



Climate Change – Cultural Change Religious Responses and Responsibilities

Abstracts

Keynote address

Exploring Eco-wisdom

Norman Habel

According to the Wisdom traditions of the ancient Near East, including the Bible, Wisdom is imbedded in the ecosystems of nature. If so, how and where do we discern this wisdom today? Does wisdom adjust its role when humans upset an ecosystem such as climate? How might humans who become eco-wise play a role in restoring the balance of nature?

Dr. Norman Habel hails from Yulecart, near Hamilton in Victoria, Australia and is a pastor of The Lutheran Church. He was professor of Biblical Studies in the USA from 1955–1973. In 1974 he returned to Australia and established the first Religion Studies Department in Australia. From 1984–1987 he was Principal of Kodaikanal International School in South India. During his time in India, he and his wife Janice Orrell established the Grihini programme, a school for empowering oppressed uneducated Tribal and Dalit women in the remote hills around Kodaikanal. Norman Habel is currently Professorial Fellow at Flinders University. He has long been involved in issues of biblical interpretation and social justice. His research includes *The Earth Bible*, a five volume international project with other scholars reading the Bible from the perspective of justice for Earth. He is concerned that we, as human beings, re-connect with Earth as a sanctuary and a living planet. As part of this concern he has led the move to include *The Season of Creation* as part of the church year. Recently, he has published two volumes relating to ecological hermeneutics, namely, *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, co-edited with Peter Trudinger, published by Society of Biblical Literature and a more popular work *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* In 2011 he will publish the first volume in the new Earth Bible Commentary series.

Papers

Climate Change and a Climate of Change in the Church

Clive Ayre

This paper relates to the way in which climate change, as the most visible face of a wider crisis, has been responsible in part for a re-examination of attitudes and of theology. Against the background of the growth of ecotheology and a practical theology paradigm which looks at climate science and theology together, the paper will consider some of the fresh approaches to basic theological doctrines such as creation and grace which are helping to change the religious culture and mission of the Church. Climate change presents a particular challenge to the Church. The often-phoney debate about its reality leads to misconceptions about the need to care for the environment. The best initial approach to the encouragement of environmental care through a Church culture is through a

theological imperative. The pace of change may be too slow for some, but it is nevertheless taking place. The paper will illustrate the climate of change in the Church by reference to a mission conference in September 2011 and a Global Symposium on “Christian Faith and the Earth” set for 2012. Further illustrations will relate to some denominational structures, for example in the Uniting Church, as well as the National Council of Churches Eco-Mission Project and some practical examples from the local level. The challenge now is to carry through the change that has begun, including education, but further to engage intentionally with the wider community and to look towards ecumenical and interfaith cooperation in response to the threat of climate change.

Rev Dr Clive Ayre is a Minister in the Uniting Church with a PhD on Ecological Mission in and through the Church in Australia. He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Queensland and Green Church Advocate for the Uniting Church in Queensland. He has published essays on religious faith and the environment.

Post-secular Spirituality, Science, Atheism and Climate Change

Geoff Berry

Traditional religions have regained cultural authority to a startling degree over recent decades, compared to many predictions of the late twentieth century. This rejuvenation comes in a new historical context where earth care is paramount, such that dominant or conventional ideologies are adapted to suit. Concurrently, newly emerging interfaith networks and greenfaith movements work between and amongst traditions to promote a general commitment to ecological sustainability regardless of creed. How may this be imagined to work with other mainstream and alternative visions that similarly commit to care for the earth but have no religious affiliation at all—who are inspired rather by scientific observation and/or an entirely different set of ethical groundrules than could be included in a religious system (as it is conventionally understood)? How would a sustainable society look if religious and atheistic movements both committed to earth care in their different ways? Can they be reconciled beyond the current schisms that mark religious and anti-religious discourse? This presentation will ask such questions in light of the stubbornly non-religious claims of science in its Enlightenment guise, as well as regarding atheistic and animistic conceptions of sustainability (which do not sit comfortably in any religious framework understood in the conventional context) that also mark the ethical earth territory of post-secularity.

The relationship between climate change scepticism and creationism in conservative Christians in the US and Australia

Sally Cloke

QUOTE 1: Mainstream science is based on an evolutionary understanding of our planet, and that, in itself, should be enough for any Christian to at least question the conclusions and predictions we are being presented with in the climate change debate. ("Kellie", Facebook)

QUOTE 2: I do notice of late a new intrusion into the [climate change] debate [on talk-back radio] along the lines of “God is in control, he will not permit global warming, did not create the world that way, etc., etc.” Is the Hillsong Church marshalling to assist its Lib allies in NSW? ("Dave", on *Crikey* blog *The Pollbludger*.)

It scarcely needs stating that many conservative Christians oppose evolution as anti-biblical. Though they may seem poles apart, climate change and evolution have a number of commonalities:

- both are scientific hypotheses that cannot be replicated or tested in laboratories;
- both can be seen as having theological consequences for the place of humanity in creation, the nature of “dominion” and the nature of God's sovereignty;

- and, while evolution obviously has to do with the doctrine of creation (the beginning), climate change can be seen as having implications for eschatology (the end).

