A Theology of the Environment

Introduction

Thirty-four years ago Rachel Carson warned us that we were poisoning not only ourselves but also our whole environment. The situation has not improved. It is now much worse. In *The Gaia Atlas of Planet Management* Norman Myers says 'the data are overwhelmingly clear in their import. Most devastating are those which show rates of soil erosion, desertification, deforestation, species loss, pollution ... Even if some estimates vary ... most of them are more likely to be under rather than over estimates' (quoted in Lovett, *Life*, 49). According to Brendan Lovett 'the major issue is the wipe out of millions of years of nature's crucial survival experiments under the most demanding climatic conditions that is involved in the annihilation of the tropical rain forests' (*Earth*, 23-4). Biologist Norman Myers estimates that twenty million hectares of rain forest are destroyed or seriously depleted each year (McDonagh, *Greening*, 77). These forests are believed to contain more than half the species of organisms on earth (Wilson, 185). 'What is happening in our times is not just another historical transition ... It is a change unparalleled in the four and a half billion years of earth history' (Berry and Clarke, 4). We have changed the very structure of our planet (Berry and Clarke, 5).

I think many people are overwhelmed by the litany of destruction. And as well as environmental destruction, we also have poverty, war, nuclear weapons, racism, sexism, and so on to worry about. Many either can not grasp the seriousness of the situation or refuse to. In Japan many men have sold themselves to their company and are not free to think, let alone act, for themselves. I try to take it in — with the result that sometimes I experience moments of terror and panic. What should I do? What can I do? Is there really a chance that humans will disappear? Being single and employed by the Catholic Church I perhaps have more freedom than most to think about these issues. In fact, I see informing people of the situation and motivating them to tackle the issues as part of my job. A very difficult job.

The Problem

A year ago the parish council president told me the company he works for was still producing CFCs. Recently the parish council has had three topics on its agenda for almost every monthly meeting: building, raising money for building, and functions (the first communion party, etc.). And the biggest function in terms of the number of people who participate in preparation and the person hours given to preparation is the bazaar. It is bigger than Easter and Christmas combined. The council does not discuss what the parish can do for the environment, youth, foreign workers (these three are among Bishop Hamao's four diocesan priorities, and many foreign workers come to mass here), the poor, etc. It is not because I have not suggested they do so. They do not discuss even adult education or how to develop a sense of community in the parish. I suspect they have discussed more or less the same things every month since the council was first established. Only once (in eighteen years) has a person come to me for the sacrament of reconciliation and confessed that she had harmed the environment. That was after I had mentioned harming the environment in my preparatory talk. As Berry says, 'there is no indication so far that Christians are beginning to think of this scale of change' (Berry and Clarke, 6). In his broadcast of H. G. Wells' 'War of the Worlds', Orson Welles could well have been speaking of us: 'With infinite complacency people went to and fro over the earth about their little affairs, serene in the assurance of their dominion over this small, spinning fragment of solar driftwood' (War of the Worlds [tape]).

With Lovett (Life, vii) and McDonagh (Passion, 143) I believe that we have to confront with complete honesty the seriousness of our situation. The faith we claim to have should enable us to do this and still find a reason to hope. But their is a monumental reluctance to face up to the truth of our situation. To be fair, there are scientists and officials who say there is no crisis. Others say we do have problems but that technology will solve them. But then, doctors and scientists working for the tobacco industry claim that smoking is not harmful.

I cannot judge between the claims of scientists but I believe that there is a crisis and that it demands an immediate response. I am told that James Lovelock said or wrote somewhere that the earth will do what is necessary to survive, but that what is necessary

might be the extinction of the human race. Thomas Lovejoy is convinced that 'most of the great environmental struggles will either be won or lost in the 1990s. By the next century it will be too late' (quoted in McDonagh, Passion, 145).

How could we be oblivious to this crisis? Maybe it is too much for many to take in, but it was not always this serious. Why were we not aware and concerned when it was still a 'small' problem?

Causes

The Bible

One of the reasons is our attitude towards the environment, the earth. American historian Lynn White describes this attitude as one of 'arrogance towards nature' (McDonagh, Greening 119). Some scholars trace this arrogance to the Bible:

> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1: 26-28)

Frederick Turner traces the attitude in this passage back further to the Middle East environment. In order to survive in the sparse mountains, barren deserts, steppes and narrow plains, human beings had to channel all their efforts into dominating, controlling and taming the natural world. This led them to separate the Divine and themselves from the natural world (McDonagh, Greening, 113). And there is a dualism in the New Testament: earth and earthly are opposed to heaven and heavenly (John 3: 31; I Corinthians 15: 45-47; Colossians 3: 2-5), though John L. McKenzie says that the only basis for this dualism in the Old Testament is the curse put on the earth because of the

sin of the first person (208).

