CROSS

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Purposes

a forum for theological dialogue

Contents

CROSS Purposes

The present issue of *Cross Purposes* covers a diverse array of topical matters for the Australian church. Firstly, the "multifaith" discussion of recent issues continues with Andrew Boyle's review of his recent experience at the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne.

Alan Reid's *In Service* reflection is a protest against the loss among modern clergy of an intentionally pastoral practice of visiting. Alan argues that "routine" visits, although not glamorous, are central to the minister's office as shepherd of the flock.

Joan Fisher's sermon for the beginning of Lent reflects on the significance for us of Jesus' temptations. In making his choice to respond only to God, Jesus shows us how to live the fullest lives we can, and this is part of what is meant by his "saving us".

In this issue's *Areopagus*, Max Wright calls for a renewed commitment to the observance of the Sabbath, noting that this counter-cultural practice is part of the church's vocation as an alternative *polis*, and also has ecological and economic implications for wider society.

Continuing our new *Credo* series, Michael Champion discusses the importance of the doctrine of creation from nothing. Against some contemporary eco-feminist attempts to erase the difference between creator and creation, he argues that this absolute difference is central to the Christian doctrine of God, and foundational to the possibility of loving the different other.

This issue's book review, by Adam McIntosh, is of a recent publication highly topical for the UCA, Chris Budden's *Following Jesus in Invaded Space*.

A final note—due to various delays, we expect to publish only two further issues of *CP* in 2010, with quarterly issues resuming in 2011. Subscribers will not be disadvantaged, as your year's subscription will cover four issues irrespective of their publication dates.

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Letters

Law and Gospel

The proposed preamble is mooted on the grounds that Congress sets great store by law. But is Congress aware of the intention at Assembly level to make sweeping changes to the law of the Uniting Church as expressed in the Constitution? The proposed preamble seems to be the prelude for this.

The President admits that §3 of the proposed preamble is controversial. His defence of it seems to rest on collapsing the story of salvation into a general understanding of God's law and providence. But it is not general human access to God's law and providence that is disputed. Rather it is the impression that the events of the death and resurrection of Jesus are a simple outworking of that providence. This would be to deny the new thing that God does when the Word who sustains the universe becomes flesh. It is not true either to claim that God's love and grace "was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ". We are still awaiting the final revelation of the story of salvation (as is asserted in the final sentence of the proposed preamble in which, quoting from the *Basis of Union* §3, the covenantal relationship is said to be "a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation").

By all means let us endorse respect for indigenous law where that law accords with God's law. Let us also (as Congress suggests) submit our own law and culture to the scrutiny of the gospel. But first let us clearly express the gospel. An admitted lack of clarity between law and grace is not helpful here. (The President appears to employ a teacher's lapse argument at this point: he admits the ambiguity but just wanted to see if we were awake. Is a preamble to a Constitution really meant to test that?)

If the Assembly genuinely wanted to renew the Covenant it would revisit the reason for its breakdown. If a breach of the Covenant is not a matter of vital importance to the life of the church, what is? But the Assembly resolutions on "sexuality" that run counter to the law of Australia's first peoples have not even been referred back to other councils of the church for concurrence (and the proposed sub-clause to clause 39 of the Constitution weakens the authority of inter-related councils in this respect, contrary to the Basis of Union §15(e)). The President writes: "For too long the church has equated the dominant culture with the light of the gospel". Now is his chance to do something about it: if this remark doesn't apply to light about sexuality it is disingenuous.

The proposed preamble attempts too much, hence the ambiguities. The language of "first" and "second" peoples is respectful in terms of Australian history but inaccurate in terms of the history of salvation (the Jews are first in salvation, cf. Rom. 1:16). The proposed preamble needs to be carefully worded if it is not to become an embarrassment.

Katherine Abetz

op. cit.

Andrew Boyle

The World Parliament of Religions

By the generosity of the Templestowe Uniting Church Council I was able to attend all six days of the Parliament from 3-9 December, a big ask given that this is one of the busiest times of the church year.