This paper seeks to outline some of the data supporting the hypothesis that there is a link between religious climate change denial and creationism, drawing on evidence from popular debate (online discussion forums, talk-back radio, etc) in Australia and from the US experience where some State legislative bodies are linking the teaching of climate science and evolution in schools and seeking a "balanced" approach to each. (*NY Times*, 3 March 2010).

Sally Cloke is studying a Master of Theology at the University of Newcastle, NSW. She worked for a number of years in international development, during which time she helped produce a video on climate change, the world's poor and the necessity of a compassionate Christian response.

An ecotheological critique of Clement of Alexandria's understanding of self-sufficiency and mutual dependency

David Gormley O'Brien

In this paper Clement of Alexandria's understanding of *autarkeia* (self-sufficiency) and mutual dependency is examined through the lens of ecotheological critical method to see how his views on the use of wealth, social stratification, and extravagance from the importation of produce and luxury items from every part of the Empire into late 2nd century Alexandria, are informed by and divert from both New Testament and Graeco-Roman philosophical conceptions of self-sufficiency, friendship, and voluntary frugality.

David Gormley O'Brien is McMullin Lecturer in Theology, Theology Online Coordinator, and Academic Registrar at Trinity College Theological School, United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne College of Divinity. His recent publications include "Entering the Kingdom with Difficulty: The Self-sufficient Life as the Quest for Wealthy Believers in the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Clement of Alexandria's *Quis Dives Salvetur* and *Paedagogus*", *Studia Patristica* 45 (2010).

Moral and Spiritual Change as the Basis of a Shift to Ecological Integrity: The Amish and Buddhists

Shelini Harris

I argue that unless we see ourselves as part of the biosphere, interrelated to the rest of nature, the measures necessary for restoring and living in ecological harmony and integrity will only be seen as external and onerous impositions. Short of a clear and resolute recognition that humanity has taken a wrong turn, that we have not seen ourselves as we truly are, the communion of subjects referred to by Thomas Berry, any efforts for the environment will range from futile to insufficient. Our devastation of the environment is not unrelated to what we have done to our souls, families and bodies, indicating the need for a fundamental moral and spiritual transformation, which would facilitate a healthy spiritual orientation and the cultural change necessary to transform how and what we measure and value as the goals of human life. Prevailing dominant goals and indicators have brought us down this road of destruction and despair. I draw from a couple of very different religious communities, certain Amish in the United States and some Hindu-Buddhist villagers in Sri Lanka, describing their responses and struggles in dealing with life threatening problems in ways that are in stark contrast to that of dominant cultures; illustrating the powerful effect of their immersion in alternative worldviews and cultures steeped in the values of simplicity, non-violence to all, and non-attachment. This sort of fundamental shift in worldview and concomitant culture is what is called for by every serious environmentalist today.

Shelini Harris is currently working on a critique of the dominant model of human rights and its reliance on anthropomorphic indicators. She is involved in permaculture, earth jurisprudence, and other similar approaches, having moved here from the US where she lectured in Peace and Conflict Studies and Religious Studies.

Towards Eco-theology: a Multi-disciplinary Journey

Julie James

This paper reports a journey towards reconciliation of intellectual understanding and personal spirituality. The intellectual journey began in empirical science, but subsequent experience suggested that the boundary between religion and science is permeable. My research is in the mode of personal and professional reflection-in-action, based on systems thinking. The researcher enters into, and becomes part of, the problem to be solved or the issue to be resolved. I see the dispute over the findings of climate science to be an ideological battle to justify and preserve 'business as usual'. I recognize the need to regard the earth as sacred space. My current spiritual position is the belief that God enfolds and infuses the cosmos, so I have no difficulty with the ideas of incarnation and resurrection. I am a committed Christian but not a biblical literalist. The return to Christian faith confronted me with the biblical texts I had rejected. I still reject the 'blood-stained' texts, and agree with the need to distinguish between 'green' and 'grey' texts, as a necessary but not sufficient response to the climate emergency. The problem to me is one of anthropocentrism—the belief that humanity is divinely appointed lord (or steward) of creation, or pinnacle of evolution. Modern science is moving away from the idea that consciousness is an emerging property of complex living things to that of consciousness as a fundamental property of the cosmos. Modern theology must thus recognize humanity's role as part of an earth community.

Julie James retired in 2006 from her position as Associate Professor, Information Systems. In her retirement she works on a voluntary basis for several community-based organizations and pursues her research interest in the nature of inquiry, in particular to acceptance or rejection of the findings of climate change.

Reviewing Pagan Ways in Early Irish Christianity

Catherine Laudine

Christianity arose in a particular place and at a particular time when certain land use practices prevailed, which did not predominate at other times and in other places. Not only this, but as Christianity spread it moved into different geographical and cultural regions that influenced the way it was received. This paper looks at the rich traditions of creation spirituality in early Irish Christianity particularly practices of the saints and mystics. It argues that some practices in early Irish Christianity, now seen as pagan, might have been quite acceptable to the original followers of Christ. This has implications for helping us to understand the type of eco-spirituality that we can/should develop now. Addressing the minutia of these practices may point to paths of hope for nature and for our potential to reconnect with it. Aspects of our relationship to nature that might have been thought irretrievably lost may be available after all. Christianity may remember and reintegrate some vital traditions that have wrongly come to be seen as incompatible. In these ways early Irish Christianity may potentially shed some light on some of the limitations of current forms of eco-spirituality today. That is, the paper presents a dialectic/dialogical movement between past and present.