We have an ambivalent attitude towards the Bible. On the one hand, we believe it is the inspired Word of God, read from it at mass and claim that is central to our faith. On the other hand, we do not have a tradition of reading and studying the Bible. There was a time not long ago when ordinary Catholics were not encouraged to read the Bible. An aunt in Australia and a parishioner here both told me that years ago they were told by priests not to read the Bible, supposedly because they might misinterpret it. Few of us read the Bible regularly and those who do are often very selective in their reading. We know Genesis 1: 26-28 but not 1: 29 (be vegetarian); we know Genesis 2: 18-22 (Adam was created before Eve) but not 1: 27 (Adam and Eve were created together); we know that (according to John) the Jews killed Jesus and in the past we thought that sufficient reason to kill Jews, but we forget 'Love your enemies'. So Thomas Berry can say that the Bible may be the most dangerous book in the world (Berry and Clarke, 118). I believe that we give it an unnecessarily high status. It may be one of the most sublime books in the world, but it is still no more than the record of where various Jewish and Christian communities were at particular points in history. The communities existed before the record of their faith-life was put down on paper, and they continued to exist, and grow, after the record was finished. Looking to the past can be a way of avoiding looking at the present.

Scholars looking for something positive in Genesis point out that in Genesis 1: 24 (And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind"), for example, the earth is a co-creator with a positive role in creation. But this should be obvious to us. Needing scholars or the Bible to tell us this is an indication of the degree to which we are alienated from the earth.

While claiming that the Bible is important, most of us make no effort to study it. Some do not want to know about criticism (source, form, etc.), the four models of biblical studies (cf Moore, Studies), etc. As Basil Moore says, 'in no other area of the curriculum world would we tolerate the indifference to scholarship and research as we do in teaching the Bible' (Studies, 29). We prefer new cars to old. We buy the latest

computers for the office. We buy the newest fishing rods. But when it comes to the Bible it seems that the older the better.

Faith v. Beliefs

Perhaps this indicates that our faith is not that deep. Perhaps we are more insecure than we like to admit. Roger Haight talks about 'beliefs masquerading as faith' (36). Some (many?) of us claim to believe in God, the Incarnation, Jesus, that the Bible is inspired, etc.; but we also believe that the earth is round, that Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, that it is going to rain tomorrow. Our faith is mostly in our heads. I believe the old catechism approach to instruction contributed to this. Many of us have never actually encountered God. We have never set out on the kind of journey Abraham made. We have not heard Jesus' call to follow him.

'The error begins with the social tendency of beliefs ... to take the place of the transcendent object of faith. This dynamism serves as a buttress against human insecurity, and it reinforces a kind of natural desire to grasp and control transcendent reality. The result is that the transcendent object of faith in the same measure ceases to be transcendent, to break in upon the passive dimension of faith, and to draw forth ever new commitment to the ever new exigencies of its cause. But beyond the theological confusion involved, this process also has disastrous consequences for the life of faith of ordinary people, especially in a time of radical pluralism when scientific knowledge, discovery, and changing world views have a high profile. Members of such a community can only be confused and threatened by the growing body of genuinely new knowledge human beings are generating about themselves and the world. These external forces drive a wedge between a community of beliefs taken as knowledge and the competing and seemingly contradictory knowledge of the rest of the world. The result is that many people leave the Church, and what is left is a community of closed, eviscerated and impoverished faith isolated from the world on the basis of archaic beliefs' (Haight, 36-37).

We have many pigeon holes in our mind. Hobbies are in one, work in another; politics in one, faith in another; and so on. Faith has little connection to this world, to everyday

life. We forget that Judaism and Christianity began when some slaves managed to escape from their captors. We forget that Palestine in the time of Jesus was a Roman colony with many Roman soldiers stationed there and that they crucified Jesus. A few months ago I asked the parish council here to send a letter of support to the Governor of Okinawa for his stand against the American military bases. Only two of the fifteen councillors present spoke and both were against the idea. One said we should keep out of politics. (The other said that some Catholics in France were for the nuclear tests at Mururoa. And, in the same way, the bases were not completely bad: that there was something good to be said for them.)

