafford-Smith, 2012. State of the Planet Declaration: Planet Under Pressure. New Knowledge Towards Solutions conference, London, 26-29 March 2012. Available at http://www.planetunderpressure2012.net/pdf/state_of_planet_declaration.pdf (accessed 8 July 2014).

⁵⁷ John Schellnhuber and Ottmar Edenhofer, 'Post Carbon Pathways', http://www.postcarbonpathways.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/JS-and-OE-interview_final2.pdf. In this interview John Wiseman provides a wide-ranging overview from a European perspective. 'Post Carbon Pathways', Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, <http://www.sustainable.unimelb.edu.au/content/pages/post-carbon-pathways> (accessed 9 July 2014). This website gives an Australian perspective and many links to other resources.

⁵⁸ Tony Phillips, 'Is Arctic Permafrost the "Sleeping Giant" of Climate Change', *Science@NASA*, http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2013/24jun_permafrost/ (accessed 2 June 2014).

⁵⁹ Patrick, *Redeeming Judgment*, p. 289.

⁶⁰ Dan Via cites 'Falwell and his cohorts' doing so after the attack on the New York Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. Dan O Via, *Divine Justice, Divine Judgment*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007, pp. 3-4.

environmental issues which may also call the preacher (usually a man) and his supporters to account. Their 'pontification' causes others who, like Philip Yancey, look deeper, to 'cringe',⁶¹ and depends on a dangerous confidence about what God is like. Abraham Heschel offers a deeper theology of prophecy and divine judgment.

Heschel's understanding of prophetic pronouncement of divine judgment brings together the complex dynamics of history and how humankind lives on earth, and a theology which understands God as passionate and compassionate. Heschel describes a prophet as a person:

who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he is bowed and stunned at man's fierce greed. Frightful is the agony of man; no human voice can convey its full terror. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet's words.⁶²

God, as Heschel asserts, is not impassive, but is 'moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly'.⁶³ God's 'raging' through the prophet's words and actions is an expression of the pathos of God and the passionate way in which God relates to humankind and all creation. The 'divine pathos' is:

the unity of the eternal and the temporal, of meaning and mystery, of the metaphysical and the historical. It is the real basis of the relation between God and man, of the correlation of Creator and creation, of the dialogue between the Holy One of Israel and His people. The characteristic of the prophets is not foreknowledge of the future, but insight into the pathos of God.⁶⁴

When extreme climate events or earthquakes cause great suffering, particularly to those who are already vulnerable, God's 'raging' is not manifest in the events themselves. God's rage is against all the unrighteousness and injustice which exacerbates the suffering and destruction.⁶⁵ When we live in ways careless of both Creator and creation, then we are living unrighteously. Those most caught up in the suffering do not suffer as a result of their own unrighteousness, as Sobrino makes clear.⁶⁶ They are in a sense sharing in the suffering of the crucified Christ,⁶⁷ and find a measure of redemption in God's

⁶¹ Philip Yancey, 'National tragedy and the empty tomb: not even senseless murder can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus', *Christianity Today*, Vol 57, No. 3, (2013), p 27

⁶² Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York, Harper and Row, 1962, p 5

⁶³ Heschel, *The Prophets*, p 224

⁶⁴ Heschel, *The Prophets*, p 231

⁶⁵ As Jon Sobrino observes, tragedies may have natural causes, but the extent of suffering is often due to poverty and injustice. Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity and Hope*, trans Margaret Wilde, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2004, pp. 3–5, 15.

⁶⁶ Sobrino, *Where is God?*, Ch 4 'The Crucified People', pp. 49–70 and pp. 56, 57. 'All it needs is to strike a structurally poor country, and we can take as given it will destroy mostly poor homes and injure mostly poor people.'