Catherine Laudine is an environmental anthropologist whose specialisation is the study of religion and nature. Her particular interest is in how nature knowledge, which has been found to be helpful

for human adaptation, is encoded in religious lore. Her master's thesis resulted in the publication of the book *Aboriginal Environmental Knowledge: Rational Reverence*, by Ashgate UK in 2009. Her doctoral thesis is a study of nature knowledge in other religious traditions including Hindu and Buddhist. Currently she is researching and writing about Christianity and nature.

Between Cassandra and Jonah: believing prophetic voices in climate change science.

Morag Logan

The global challenge of climate change will bring large cultural change—change in the way we live our lives—across all society, whether the path we choose is to reduce carbon emissions, or to adapt to the climate changes. In order to break out of our current paralysis and make effective decisions about responding to climate change, however, a different cultural change is required, a change in our understanding and response to the results of scientific research with all of its clarity and its uncertainty. For example, one barrier for many is an acceptance of the idea that we can influence the future, in particular the future climate, and that we can understand what that influence is. Atkisson explores these issues using the figure of Cassandra: gifted with prophecy then doomed to the fate of never being believed, her combination of deep understanding and yet powerlessness is a powerful image for environmental science today. Comparing the figures of Cassandra and Jonah, especially Jonah 4, allows a distinctive reflection on the complexities of predictions of the future that call for change in the present. We are all familiar with the dynamics of self-fulfilling prophecy, I argue that Jonah's problem is more that of "self-defeating prophecy", one that also faces environmental science. This reading of Jonah is not so much a reading from the perspective of the earth, but a reading from the perspective of the climate change debate, leading into reflection on the nature of science, prophecy and authoritative speech.

Morag Logan is an ordained minister in the Uniting Church in Australia. She has a Doctorate in Biblical Studies (Old Testament), and is currently teaching as an Associate Faculty member of the United Faculty of Theology in the Online program. For 6 years (2004–2010) Morag was living in France and working as a project manager for two European climate change projects.

Encounter and Wonder in the Natural World: An educational tool for equipping the church for cultural change in addressing climate change

Richard Mallaby

Many children growing up in city and urban areas spend most of their time indoors engaging in electronically based activities like playing computer games and internet social networking. Restricted access to the natural world raises concerns for physical, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. This situation reflects the alienation from the natural world that humans in western society generally experience. However, children engaged in Earth-connecting activities, such as gardening, care of animals and play in natural surroundings, form meaningful relationships in the natural world characterised by mutuality, care and respect. In the natural world there is the opportunity for children to experience wonder in response to beauty and encountering the Spirit of God in the other. Children develop a greater sense of place and belonging. They learn to recognise natural rhythms, discover the origin of food and the rich and diverse interconnections and interdependence within the natural world. In the natural world there is the opportunity for children to discover their earthiness and commonality of existence with other members of the Earth community. Their experience has many parallels with Job's encounter of the wild, chaotic beauty of the natural world when YHWH spoke to him from out of the whirlwind. A study drawing on the experience of ten community groups working with children offers an educational tool for equipping the church for cultural change to address climate change. If children in churches were engaged in Earth-connecting activities, practicing Sabbath principles of care for the land, and offering hospitality

to plants and animals, they could work toward healing and restoring the Earth and bring about cultural change within the church. Children can therefore offer hope for a better world.

Richard is a minister at the Box Hill Baptist Church and is working toward a Doctor of Ministry Studies entitled *Children in the Natural World: A theological reflection upon encounter and wonder*. With a background in agricultural science, theology and a master of environmental science he is passionate about the church's response to environmental issues and climate change.

Revolution as a Reasonable Religious Response to the Climate-Change Crisis

Mark Manolopoulos

I propose that perhaps/probably the only way that the climate-change crisis will be resolved is via revolution. After all, an extreme situation requires an extreme response. Introducing carbon taxes, implementing moderate recycling measures, holding conferences, etc., are all well-intentioned and responsible, but they are only half-measures, largely cosmetic, diverting our attention from anthropogenic climate change's core causes—global capitalism, ingrained anthropocentrism, exponential population growth, and so on. Until we face and overcome these forces via a neo-communistic revolution, climate change (and a host of other crises) will most likely remain with us, perhaps leading to our demise and the planet's regeneration. Furthermore, I shall explain that, rather than being mutually oppositional, religion and revolution are/can be partners, textually and experientially. For example, there is Christic outrage in the Temple, communistic living in the Book of Acts, Thomas More's *Utopia*, the German Peasants' War, Gerard Winstanley and the True Levellers, liberation theology, etc. And so, although we peace-loving ones may prefer a peaceful transition to a truly ecological culture, we must acknowledge that the powerful will most likely not surrender their power voluntarily, thus ensuring the Earth's continued ruination. Finally, whether the revolution will be violent or peaceful is ultimately a secondary consideration: what matters most here and now is that believers realize that a truly egalitarian culture can only arise from radical political transformation—i.e. *revolution*—and that religious involvement in this transition is reasonable and responsible. And sanctified.