Our selectivity in our reading and our reluctance to accept the results of modern biblical studies mean that we have decided what we want to believe in before we read the bible. We choose passages that support our chosen way of life.

When did Christianity become divorced from politics, economics, etc? Joseph Martos, describing the early Church, writes that 'the general population ... did not always share this interior appreciation of the liturgy. The wholesale conversion of the Roman empire in the fourth century, the baptism of Christians from infancy in the fifth century, and the mass baptisms of the Germanic peoples beginning in the sixth century meant that many attended the liturgy because of custom rather conviction' (225). What he says about the liturgy probably applies to the faith in general. Christianity became the official religion of the empire in 380 and 'it was sometimes difficult to tell whether those who wished to join the church did so out of conviction or convenience. In the face of growing numbers of conversions, the lengthy catechumenate was retained but the period of immediate preparation and teaching was shortened ...' (151-152). The Bible itself suffered as a result of Christianity being proclaimed the official religion. The copyists of the Byzantine texts seem to have been 'more concerned to promote Constantinian orthodoxy through the text rather than faithfulness to the texts from which the copy was made' (Moore, Criticism, 162).

Whatever about the origins of this evisceration of the faith, it is the faith that we have inherited. Silent spring was published in the spring of 1962 (I read it in high school about 1970); yet the Vatican Council, which opened in October that year and continued

for four years, had nothing to say on the issue.

Another Christian paradox is that while we have done our best to separate faith from this world, the Church has done its best to ally itself with the powers and establishments of this world. The list of papal involvements in matters that have nothing to do with the Gospel, or are even opposed to the Gospel, is quite long. The Church allied itself with the Roman empire. Pope Adrian asked the king of England to invade Ireland. A pope divided up South America between Portugal and Spain. The Church still retains its own territory and has embassies around the world.

Theology has lost contact with our present story of the universe (Berry and Clarke, 28). Whatever pre-baptismal instruction, adult education, homilies, etc. the ordinary Catholic is exposed to, it obviously is not enabling her or him to grasp and respond to the present crisis. Nor does it encourage the ordinary Catholic man to reflect on the place of the company in his life. The vice-director of the Columbans in Japan suggested to me that some, perhaps many, people come to the Church seeking some kind of solace, that they prefer the 'old' Church of certainty and uniformity. Apparently they have the impression before they come that this is what the Church will provide, i.e., this is the image the Church projects. If this is so, we need to let people know what the Gospel is about when they first come to the Church.

God

Berry believes that our idea of God is also part of the problem. 'The divine, once perceived as a pervasive divine presence throughout the phenomenal world, was constellated in the Bible in a transcendent, monotheistic deity, a creator of the world with a covenant relationship with a special people... we appear to give up that primordial, inherent relationship between the human and the divine within the natural order of things. To give up that immediacy in favor of a transcendent deity mediated by a covenant has done something profound to our relationship with the natural world, even when the natural world is explained as good and as created by the divine' (114). 'The dominant vision of the Divine which Israel developed is so focussed on the Divine—human relationship that it can dull people's sensibilities to the natural world' (McDonagh, Greening, 116). In addition, some seem to think that God will step in and

clean up the mess we have made. But God will not be coming down to fix things. God, far from being omniscient and omnipotent, is actually powerless to intervene by force (Kolbenschlag, 147).

The Human

Then there is 'the exaltation of the human as a spiritual being to the exclusion of the spiritual dimension of earthly beings. In Western Christian thought, the human is so special that the human soul has to be created directly by the divine in every single case... there is a feeling that the human is so special that it does not really belong to the inherent processes of the natural world. This contributes to our sense of alienation from the natural world' (Berry and Clarke, 115).

Redemption

Our emphasis on the need for redemption/salvation has also contributed to our flight from the world. 'The believing community put its emphasis on redemption. We are in the world but not of it ... The world, furthermore, is intransigent and irredeemable. We're stuck with earth for the present, but by being wary of it we can save ourselves for a better future life (Farrell, 8). Christianity has indeed become 'the opium of the people'. 'The church redemptive mystique is little concerned with any cosmological order or process since the essential thing is redemption out of the world through a personal savior relationship that transcends all such concerns' (Berry, quoted in Farrell, 8).