⁶⁷ Sobrino, *Where is God?*, pp. 77–80

presence experienced as 'solidarity, love and hope' in the midst of suffering.⁶⁸

Conradie suggests that redemption 'could be understood as a creative process in which God allows something new to emerge out of a world infected by sin'.⁶⁹ Love, hope, and solidarity are redemptive as they emerge amongst and with those who are victims of disasters. They are redemptive in the obvious sense of bringing people together to restore more normal conditions. However, they are redemptive at a deeper level. Disasters, whether experienced or observed, can and do lead people to radical change in belief about what matters in life. Redemption may then be worked out in living more towards rather than against shalom. In the context of climate change, this means accepting obligation towards all creation, human and non-human. This calls for what Sobrino describes as 'a "will" to truth; we must want to know the reality and not conceal it'.⁷⁰ Re-shaping how to live with will to truth in view of this obligation is counter-cultural and against the grain of high-energy consumer-oriented society. As Anne Elvey and David Gormley-O'Brien put it, what is necessary is 'a radical and culturally-subversive reappraisal of how we as humans are to live'.⁷¹ Working towards shalom requires reorientation from cultural mind-sets in which pursuit of privilege and material wealth alienate people from one another and the natural world. It calls for a metanoia, or re-orientation of mind towards righteousness expressed in loving and constructive inter-dependence, and redemptively forged in truth-telling and reconciliation. Conradie describes the journey as oikiosis,⁷² the building a new global oikos, or household, a new and redeemed Earth infused with shalom, where righteousness prevails.

Coming Home on Earth: Coming Home to God

Brueggemann describes the Christian season of Advent as an invitation for 'people to imagine homecoming'. He asks, 'What would it be like to cross over into the new regime...to Jesus, to the neighbourhood, to peaceableness where the rule of the God of covenant is underway?'⁷³ Both 'homecoming' and 'underway' are words which hold the journey and its fulfilment in tension. It is an invitation not only to imagine crossing over, but to be alive on the other side, bringing a counter-imagination of hope where injustice, suffering and present and anticipated social and environmental threats are bringing despair. The new 'neighborhood' is already present in the world. It is the place where the liberating power of Christ is being worked out in the 'praxis of solidarity' of which Gustavo Gutierrez writes:

The praxis on which liberation theology reflects is a praxis of solidarity in the interests of liberation and is inspired by the gospel. It is the activity of "peacemakers"—that is, those who are forging shalom. Western languages translate this Hebrew word as "peace" but in doing

⁶⁸ Sobrino, *Where is God?*, p 24

⁶⁹ Conradie, *An Ecological Anthropology*, p 19

⁷⁰ Sobrino, *Where is God?*, p 43

⁷¹ Anne Elvey and David Gormley-O'Brien, eds, *Climate Change, Cultural Change: Religious responses and responsibilities*, Preston, Vic., Mosaic Press, 2013, pp 12, 13

⁷² Conradie, *An Ecological Anthropology*, p 24

⁷³ Walter Brueggemann, 'Advent: Departure and Homecoming', *Journal for Preachers*, Vol 31, No 1, 2007

so, diminish its meaning. Shalom in fact refers to the whole of life and, as part of this, to the need of establishing justice and peace... This liberating praxis endeavors to transform history in the light of the reign of God. It accepts the reign now, even though knowing that it will arrive in its fullness only at the end of time.⁷⁴

Gutiérrez has an inclusive vision of who may be found on the side of the peacemakers in this 'praxis of solidarity'. Sharing in the praxis of building a just society affirms 'the single vocation to salvation' for 'Christian and non-Christian alike'.⁷⁵ It is a 'neighborhood' in which there is shared sense of belonging and of being at home, even though being in that place brings its own dangers of rejection. Gutiérrez wrote from within a social and political environment where people who worked for justice were being oppressed and killed by those whose material and political privileges were threatened. He sees those who die building a just society as following Jesus to death. 'What brought Jesus to his death, and is bringing his present-day followers to their death, is precisely the coherence of message and commitment.'⁷⁶ The Christian vision of being 'at home' under threat rests in the resurrection of Jesus. Whether belief in the resurrection of Jesus originated in 'something that happened to Jesus' or in 'something that happened to the church',⁷⁷ it is bold affirmation that death does not have the last word. It is a 'realization that life and not death has the final say about history'.⁷⁸ At one level, this is a source of courage in which all may share. It is a core scientific tenet of how life itself evolves, and a basic human experience as each new generation shapes the future and builds on the past, even when emerging from disasters. However, in Christian understanding the ground of courage in face of disaster is based on more than universal observation of regeneration or of human courage and determination to build a better future. It rests in God, with an ultimate horizon which goes even beyond the world as we know it. As Rowan Williams affirms: 'God's faithfulness stands, assuring us that even in the most appalling disaster love will not let us go; but it will not be a safety net that guarantees a happy ending in this world.'⁷⁹

Interpretation of solidarity with those suffering oppression and injustice as a sign of the reign of God is readily extended to the whole of life on Earth and the Earth environment. Solidarity then is about sharing with and working with oppressed fellow creatures, whether human or non-human. It is about empowerment and being empowered, so that life-affirming thriving and well-being replaces life-destroying impoverishment. It is as wide as to 'engage in the work of love and creativity', as Jonathan Sacks describes it.⁸⁰ It is as diverse as empowering birds and animals on the verge of extinction by providing safe habitat through to working in the corridors of political and economic power to shape policy and its implementation in life-affirming ways, particularly when precedence is given to those in greatest need.