Mark Manolopoulos works in the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies at Monash University. He is the author of *If Creation is a Gift* (SUNY, 2009) and editor of *With Gifted Thinkers* (Peter Lang, 2009). His theoretical interests lie with radical philosophy, ecological thought, and revolutionary theology.

Rainbows on a Crying Planet, Planetary Theology and practice

Carol McDonough

Planetary Theology (1976) of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, OMI speaks to present climate change predicaments, proclaiming Christian response and responsibilities—that God's justice involves far more than human rights. An Oxford University agricultural economist, he trained for the Catholic priesthood in Rome, bringing both disciplines into sustained critical eco-theology and action. Generated through his pioneering Centre for Society and Religion (established 1972), his Gospel-based radical action for planet-wide eco-justice spread through Sri Lanka, across Asia to all. His was an early Christian voice crying peril, for the beauty and abundance of Earth suffers increasing disharmony of its biosphere and biota as world population massively increases. Natural resources plundered for human survival incrementally increases, imperilling all species. What are contemporary theological implications? Balasuriya prefigured then lives answers. Critical thinkers and twenty million people of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka confronting these urgent issues head-on, offer some solutions to our oftentimes human-caused Earth predicaments. Their overpopulated, conflicted island, nation-state home of Buddhists and Muslims (6% Christian), starkly

images a microcosm of our planet's dilemmas. Thinker-theologian, Balasuriya still argues all must work willingly for natural resources health; we humans must freely choose equitable political, economic and environmental population redistribution across habitable earth. Essential to safe life of Earth our home, this demands resources use 'descent' and frugal fair share, so all species might live. Listening to Balasuriya, what could become Australia's reframed local to planetary learnings and grace-inspired religious responsibilities and responses?

Carol McDonough, a UFT postgraduate student, placed on the Honour Roll of Women, Victoria, for contributions to human rights, community and environment, grounded in the tradition of desert eremiticism, has long been immersed in eco-theologies and spiritualities as reflective lenses for eco-faith journeying towards practical Christian environmental responsibility and just action.

'Don't build your house on sand'—Using Spiritual Imagery in Climate Change Communication and Research

Jana-Axinja Paschen

Based on research I conducted recently in the coastal community of Port Fairy, this methodological paper discusses the value of alternative approaches to research and community engagement in the contexts of climate change adaptation. Climate change is often perceived as an abstract threat, which makes people feel either disempowered, or lets them react with indifference and withdrawal. Effective community engagement is therefore increasingly moving to the forefront of policy considerations. My research confirms that communities need tangible experiences and the emotional attachment to things that matter locally in order to feel and be empowered. In this paper, I outline my idea for a research program that pays attention to the spiritual symbolisms of language and practice, with the aim of investigating the potential of local art-environment projects for better community involvement in climate change adaptation.

Jana-Axinja Paschen is a Research Fellow at the School of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Monash University. She currently works on a joint project with the Victorian Centre of Climate Change Adaptation Research, looking at multi-actor and multi-level framings of adaptation in science, government and community. Her research interests centre on developing alternative paradigms in climate change research and governance, using narrative methodologies and place-based creative research methods.

NCLS 2011 Environment Survey: Mapping and equipping cultural change

Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is an ecumenical project that conducts a quantitative survey of approximately 300,000 church attenders, 10,000 clergy and 7,000 churches in more than 20 Australian denominations every census year, across a range of areas of religious faith and practice and social concern. For the past 20 years, since the first NCLS in 1991, the NCLS Research team has been collecting some data on environmental attitudes and actions of church attenders and local churches. In 2011, with input from academics and from Christians who are actively building environmental awareness and action across a diversity of denominations, we have expanded our set of environment survey questions. From September to November this year, a representative sample of church attenders will answer additional questions about their attitudes towards climate change, their theological understandings regarding environment and ecology, their view of the Church's role in terms of caring for the Earth, and their civic and political engagement concerning environmental issues. Some of these questions are also included in the NCLS Leader Survey, to be completed by all local church leaders (lay and ordained). There is also a battery of items in the Operations Survey

about environmental initiatives undertaken in local churches, including in the areas of worship, operations of church buildings, and community projects and events. This paper will give an overview of the findings from previous rounds of surveys, and will discuss potential uses for the 2011 data both for researchers interested in mapping churches' responses to climate change, and for practitioners who are working to raise the profile of climate change and environmental responsibility in their churches.

Dr Miriam Pepper is an Associate Researcher with NCLS Research and an Honorary Fellow at the Australian Catholic University. She is also an environmental activist who works with grassroots initiatives the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change and Uniting Earthweb. Her PhD research examined Christianity and sustainable consumption from a social psychological perspective.

Dr Ruth Powell is Director of NCLS Research, and has been a part of the NCLS team since 1991. She has co-authored books on church life such as *Winds of Change, Shaping a Future, Taking Stock, Build My Church* and *Enriching Church Life*. Her doctoral thesis focussed on age differences among church attenders. Ruth is also Associate Professor at the Australian Catholic University.