Prayer

Our prayer also has failed us. People can say their morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meals, recite the rosary and go to mass every day but still not advert to the environmental crisis. Can this really be prayer? Is it really God we are talking and listening to? Some years ago at a priests' meeting in Fukuoka some young priests were suggesting the Catholic prayer book needed revising. I suggested teaching people how to pray without a prayer book and they looked at me uncomprehendingly. Now some are looking to Zen Buddhism but its record is not much better. 'In the 1930s Zen

Masters occupied themselves more and more with giving military men training, and during the Second World War a large meditation hall was built in the heart of Tokyo and used exclusively for that purpose ... the great D. T. Suzuki himself was a strong supporter of Japanese aggression ...' (Jones, 212). About twelve years ago I went to see William Johnston to ask him how people of prayer could be blind to justice issues. His reply was to the effect that this problem had never occurred to him, and that perhaps I had been 'sent' to alert him to this.

Bernard Cooke has pointed out that the sacramental signs and the theology which imbues them with meaning have often been used to distance rather than mediate the divine presence (McDonagh, Passion, 148).

Plato

However, I don't blame our ignorance and apathy just on Christianity. Plato, 'the father of Western philosophy' (Plumwood, 524), has to take a little of the blame. He regarded the world of nature as inferior and corrupt (Plumwood, 525). How much of our dualism comes from Plato and how much from the Hebrew tradition? I do not know, but we need to be more critical towards our culture.

Science

Science also comes in for some of the blame. The discoveries of Francis Bacon, René Descartes and Isaac Newton undermined 'the organic, holistic, though static and often erroneous, view of the world which had prevailed in the West for the previous thousand years. For the earth-centered and static universe they substituted an undoubtedly more scientific view of nature. However, because it failed to take into account a holistic view of all the living world, it contributed significantly to the development of the modern scientific and technological paradigm which regards the world as complex and intricate, but ultimately a lifeless machine' (McDonagh, Greening, 109-110). 'The very success of the control of meaning in the natural world through empirical verification ultimately led to a secularist reduction of all religious values' (Lovett, Life, 41).

Capitalism

Capitalism also has played a large part in the destruction of our earth. Christianity has to take some of the responsibility for its emergence. 'In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries both ecclesial and social institutions were well and truly perverted into the apparently insatiable pursuit of wealth.' People 'were exhorted to work, no longer just for a living, but for the sake of accumulation ...' Moral teaching on killing mutated from the right of the poor person to kill in self defense into 'a right to kill the poor in the interest of preserving things' (Lovett, Life, 33). 'It is very hard for us to realize the historical negatives of the system with which we are so involved; to grasp, for example, the human cost of even the first century of this system. The population of Mexico was 16,871,408 in 1532: in 1580 it stood at 1,891,267'. 'Hans-Guenther Prien gives the total population figures for the New World as 100 million in 1492: by 1570 his estimate for the total population is 10-12 million survivors.' 'This is genocide of unparalleled proportions' (Lovett, Life, 35).

If the system had such appalling results in terms of distribution, why did it begin in the first place? 'Wallerstein suggests that the reason was to ensure precisely such bad distribution. He presents the following scenario. Economically, feudal Europe was cracking up; the pressure towards egalitarian distribution was strong; small peasant farmers were showing great efficiency as producers. Internecine strife was frequent within the ruling class and the ideological cement of Catholicism was internally under strain from egalitarian movements. The direction of the change desired appalled the upper strata. The effectiveness of their response to this crisis is shown by Wallerstein in two set of figures. Looking at the two-hundred -year period between 1450 and 1650, he finds that by the end of this period the basic structures of our system as a viable social system had been established with a reasonably high level of continuity between the families who were the high strata in 1450 and those who occupied this position in 1650. Moving on to the period 1650 to 1900, he finds that most of the comparisons with 1450 still hold true. The trend towards egalitarianization had been drastically reversed' (Lovett, Life, 36).

Imperialism

As Lovett says, ‘it is very hard for us to realize the historical negatives of the system with which we are so involved’. Most of us would not accept that the purpose of capitalism was to ensure unequal distribution. Yet the evidence is there. Noam Chomsky documents American interventions abroad. The number of military interventions alone is far higher than most people realise. It’s hard to choose which examples to present. From 1849-1913 U.S. navy ships entered Haitian waters twenty-four times to “protect American lives and property” (Chomsky, 200). Perry forced Japan to trade with the West. Marines landed in Hawaii in 1873 and 1893. The Philippines was annexed. Troops were sent to intervene in the Boxer Rebellion. The U.S. pressured Panama to rebel against Colombia. Cuba, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, the Korean War, Iran, Guatemala, Lebanon, Indonesia, Vietnam, El Salvador, Chile, Angola, Pakistan, Turkey, Grenada, Libya, Iraq, Panama. The list goes on.