⁷⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Caridad Inda, 15th Anniversary Edition ed. Maryknoll, Orbis, 1988, p. xxx

⁷⁵ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, pp. 46 and 84, where Gutiérrez states 'persons are saved if they open themselves to God and to others, even if they are not clearly aware they are doing so. This is valid for Christians and non-Christians alike – for all people'

⁷⁶ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. xlvi

⁷⁷ Gary R. Habermas, 'Mapping the Recent Trend Toward the Bodily Resurrection Appearances of Jesus in Light of Other Prominent Critical Positions', in *The Crossan-Wright Dialogue: The Resurrection of Jesus*, ed. Robert B. Stewart, London, SPCK, 2006.

⁷⁸ Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

⁷⁹ Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, p. 190.

⁸⁰ Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2011, p. 205

Gutiérrez and Sacks each has an inclusive vision of how people may live on the side of God's shalom. Their inclusiveness focuses on the witness of shared praxis rather than confession of shared belief. Shalom is expressed in praxis which has at its heart love, justice and the nurturing of life. Their visions of shalom interrogate the many ways in which people imagine and plan for living into the future as the impact of climate change becomes increasingly severe. Do these ways affirm or deny life, and particularly the lives of fellow humans and of non-human creatures starved of resources to thrive, or even to survive? Are they primarily about protecting privilege for particular people or particular nations? Are they oriented towards world-wide justice and sacrificial sharing in the dangerous journey of life in the Anthropocene—the unfolding era in which humankind is profoundly modifying the Earth environment?

As a global problem, climate change is provoking multiple global responses. These include responses as diverse as adaptation for immediate survival within nations like Kiribati and Tuvalu,⁸¹ and international conferences under the United Nations Convention on Climate Change.⁸² In Australia, typical of many countries, awareness of climate change and its possible implications has permeated society as a whole. Federal politics continues to debate the complex interaction of the national economy with causes and projected consequences of climate change, and Australia's place internationally in addressing climate-change related issues. Climate change is increasingly part of planning by business, industry and agriculture. It is recognised as an important factor for assessing insurability of properties.⁸³ Many local and national organisations whose work is directly affected by climate change are networked with each other and to similar international groupings.⁸⁴ These represent a bottom-up force aiming to influence policy and set local examples of climate-friendly practice. The representatives of Christian,⁸⁵ Islamic and other faith traditions also speak into discourse on climate change, at every level from local to international. Detailed critique of any of these responses is beyond the scope of the present work. However, from a Christian perspective, all stand subject to interrogation against the eschatological vision of shalom.

Shalom is a vision, a horizon of hope for universal peace and wellbeing on Earth. However, in his surveys of church-going people Michael Armstrong found that the unrelenting presence of so much that contradicts the vision makes it difficult to imagine that it could ever be fulfilled on the real, physical Earth.

'The point is that it is hard to see what a 'new earth' would actually be like. In fact, it is as difficult to envisage a renewed physical environment which would be 'heavenly' for all, as it

⁸¹ 'Tuvalu: Joining forces to tackle climate change', International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Case%20studies/Disasters/cs-tuvalu-en.pdf> (accessed 24 July 2014)

⁸² 'COP19', United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, unfccc.int/meetings/warsaw_nov_2013/session/7767.php. This is a recent example, accessed 18 July 2014.

⁸³ K. Mallon, J. Lamb, and J. Wormworth, 'Buyer-Beware: Home Insurance, Extreme Weather and Climate Change', A report to the Climate Institute of Australia in partnership with Choice, Sydney Climate Risk Pty Ltd (Australia), 2014, www.climateinstitute.com.au (accessed 18 July 2014)

⁸⁴ CANA, Climate Action Network Australia, <http://cana.net.au/> (accessed 18 July 2014)

⁸⁵ Clive W. Ayre, 'Climate Change and a Climate of Change in the Church', in *Climate Change, Cultural Change, Religious Responses and Responsibilities*, ed. Anne Elvey and David Gormley-O'Brien, Preston, Vic., Mosaic Press, 2013.