Climate change, development and equity: The scientific context

Peter Rayner

Ethical responses to climate change should be founded on our best understanding of physical, economic and social processes. In this talk I will briefly lay out the evidence for anthropogenic global warming and its likely trajectory. By considering future contributions to warming I will show that large temperature change is not inevitable, it is a problem very much in our own hands. Problems arise when we consider the vulnerability to climate change; vulnerability is closely linked to economic under-development and economic development is linked to higher greenhouse gas emissions. The solution to this dilemma is a so-called contraction and convergence approach in which countries move gradually to equal emissions per capita with a total consistent with stabilizing the climate. From this simple idea we can get a picture of those who may still increase emissions and those who must reduce them. Furthermore we can allow a emissions trajectory for low emitters that allows development provided large emitters act first. Beyond this ethical consideration, I believe it is in the best interests of large emitters (like Australia) to act first since they have the largest adjustment to make.

Peter Rayner researches the global carbon cycle to understand the sources and uptake of greenhouse gases now and in the future He has worked in Australia, the U.S. and France. He is currently an Australian Research Council Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne.

There is no such thing as a natural disaster: The end of the Modern Constitution and the revaluation of prophetic witness

Kate Rigby

When, in January 2011, two thirds of Queensland and significant areas of New South Wales and Victoria (in other words, much of eastern Australia) disappeared under flood waters, a catastrophe soon followed in February by the widespread havoc wrought by a huge force 5 cyclone that ploughed into a 700-kilometre stretch of the Queensland coast, both of these events were publicly framed as 'natural disasters'. This is hardly surprising. While some American evangelicals and Islamic fundamentalists might seek to discern divine agency in such catastrophes (albeit with varying diagnoses of the human ills that could have provoked such heavenly wrath), self-respecting moderns

are rightly reticent about attributing moral significance to the periodically unruly behaviour of earth and sky. For all that, though, the designation of the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi as 'natural disasters' was profoundly misleading, given that the intensity of both the precipitation event and subsequent cyclonic winds was directly related to the unprecedented warmth of the La Nina-affected oceans that are already heating up as a consequence of industrial modernity's rapidly rising CO₂ emissions. In this paper, I propose to sketch the historical background to the emergence of the modern concept of natural disaster, which replaced earlier theocentric notions of divine intervention, before proceeding to consider how climate change is prompting a reconsideration of biblical witness to the complex entanglement of human, nonhuman and divine agencies in the aetiology of environmental catastrophe.

Kate Rigby FAHA is Associate Professor in Comparative Literature at Monash University. Her research ranges across German Studies, European philosophy, literature and religion, and culture and ecology. She is founding co-editor of the journal *Philosophy Activism Nature*, and was the founding President of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (Australia-New Zealand).

The Goodness of Creation and The Darkening World of Extinctions

Deborah Bird Rose

How shall we imagine the goodness of creation in the twenty-first century? How must we understand climate change in light of creation? In this darkening world of the Anthropocene, how may we yet be called to witness to the goodness of the living world? This paper addresses, in brief, questions that link James Hatley's recent work on Levinas's analysis of the original goodness of creation with issues of anthropogenic extinction and with questions of witness. It is a poetic call toward an ethics of proximity within a darkening world of death and disaster.

Deborah Bird Rose is Professor in the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University, Sydney. Her work focuses on entwined social and ecological justice in this time of climate change, and is based on her long-term research with Aboriginal people in Australia. She writes across several disciplines, including anthropology, history, philosophy, cultural studies and religious studies, and has worked with Aboriginal people in their claims to land and in other decolonising contexts. Her most recent book is *Wild Dog Dreaming* (University of Virginia Press). With Thom van Dooren she edits the *Ecological Humanities* in the *Australian Humanities Review*.

The Interfaith Ecology Movement

Elyse Rider

This paper will present an overview of the cultural forms, structures, practices, motivations and challenges of the Interfaith Ecology Movement. This emerging global grassroots community movement is motivated by the need to understand and act on climate change in the context of our ecologically-vulnerable, diverse, and intimately connected global society. Interfaith Ecology is situated at the intersection of the contemporary interfaith dialogue and the environment movements. Drawing on the infrastructure, networks and ideologies of these two parent movements, Interfaith Ecology responds to the unique set of eco-human circumstances coinciding under advanced globalisation by connecting the themes of religion, diversity, spirituality, environmentalism and peace. It seeks to forge an integral understanding and practical ethics that will shape the future of humanity and is striving for a new shared culture of civic participation, cross-cultural relationality and eco-social sustainability while at the same time preserving and valuing diversity of identity, culture, and in particular, religion. While the world is struggling to contain religiously motivated violence and ecological exploitation, the Interfaith Ecology Movement is

attempting to develop an alternative of spirituality motivated peace and eco-cultural flourishing through diversity. This paper is based on doctoral research into the movement carried out between 2007–2010 through engaging local community organisations, individuals and global networks working on interfaith and environmental themes into Participatory Action Research activities.