Before August 1990 (i.e., the start of the buildup in the Middle East in preparation for the Gulf War), there were 435,000 U.S. troops assigned to 395 major military bases in 35 foreign countries. Another 47,000 U.S. Navy and Marine Corps personnel were stationed aboard ships in foreign waters and 10,000 U.S. troops were stationed at 20 military bases on the American overseas territorial possessions of Guam, Johnston Atoll, the Marshall Islands, Midway Island, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Wake Island. The U.S. would have us believe the bases in Japan are for Japan’s defence, but that this is not so was explicitly stated in a hearing of the U.S. Senate’s Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, on 21 April, 1982: ‘The Marines in Okinawa are not assigned to the defense of Japan. They constitute instead the U.S. Seventh Fleet ready Marine force and could be deployed anywhere in the Seventh Fleet’s operating areas ...’ (document obtained under the Freedom of Information Act).

People might still say that the U.S. (or in the past the U.K. or whichever colonial power) is doing all this to defend democracy. Some Japanese still claim they were aiming to liberate Asia in the Pacific War. That is not true. In the 1898 debate about whether or not the U.S. should claim the Philippines as a colony, Senator Albert Beveridge argued, “The power that rules the Pacific is the power that rules the world. And, with the

Philippines, that power is and will forever be the American Republic" (Asia Link, p. 2). President Taft claimed that "The day is not far distant" when "the whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it is ours morally" (Chomsky, 158). In 1927 Undersecretary of State Robert Olds stated: "We do control the destinies of Central America, and we do so for the simple reason that the national interest absolutely dictates such a course ..." (Berry et al., 5).

But perhaps the clearest statement of the U.S.'s motives came from George Kennan. In 1948 Kennan, head of the State Department's planning staff, stated the basic U.S. policy goals:

...We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its populations.... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so we have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we an afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction.... We should cease to talk about vague and...unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans, the better (Nelson Pallmeyer, 5).

Politics

The U.S. and other First World countries are maintaining this position. During the period 1982 to 1990 there was a net transfer of $418 billion from the poor South to the rich North (George, xv). Much of this was interest payments. George shows how deforestation is directly linked to the debt crisis. Only by cutting down more trees and planting more cash crops can poor countries service their debts. There is something wrong with economic theory and systems that allow this. The 'economic crisis is unavoidably a moral one' (Lovett, Life, 67). And there is something wrong with our politics, too. A passage from Machiavelli's The Prince sums up our political theory:

... he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done will rather bring about his own ruin than his preservation. A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince who wishes to maintain himself to learn how not to be good, and how to use this knowledge and not use it according to the necessity of

the case (Lovett, Life, 70).

Economic interests have come to govern the legal and political order, and the political order has displaced the function of culture. The role of politics has become repression and propaganda, convincing people that they needed what the economic system was supplying. The true role of politics should be to mediate cultural values to the shaping of economic institutions (Lovett, Life, 90).

Population

One final word about population and overpopulation. The proliferation of human population literally threatens planetary life itself (Rosemary Radford Reuther, inside the front cover of Berry and Clarke). The Church has an aversion to tackling this issue (McDonagh, Greening, 59-72). McDonagh asks, 'What does pro life really mean?' I believe it means putting our planet first. Contraception can be pro-life.

These, briefly, are the main causes of our present crisis. It is, of course, possible to inquire further. Why do we want this kind of political system, this economic system? Why do we want to have more than others? Why do we refuse to share the world's goods? Some psychologists believe that our grasping for more and more possessions arises primarily out of our anxieties in the face of death. By surrounding ourselves with more and more things we hope to avoid the reality of death and gain some measure of immortality, at least in the things that we own (McDonagh, Greening, 162). If this is true, it means that we do not believe in God, that we do not believe that God loves us and will take care of us even after death. We have not yet heard the Gospel.