is to imagine a more spiritual concept of the after-life.⁸⁶

Ann Christie, also exploring the 'ordinary theology' of church-going people, found that for a significant part of those surveyed Jesus was not considered to be God. She describes their Christology as 'functional rather than ontological'.⁸⁷ The results of encountering Jesus in a community informed by Christian tradition can be powerfully life-directing, whether or not orthodox Trinitarian Christology is believed, or fulfilment of the reign of God is thought of as shalom on Earth or in a dualistic, spiritual way. As in Jesus' parable of the wheat and weeds,⁸⁸ the reign of God is beyond human sorting. Belonging in a faith community and professing the orthodoxy of its traditions, be they Christian or any other, may be life-shaping towards shalom. It may bring particular responsibility both to articulate and live in accord with shalom. However, following the inclusive spirit shown by Gutierrez and Sacks, those through whom shalom is being effected are scattered throughout the Earth and all of humankind, unconfined by any particular culture or tradition.

The end, or telos, of the reign of God is much more than fulfilled destiny for all or part of humankind, whether on Earth or in some spiritual sense. Evolutionary science and Biblical tradition each places humankind in intimate relation with all creation. In both narratives, humankind is of the Earth,⁸⁹ and in both narratives the future of life on Earth is intimately linked to the future of humankind. Paul's first-century theological imagination portrays the creation waiting 'with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God', likening this anticipation to the labour of childbirth.⁹⁰ In Paul's thought the 'children of God' are people who are 'led by the Spirit of God'.⁹¹ They too share in the pain of bringing forth new life, for they too are part of the creation or ktisis, which Harry Hahne interprets as the 'creation of God in all its totality'.⁹² The Spirit is both companion and 'midwife to the birth of new creation', as Denis Edwards suggests.⁹³ The Spirit of God, then and now, breathes God's life of creative love and righteousness into people to draw them into the Spirit's work of bringing forth shalom.

The image of participating in childbirth is one which invokes home and security, but it is also an image of uncertainty and utter vulnerability, exacerbated by human violence and natural disaster. Christian tradition remembers this in the stories of Jesus' birth, and Jesus' reminder of the woeful circumstances of those expecting to give birth in the midst of destruction of their earthly home.⁹⁴ But in Christian

⁸⁶ Michael Armstrong, 'Extraordinary Eschatology: Insights from Ordinary Theologians' in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013, p. 100

⁸⁷ Ann Christie, 'Who Do You Say I Am? Answers from the Pews', *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2007, p. 33

⁸⁸ Mt 13:24-30

⁸⁹ David W. Cotter, Genesis, ed. David W. Cotter, Berit Olam. *Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 2003, p. 29 'God fashioned adam from the dust of the adama'

⁹⁰ Rom 8:19-22

⁹¹ Rom 8:14

⁹² Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, London, T and T Clark, 2006, p. 176

⁹³ Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith: The change of heart that leads to a new way of living on Earth*, New York, Maryknoll, 2006, p. 44

⁹⁴ Mt 24:19

understanding it is Jesus' death and resurrection which makes possible being at home on Earth because of being at home with God. Just as the reign of God is already but not yet, with intimations of shalom already permeating a creation labouring for new life, so too homecoming to God makes being at home on Earth also already but not yet. Conradie likens this journey of homecoming to the restlessness of Jesus' own life, fulfilled in death and resurrection.

The message of the cross and the resurrection is not only that God dwells through the Son in God's household but that this shows a Way to make God's household, tormented by natural suffering and by the devastating impact of human sin, habitable and hospitable. The message about the homeless and restless Son of Man (Luke 9:58) allows us as human beings to become at home on earth, to come to Jesus in order to find a home and rest for ourselves, indeed the earth is not our home yet. It is only through the work of Jesus Christ that it may become so.⁹⁵

The 'not yet' expresses hopeful anticipation, but it is qualified by the 'already' of being at home in the journey of homecoming itself.

In Paul's eschatological birth image the whole of creation is in labour pains, waiting to be set free 'from its bondage to decay'. Today the journey of homecoming to God takes place in a world where climate change hangs like a dark cloud over a world already subject to multiple stresses. As more and more people are on the move seeking refuge, opportunity and hope, will they encounter hospitality in a new home, or rejection by those who see homecoming as continuing expansion of their own already highly privileged material prosperity? Jione Havea develops the theme that for the people of the Pacific 'diaspora is home', and being at home is to be welcoming, wherever one is.⁹⁶ In face of highly protective border policies by Australian authorities, he observes that 'They too need to learn from First Peoples how to be opening, welcoming and homing'.⁹⁷