This was the fourth Parliament in recent years to be held. The first was held in 1893 in Chicago but was not repeated. The initiative was then revived in 1993, again being held in Chicago where the secretariat for the council for the Parliament is based. Subsequent Parliaments have been held in Cape Town, 1999; Barcelona, 2004 and Melbourne, 2009. Somewhere approaching 8,000 delegates gathered at the brilliant new Melbourne Convention Centre, located beside the Melbourne Exhibition Centre, with its 5,000 seat auditorium and 30 conference rooms accommodating from 40 to 1,000 people each. Each day comprised five session times, the day starting at 8.00am with morning religious observances and the last session concluding at 6.00pm. I was just one among 8,000 taking part in 630 electives so to try and give any sort of objective view would be impossible.

I had to wonder about how to approach such an event. Who, I asked myself, was I and what did the faith I embrace mean in the presence of others who affirm different understandings of the ultimate meaning in the universe? How would I need to be in the presence of these "others"? How did I need to hold my belief while being in dialogue with others?

It was not difficult to participate fully given the goodwill present but this spirit was starkly contrasted with a group of belligerent "Christian" demonstrators who berated delegates as they arrived at the centre on the first few mornings. "Jesus is the only way" they proclaimed, all other religions mistaken and their adherents destined for some form of eternal misery.

The spirit of dialogue and cooperation present in the convention was summed up in the words of Swami Agnivesh, born a Brahmin (the highest of Indian castes) but now president of the "Society of Nobles", a Hindu reform movement. He suggested that "'believers' are fearful that what they believe is not true". There was a sense that most present at the Parliament had moved beyond the "believing" stage, or held belief lightly, acknowledging that the containers of language and culture through which we express our religious practices and traditions are, ultimately, inadequate to express those things which have to do with the divine. So in this regard there was a sense of unity and forbearance amongst speakers and delegates and a sense that people of religious faith have a fundamental role to play in the transformation of hearts and minds in responding to the momentous issues facing us on the planet.

The Parliament was structured around seven subthemes and there were numerous electives around these:

- Healing the Earth with Care and Concern;
- Indigenous People (this was the first Parliament where indigenous peoples and their ancient faith practices were acknowledged and included as part of this religious congress);
- Overcoming Poverty in an Unequal World;
- Securing Food and Water for All People;
- Building Peace in the Pursuit of Justice;
- Creating Social Cohesion in Village and City; and,
- Sharing Wisdom in the Search for Inner Peace.

What was apparent in these themes was that questions to do with the sacredness of the earth, the upholding of human dignity, of justice and equity and the search for meaning are all concerns at the heart of each of the great religions. Using this "common language" and acknowledging the great challenges facing us as a global community there was much common ground to be explored. While at the Parliament I was conscious of the frustrations and setbacks the church often faces in ecumenical dialogue and found there a much freer atmosphere because we were not there needing to surmount our "old" difficulties rather seeking common ground in the face of our great global challenges. We were all certainly forced to think big.

Particular highlights for me were:

The Warfare is Over: Science and Spirituality as Allies for the Sake of the Planet—a whole day stream involving six scholars, all world leaders in their fields of science and religion;

A New Ethical Manifesto for the Global Economy, introduced by Hans Küng (see unglobalcompact.org)—a compact which aims to lay out a "common fundamental vision of what is legitimate, just and fair" in global economic activities;

A Qur'anic Perspective on Healing the Earth with Care and Concern—a morning observance offered by Prof. Muhamed Shafiz, an Islamic scholar from the USA, who spoke with deep affection

and devotion of an Islamic sense of the earth's sacredness;

Decolonizing our Hearts and Minds, Healing the Earth and Ourselves: North American Indigenous Perspectives—with Prof. Ines Talamantez, an Apache Indian and mother of ten who spoke of her own quest to decolonize her mind of the corrosive effects of western civilisation to her indigenous heritage;

Christianity and Ecology—including Dr. Joel Hunter, evangelical pastor and board member of the World Evangelical Alliance (representing 420 million evangelicals), who pleaded for our prayers for the evangelical church, that they would grasp the urgency of the climate crisis and be mobilized to respond positively to the challenge;

Islam and the West: Creating an Accord of Civilizations—a panel discussion involving five Islamic scholars who highlighted the fact that much of our religious (and religio-political) tension is simply a problem of language and what we can do to create a less "tense" world.