Hope

A New Story

Now for the good news. The situation is not hopeless. We can do something. The most important thing is to learn and tell others the story of the universe. Here I want to present a long quotation from Brian Swimme:

> ... from a physical point of view ... Different ion flows would give you qualitatively different experiences; or, equally true, a qualitatively different mood would manifest as a different movement of ions in your nervous system. The question I want to ask is simply this. What enables the ions to move? Or what enables you to think? On what power do you rely for your thinking, feeling, and wondering?
>
> Ions don't move by their own power ... A close examination shows that an energy-soaked molecule in the brain is responsible for the ion movement. Closer examination shows that this molecule is able to push ions around because of energy it got, ultimately, from the food that you eat. The food got the energy from the Sun; food traps a photon in the net of its molecular webbing, and this photonic energy pushes and pulls the ions in your brain, making possible your present moment of amazing human subjectivity. Right now, this moment, ions are flowing this way and that because of the manner in which you have organized energy from the Sun.
>
> But we are not done yet. Where did the photon come from? We know that in the core of our Sun, atomic fusion creates helium atoms out of hydrogen atoms, in the process releasing photons of sunlight. So, if photons come from hydrogen atoms, where did the hydrogen get the photons? This leads us to the edge of the primeval fireball, to the moment of creation itself.
>
> The primeval fireball was a vast gushing forth of light, first so powerful that it carried elementary particles about as if they were bits of bark on a tidal wave. But as the fireball continued to expand, the light calmed down until ... the energy level decreased to a point where it could be captured by electrons and protons in the community of the

hydrogen atom. Hydrogen atoms rage with energy from the fireball, symphonic storms of energy held together in communities extremely reluctant to give this energy up. But in the cores of stars, hydrogen atoms are forced to release their energy in the form of photons, and this photonic shower from the beginning of time powers your thinking (quoted in Lovett, Life, 82-83).

'So fires from the beginning of time fire us now: we are cosmic fire! We are the universe come to consciousness and the psychic energy by which we live is nothing other than the energy of the whole universe' (Lovett, Life, 84). The story of the universe is our story. If we do not know the story, we do not know anything (Berry and Clarke, 7). But it is also the story of God: '... attention needs to be payed to the extreme fineness — a matter of milliseconds — of the condition of emergence and survival of the universe. To grasp the emergent probability of the universe is to experience immanent Providence, revealed in the passionate finality of the process' (Lovett, Life, 82). The story of the universe is revelation. We need to see the religious value of the scientific explanation of creation (Berry and Clarke, 26 27). Our present understanding of the time-developmental universe is a new revelatory experience of the divine (Berry and Clarke, 7).

'We are the universe come to consciousness'. 'This means that who we are is the consciousness of the universe ... To fail to identify ourselves with the twenty billion year old story of our emergent universe is to remain incapable of ever approximating to the human good. The very first step in moving towards the integral human good is being reconciled to and glorying in the story of the universe as our foundational truth. Nor is this step to be taken for granted: for quite some time now many of us have been living out consumerist productive values which are simply not sustainable on our Earth. Our self-understanding has been at the expense of the Universe! ... our mode of life is a denial of belonging to the Earth, a refusal to accept the human condition as limited. This vitiates any alleged spirituality we may lay claim to' (Lovett, Earth, 21).

'We are the universe come to consciousness'. It is not that we think on the universe; the universe, rather, thinks itself, in us and through us (Berry and Clarke, 21). We are part of the universe. The universe is bigger than us. Its concerns are more important than

ours. ‘The universe itself is the primary sacred community’ (Berry and Clarke, 16). We have to change our way of thinking from human-centered to universe-centered.

Indigenous People

We can learn a lot from indigenous peoples. The aboriginal people of Australia understand their dependence on the land. Bill Neidjie says ‘Our story is in the land ...’ (Plumwood, 531). The Navajo tell the story of the universe in their healing rituals (Berry and Clarke, 27). One of my favorites is Chief Seattle’s letter to The President of the United States in 1854:

> The Great Chief in Washington ... wishes to buy our land... The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine-needle, every sandy shore. every mist in the dark woods, every clearing, and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man... This shining water that lives in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors... The white man’s dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars. Our dead never forget this beautiful earth, for it is the mother of the red man. We are part of the earth, and it is part of us (Lovett, Life, 99-100).