Referring to Isaiah 42:5-7 and 56:7 and Israel's post-exilic homecoming, Bouma-Predeger and Walsh warn against wall-building:

Home-coming, then, must not be yet another attempt to build a home with even higher protective walls; rather, it is a matter of renewed covenant. It is significant that the text does not say that Yahweh will make a covenant with Israel; instead, Yahweh will give Israel to be a covenant to the peoples. The very existence of the people of God – their return home – is to be of service to others. Such an open, hospitable home is the only kind worth having.⁹⁸

Wall-building is a metaphor for distancing and separation, whether from human needs or the fate

⁹⁵ Conradie, *An Ecological Anthropology*, p. 70

⁹⁶ Jione Havea, 'Opening Borders for Diaspora and Home', in *Climate Change, Cultural Change, Religious Responses and Responsibilities*, ed. Anne Elvey and David Gormley-O'Brien, Preston, Vic., Mosaic Press, 2013, pp. 74-76

⁹⁷ Havea, 'Opening Borders for Diaspora and Home', p. 77

⁹⁸ Bouma-Predeger and Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*, p. 22

of non-human life. Shalom-makers are at home on their journey because of commitment to earthly implementation of a heavenly vision of inclusive peace, harmony and well-being. It is a journey with immediacy, for the reign of God already is within and among people. It is also a journey which cuts across the interests of those who build walls to protect privilege. In Christian understanding, it is a journey with Jesus, who travelled that journey even to crucifixion. It is also a journey made in confidence that Jesus' death was not the end, but the beginning of new life in which the Spirit of God enables people to be children of God, bringing in the shalom of God, the presence of the reign of God on Earth.

We may look into the future, imagining and working towards a more peaceful, coherent and just world order. It may or may not happen, but beyond extrapolation of reasoned hopes and fears, how may being at home with God be approached, no matter what happens in the world? In our material, scientifically accessed world, time is irreversible, and all the suffering, death and injustices of the past lie in the grave of history. The Jewish and Christian traditions of a general resurrection form a way of speaking of history itself being redeemed. In Christian thought, Jesus' resurrection foreshadows the general resurrection. For Jürgen Moltmann:

The hope that is born of the cross and resurrection transforms the negative, contradictory and torturing aspects of the world into terms of 'not yet', and does not suffer them to end in 'nothing'.⁹⁹

The 'not yet' is the space in which apparent futility arising from the life and death struggles of the evolving creation are held in the memory of God, finally to be redeemed.¹⁰⁰ 'Not yet' looks forward to an eschatology which is beyond scientific evidence or extrapolation of rational understanding. It is eschatology of ultimate homecoming, emerging like a new dawn breaking above the furthest imaginable horizon of reasoned hope, where all things created through Christ are redeemed and made new in Christ. It is the timeless eschatological space where heaven and earth meet, and where the Spirit/wind of God creates and recreates, and moves people to be part of creation's bringing forth of new heavens and new Earth.

Future orientation in a warming world

Jesus' teaching about the reign of God and Christian faith that Jesus' resurrection establishes the reign of God on Earth provide a vision for Christian living in any age and circumstance. The reign of God is righteousness and peace in which right relationships bring intimations of shalom—the outworking of the loving kindness which God shows to us in Christ. Living towards shalom is costly, for the world we live in is so often marked by broken relationships—people with people, people with the rest of creation, and people with God. The healing which Christ brings is healing in truth, where all may be exposed,

⁹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch, London, SCM, 1967, p. 197

¹⁰⁰ Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption and Special Divine Action*, Hindmarsh, ATF, 2010, pp. 70–71, 162

named and forgiven. Truth-telling requires judgment, and reconciliation brings redemptive healing. Through pain and anguish truth and reconciliation is a proven, though not certain, path towards shalom amongst people.

The warming of our world is a global effect, understood scientifically much as a medical diagnosis of developing bodily failure might be. The body in question is the whole global web of life, including humankind, and the earth environment. It is given voice by people close to the Earth, and cries out for truth to be told and heeded, and reconciliation to take place within the body, for humankind is part of the body too. Living towards shalom goes far beyond direct human concerns, and includes working towards the health of the Earth and the web of life of which we are an interdependent part. As with working for reconciliation between people, there may be pain and anguish, and no certain outcome in this world.

Christ's resurrection is assurance that in God, death does not have the last word. Living towards shalom in the 'already' of the reign of God is living in hope of its 'not yet'. Although the fulfilment of the reign of God is already taking place, its end is hid with Christ in God.