Elyse Rider is a Doctoral candidate at the Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, Monash University. Her research explores the relationship between cultural and religious diversity, environmentalism and spirituality in the global grassroots movement of Interfaith Ecology. Elyse currently works in community development and social planning at the City of Boroondara.

The Sacredness of Nature: Animism, Spirit and the Aboriginal Gift.

David Tacey

The paper discusses the *sacred* or *sacramental* as the ‘missing dimension’ in our relation to nature and the environmental crisis. I have long been impressed by the fact that indigenous cultures have maintained profound relations with the natural world not based on rationality or logic but on mythological bonds with land and its elemental forces. Today we assume that such mythologies are ‘invented’ by humans and imposed upon landscapes, but what if we are wrong? What if our understanding of nature is flawed, and indigenous peoples are right? The new age movement grasps this insight but distorts it by taking it literally and appropriating the mythologies of indigenous cultures. But contemporary consciousness may have to find the spirit that animates the world in a new way. Aboriginal elders call all Australians to participate in a deeper response to nature, and want to give the *gift* of belonging. But how can non-indigenous Australians accept this gift if we do not understand the meaning of a sacramental relation to nature?

Dr David Tacey is Reader in Literature and Psychoanalytic Studies at La Trobe University, Melbourne. He is the author of twelve books, including *Gods and Diseases* (2011), *Edge of the Sacred* (2009), *The Spirituality Revolution* (2003) and *ReEnchantment* (2000). David was born in Melbourne and grew up in Alice Springs. It was here that he was introduced to the animistic world of Aboriginal cultures. He is a public intellectual who is often asked to address current issues, including ecological awareness, mental health, spirituality and Aboriginal Australia. His books have been translated into several languages, including Cantonese, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese and French.

Education for Cultural Change in Religious Communities in Response to Climate Change.

Dr Margaret Watts

We are all called to an ecological conversion but how well are we responding? Educational institutions and parishes are the ‘womb’ in which cultural change is nourished. The idea is to bring our best theological/spiritual understanding to the best science/experiential knowledge for they belong together. *An Open letter to the Religious Community from the Scientific Community* (2007) says, “As scientists many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before creation. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred.” *Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion* (1999) states that, “problems of such magnitude, and solutions demanding so broad a perspective, must be recognised from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension.” They go on to plead with religious communities: “Mindful of our common responsibility, we scientists, many of us long engaged in combating the environmental crisis, urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit in word and deed, and as boldly as required, to preserve the environment of the Earth”. This paper addresses one pathway to engage in an ecological conversion.

It begins with accepting the reality that we are in a global environmental crisis. It then moves through environmental awareness, ecological consciousness, earth spirituality/cosmology, ecological theology, to arrive at an ecological conversion for the restoration of God's Earth and as a consequence, environmental sustainability.

Margaret has enjoyed a career as a teacher in primary and secondary schools. After completing doctoral studies in Spiritual Ecological Consciousness: Towards Ecological Conversion she now works in Healthy Earth Education facilitating 'Awakening to the Earth' days for teachers, students and parishioners. She can be contacted: margaret@healthyeartheducation.com.au

Panels

Relationship between Climate Change and Cultural Change in Religious Communities

Gillian Baker (chair), David Mitchell, Rowan O'Hagan, Glyn Reese

Effecting cultural change is a challenging task, made more so when time is short and the outcomes as threatening as those predicted if runaway climate change occurs. Cultural change in this respect demands that all of us who live in developed countries, and whose ecological footprint is unsustainable, change our behaviours in regard to the way we treat this Earth. The Anglican Communion believes that embedded within our belief in God's creation of the world is the challenge to sustain life in all its forms, thus we have a responsibility to act as leaders and role models in the face of severe environmental damage. The Anglican Diocese of Wangaratta is influenced by and serves the interests and concerns of interactive urban and rural communities, while supplying the needs of the city based consumer populations that dominate our nation. We have been developing and implementing an Environmental Strategy over the past five years, as well as working collaboratively with other churches and some very active community groups in North East Victoria and Southern New South Wales, in order to take up this challenge. This cohesion has been further advanced by the extreme drought, bushfire and flood events that its congregations have faced in the past decade. In addition the Bishop of Wangaratta has recently visited the Horn of Africa, seeing for himself the awful devastation of drought and famine, and is passionate about reaching out to those suffering in this part of the world. This kind of networking, both globally and locally, is essential across religious and secular communities to reach the critical mass required to achieve cultural change. The co-empowerment generated by this collaboration has developed from our common goals of decreasing our demands on the earth and its resources, moving away from our culture of rampant consumerism, and moving toward a more socially just global environment.