Animals

Sometimes it seems that animals are more conscious of our mutual links than we are. In June, 1991, Yvonne Vladislavich was aboard a yacht that exploded and sank in the Indian Ocean. Utterly terrified, she was thrown into shark-infested waters. Then three dolphins approached her. One of them proceeded to buoy her up, while the other two swam in circles around her and guarded her from sharks. The dolphins continued to take care of Yvonne, and protect her, until she finally drifted to a marker in the sea and climbed on to it. When she was rescued from the marker, it was determined that the dolphins had stayed with her, kept her afloat, and protected her across more than 300 kilometers of open sea (Robbins, 24). There are many stories of dolphins and other

animals helping and protecting people. Befriending them makes us more caring. Studies of inmates in a number of U.S. prisons reveal that almost none of the convicts had a pet as a child. Other studies have found that convicts nearing their release dates who were allowed to have pet cats in their cells all later successfully adjusted to society (Robbins, 23).

Conclusion

Every Catholic, from the pope to the individual lay person, as well as our structures — Bishops' conferences, parish councils and schools, etc. — has to make ecology their top priority. This will necessitate changes to the Church's structures and way of operating. We need the latest information and ideas. We need people thinking and taking the initiative. So the Church must stop trying to control what people think. We need to promote Thomas Kuhn's notions of paradigm and paradigm shift. Our people need to know that truth is not fixed and unchanging. Faith is not acceptance of a body of doctrine, but 'a struggle which is complex and historically without end' (Lovett, Earth, 5). A large part of this struggle will be trying to persuade governments and industry that the needed changes are desirable.

The task is enormous but not impossible. Perhaps the biggest hurdle to be overcome is motivating and energising people to tackle the problem. As mentioned in the introduction, mere knowledge of the situation can be paralysing. Jay Earley has used Jean Houston's work to develop exercises that can do this. But in the end it comes down to each of us. Are we prepared to join the struggle?

Bibliography

Books

Berry, Thomas, & Clarke, Thomas, Befriending the Earth

Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, Connecticut, 1991

Berry, Tom et al. Dollars and Dictators
The Resource Center, Albuquerque, 1982

Carson, Rachel Silent Spring
Penguin, London, 1965

Chomsky, Noam Year 501
Verso, London, 1993

Earley, Jay Inner Journeys
Samuel Weiser, Inc., York Beach, Maine, 1990

Haight, Roger Dynamics of Theology
Paulist Press, New York, 1990

George, Susan The Debt Boomerang
Pluto Press, London, 1992

Jones, Ken The Social Face of Buddhism
Wisdom Publications, London, 1989

Kolbenschlag, Madonna Lost in the land of Oz
Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1990

Kuhn, Thomas The Structure of Scientific Revolutions
University of Chicago Press, 1970

Lovett, Brendan Life Before Death
Claretian Publications, Quezon City, 1986

		On Earth as in Heaven
		Claretian Publications, Quezon City, 1988
McDonagh, Sean		To Care for the Earth
		Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1986
		The Greening of the Church
		Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1990
		Passion for the Earth
		Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1994
McKenzie, John L.		Dictionary of the Bible
		Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966
Martos, Joseph		Doors to the Sacred
		Triumph, Liguori, 1991
Moore, Basil		Biblical Studies and Teaching the Bible
		pages 29-38 in Readings: Part 1, URE 512
		The University of South Australia, 1994
		Biblical Criticism
		pages 156-185 in Readings: Part 1, URE 512
		The University of South Australia, 1994
Nelson-Pallmeyer, Jack		War Against The Poor
		Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York
Plumwood, Val		Meanjin (?), 49, 1990
Reuther, Rosemary Radford		Toward an Ecological-Feminist Theology of Nature

in Plant, Judith (editor), Healing the Wounds
New Society, Philadelphia, 1989

Robbins, John Diet for a New America
Stillpoint Publishing, Walpole, 1987

Sanders, J. N. The Literature and Canon of the New Testament
in Black, M., and Rowley, H. H. (editors): Peakes's Commentary on the Bible
Nelson, New York, 1972, pages 676-682

Segundo, Juan Luis Liberation of Theology
Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1976

Welles, Orson War of the Worlds (audio tape)
Hodder Headline Audiobooks
Broadcast rights held by Heritage Media, Castle Eden Studios, Castle Eden, County Durham, TS27 4SD, England

Wilson, Edward O. The Diversity of Life
Penguin, London, 1992

Periodicals

National Catholic Reporter Farrell, Michael J.:
Thomas Berry's Dream of Biocracy
November 13, 1987, pages 7-9

Asia Link May/June, 1990

Quotations from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version, macBible, Zondervan Electronic Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990.