Dr David Mitchell, Adjunct Professor, Charles Sturt University, Albury, Diocesan Environment Panel, Chair of Australian Anglican Environment Network Working Party

Dr Rowan O'Hagan, Representative of Australian Women in Agriculture and founder of the Wangaratta Sustainability Network

Fr Glyn Reese, Priest at St John's, Wodonga, involved in partnership between Anglican and Uniting Churches, Birallee Neighbourhood Centre, Community Garden and Street Harvest Program in Wodonga

Gillian Baker, Former Science teacher and Education Officer with Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst, Anglican Diocese of Wangaratta. Environment Panel, member Wangaratta Sustainability Network and NE Region Sustainability Alliance

Emergency Networks and the Churches

Kathleen Grant (chair), Chris Beggs, Pamela Collins and John Randles

In recent years many Australian churches have taken initiatives in areas of theological understandings and praxis that are responses to new and increasing knowledge about ecology and the environment, and the impact of human life styles and activities on the resources and climate of the planet. This panel focuses on some ways that church communities are responding when “things go badly wrong” through natural disasters or human activity. The Victorian Council of Churches has established an Emergency Network which is part of the Victorian State Emergency Plan. Our panel looks at how the VCC Emergency Network operates on the ground, how the churches of Castlemaine became part of this Network, and the experiences of our VCC volunteers in response to recent bushfires and floods.

Sr. Kathleen Grant is a member of the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. Her past experience was in social work services and administration in hospital and family agencies. She is currently pastoral associate at the Catholic Parish of Castlemaine and secretary to the Castlemaine Ministers Community. Through this she has been responsible for establishing the local VCC volunteer group and acting as Area Coordinator.

Chris Beggs is a member of the Uniting Church. He lives on a 110 acre farm on the outskirts of Harcourt in Central Goldfields and is a self employed carpenter. He is on the committee of the local Land Care group.

Pamela Collins is a member of the Anglican Church. She was a teacher and then a farmer for many years, on a mixed farm with a milking goat herd. The family fostered adolescents, and were also house parents to a group of young people.

John Randles is a member of the Gisborne Church of Christ. He was Shire Engineer at Woodend during the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires that ravaged the Macedon Ranges and has firsthand experience from a municipal point of view of the community’s response to a major disaster. He initiated a Church outreach to the bush fires in the Grampians.

Pam, Chris and John have all been involved in ongoing VCC outreach to the flooded areas of Northern Victoria.

Workshops

Bridging the ‘policy-praxis disjuncture’ – a workshop to discuss the challenges and potential remedies.

Steve Douglas

Introduction to the problem

What is the nature of the ecological ‘policy-praxis disjuncture’ amongst the Catholic, Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia?

Challenges to dealing with this problem include:

- anthropocentrism in theology and organisational (and wider societal) culture;
- specific and general econometrism/econocentrism;
- relatively low and very patchy technical and organisational knowledge in relation to ecological problems and remedies;
- lack of compulsory eco-education and allied professional competency for clergy;

- lack of requirement for ecological qualifications and vocational experience in key lay staff (need for professional ecological vocations in religions, rather than largely relying on volunteers or poorly paid and lowly placed staff);
- lack of sufficient and sufficiently highly-placed staff positions with core ecological responsibilities (e.g. ‘Manager, Environment’, ‘Director, Creation Care’);
- organisation eco-education tends to focus on children, not adults, and especially not those in positions of authority;
- relatively elderly clergy and parishioners with very low recruitment;
- declining membership;
- focus on survival of the organisation and its components rather than on meeting other challenges;
- acute reluctance to mandate ecological performance standards (i.e. all ecological reform initiatives are voluntary, yet other doctrinal and praxiological reforms are often mandated).

What other challenges exist?

The viability of remedies

Some potential remedies include:

- agreeing to specify compulsory eco-education (re)training of clergy and senior laity to ensure that they are appropriately informed (facts) and thus potentially more likely to adopt the values and behaviours needed to achieve substantial organisational ecological reform;
- scope for mandating organisational structural reform to include key ecological vocations such as environmental management (e.g. energy and water, land management, purchasing, etc). Other roles such as those in financial management are mandated, but ecological roles are not. Ecological roles need to be on par with financial roles in terms of organisational authority, otherwise economics will always trump ecological values;
- scope for getting agreement to mandate standards of ecological performance (e.g. organisational KPIs backed by publically available ‘state of the environment’ reports);
- transcending survivalism—accepting the decline of some religious organisations and ‘greening’ them irrespective of this decline, rather than refusing to ‘green’ because economics is seen as paramount in trying to achieve survival or at least a slower decline before presumed collapse. Perhaps the demise of some organisations is in part because of poor ecological policy and/or praxis, such that dramatic reforms on that front may increase viability by attracting newcomers / retaining those who might otherwise have left for a ‘greener’ organisation;
- promoting greater ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and exchange to maximise synergistic gains in trying to tackle the ecological policy-praxis gap. Perhaps ecological issues, especially ‘climate change’ can be a catalyst for greater commonality of purpose and greater collaboration (e.g. recent National Council of Churches initiative);
- greater formal engagement with ecological/environmental professionals and NGOs.

The wider context

How many of these problems are specific to these Churches; to Christianity; to organised religion; to organisations?

Are these problems ‘universal’? Are they really manifestations of poorly managed ‘human nature’? Is the underlying issue simply fear in various forms?

Are there better ways to conceive of the challenges and the potential solutions? Is any talk about mandating ecological reform fundamentally in conflict with how most religions or at least many religions function. Is the provision of fact-based ecological education really the core need, or is it mainly an issue of ecological values needing to be changed first? How can these head/heart approaches be best combined?

Dr Steven Douglas researched the ecological policies and practices of the Catholic, Anglican, and Uniting Churches in Australia for his PhD thesis and subsequent publications. He continues to work in the field of 'religion and ecology', but primarily works as a consultant ecologist and environmental planner.

What is it that needs to change?

Pat Long and Anne Boyd

'Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing.'

Arundhati Roy

Human identity and purpose are shaped by cultural stories. This workshop will consider the cultural messages embedded in Christian traditions that enable humans to accelerate climate change and ecological destruction. It will more importantly explore the new all embracing origin story, an epic narrative, that gives rise to new answers to the cosmological questions about identity and purpose. A new cultural consciousness with the capacity to invigorate creative and healing ways of seeing and being emerges from this story. The process will draw on the work of Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme and associated authors.

Pat Long and Anne Boyd are coordinators of EarthSong (www.earthsong.org.au), a project that engages contemporary science as a catalyst to the transformation of religious ideas, particularly in the area of spirituality. In this process we are rediscovering the 'book of nature' as a vital source for understanding our own identity in relationship to the Divine and all that is.

Contesting narratives: the Kimberley and the prophetic tradition

Jan Morgan

This workshop offers an experience of engagement with contesting narratives in our historical moment and in place. For Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, such engagement lies at the core of the prophetic tradition and was a primary means of cultural change in religious communities. The Kimberley is a site not only of incredible beauty and spiritual power, not only is it immense (being the size of Victoria and Tasmania combined), it is of immeasurable significance for our response to climate change. As one of the last places on our Earth where ecological processes are unfolding relatively free of human interference, it constitutes an irreplaceable ecological reference site for the study of evolutionary processes. This knowledge, now rudimentary, is set to become increasingly urgently needed as climate change affects the conditions under which life has recently flourished. This vast treasure is about to be destroyed. Participants will have the opportunity to identify their own responses to this knowledge, and to name some of the conflicting narratives at play here, including political, Indigenous, post-colonial narratives. But our times call for engagement with other narratives, Earth narratives—in the Kimberley the narratives of snubnose dolphin, masked owl and rare vegetation communities. Cultural change requires this repositioning of ourselves as moderns *inside* the biosphere—a change at the level of cultural identity. The prophetic tradition, born in times of crisis in the past, holds wisdom for this complex yet exciting task. For Brueggemann it is in the negotiation of contesting narratives that an inexplicable transforming of identity occurs, freeing us to respond and to take responsibility.

Jan Morgan has pursued Earth's call from a background in pastoral care as Director of Clinical Pastoral Education programs at the Peter McCallum Cancer Institute. She has studied Earth Literacy at Genesis Farm, New Jersey, a well-known Ecological Learning Centre and Community Supported Garden, based on the vision of Thomas Berry. Her doctoral studies with the Melbourne College of

Divinity drew on the prophetic tradition, ministry studies and the ecological humanities as a way of reconceptualising ministry as ecoprophetic ministry.

Addressing Change through the Two Books of God: Education for Cultural Change in Religious Communities

Robin Pryor

Culture constructs the lens through which we view nature, but equally cultural and textual—including theological/hermeneutical—constructs are conditioned by the changing impact of the natural environment. Vast landscape and climatic shifts constantly occur out of ‘natural’ physical processes [*physis*], even while human influences [*techne*] undermine the integrity of the global ecosystem. Ecocriticism commenced as an earth-centred approach to literary studies, but is now called on to expand the notion of ‘literature’ to a deeper reading of Earth itself as text, and a more compassionate, just and responsive reading of Christian Scripture. This presentation will outline two approaches which may contribute to these deeper readings. The context is understood to be ‘religious communities’, loosely defined, and the ancient understanding that there are two Books of God, scripture and nature. The first [used in a Meditation Day setting] is addressed by the four ‘paths’ in Alexander Shaia’s *The hidden power of the Gospels* (2010), and his perspective that each Gospel has its own living pattern of prayer and spiritual practice. The most pertinent ‘paths’ for our purposes are (1) How do we face change ? (especially from Matthew’s Gospel), and (2) How do we move through suffering ? (especially Mark’s Gospel). How might these questions help re-found our hope in the midst of change and turmoil? Secondly, a deeper reading of the Book of Nature alerts us to the long history of Earth itself, and the diverse human impacts and responses over millennia. A better understanding of long-term physical changes in Australia—and especially the human capacity to adjust (as well as contribute) to such changes—provides a wider perspective and a source of hope for engaging with the necessary responses. A case study is drawn from a desert retreat honouring the story of Aboriginal peoples around the Willandra Lakes system in NSW.

Robin Pryor retired in 2007 as Director, Uniting Church Retreat Centre, *within* Pallotti College. He has a Ph.D in demographic change in developing countries, a Theol M. in Pastoral Theology, training in Britain in spiritual direction, and D. Min. St. on the significance of place in developing Retreat Ministry in the Australian landscape. Robin and Bronwyn regularly lead Labyrinth Meditation Days, and wilderness retreats, including in the Bass Strait islands, and Mungo National Park, NSW.