For more information, recordings and video clips see parliamentofreligions.org, or for entire video clips of some electives see slowtv.com.au (an initiative of *The Monthly* magazine).

Sandy Yule wrote of the significance of the multifaith environment in *Cross Purposes* 17: "The reality of God is served by faithful human witness … Our ideas of God become more faithful as we attend to the truth in the witness of other human traditions and other individual voices." Certainly this was my experience at the Parliament.

Andrew Boyle is Minister of Templestowe Uniting Church.

in service

Alan Reid

Where Has All the Pastoral Care Gone?

To begin, perhaps one should consider the nature of pastoral care. Obviously it is more than care of the "How are you?" variety. But "pastoral"? The way in which a shepherd stands by his/her flock: no running away when the going gets tough, no occasionally being there for support and guidance but the rest of the time leaving the sheep to cope alone (after all, like today's GPs, the pastor has set hours).

But within the ministerial role, surely pastoral care is being (a) the hand of God, (b) the representative of the community ("the body"), (c) the person of love and caring; roles peculiar to ordination. Let me spell out these ideas.

To be the representative of God. Surely this takes the conversation beyond the everyday into the depth of prayer and concern. How can such a visit take place without shared prayer?

Secondly the pastoral visit is a reminder to the person that the community is concerned for them and is less in their absence. It's not a question of "rounding up" the Sunday congregation but rather an expression of the congregation's concern. By all means let the pastor take an elder for the visit but don't leave the elder to do it alone. This sort of visiting is crucial for baptismal and confirmation preparation and perhaps even for marriage and funeral arranging and counselling.

And finally the pastor reflects a personal concern and interest which radiates from their person: this is no duty, but a time of love by one immensely concerned and interested in the family being visited. (If you don't like people don't become a pastor, be an administrator!)

Well that is nice in theory but what has happened to the practice. Sure ministers visit the sick and the dying, the bereaved and the lost, but what has happened to what we might call the "routine visit"? Is it too boring? How much more ego-enhancing is the committee meeting or the finely prepared exegesis on Sunday morning.

Many years ago Canon Bryan Green talked about his experience in visiting, dividing it into four types. There was the visit where the doorbell remained unanswered although if you felt devilish and took a quick glance over your shoulder at the gate, yes, that was the curtain dropping back! Then there was the visit conducted through the wirescreen door as you asked about little Johnnie's absence from Sunday School. The third was the formal visit in the lounge as one balanced the best china cup and the plate with the sticky chocolate cake

and talked abou the weather. Finally there was the visit where the pastor entered at the back door, made his own coffee in the mug at the kitchen table and held a loving conversation with the family. Canon Green argued that this fourth was the prelude to a pastor visit in which the family was so well known that the minister was the one turned to when a tragedy or need occurred—the groundwork of getting to know the family, and being known by them, had been done (although such knowing remains an ongoing task).

Of course such a "routine" visit can be time consuming, but it doesn't need to be two hours where the minister talks about themselves 90% of the time: ten minutes is often enough to fill the three purposes noted above.

The Catholic priest in my last parish had a marvellous system. He began his visiting after school when his secretary had arranged for him to have afternoon tea with a family, then it was on to a pre-dinner drink with another family, then dinner with another, sweets and coffee with a final family ended his visiting day. In this way he got round his parish of 3000 souls! One might also wonder if there are so few men in our congregations because so many ministers thrive on night meetings and never visit in the evening!

My argument is that before you can pastorally care you have to really know your people, and such visits are surely the great joy of the parish ministry. Too often the elder is expected to do the routine and only report to the minister when there is a perceived need requiring the "expert"!

A final comment. If the pastor does not know his/her people intimately as a result of an abiding friendship, how does one preach relevantly on Sunday? As the Scottish preacher Peter Marshall commented: "Unless I can see one tightening finger muscle on a Sunday morning my sermon hasn't addressed anyone's needs no matter how 'interesting' it may be".

Today we talk about the need for evangelism in the face of diminishing and ageing congregations. Without the type of pastoral care I have tried to outline beginning with the ordained clergy, how can we expect our lay people to reach out. The words of Reynolds Price in his story of how he contracted spinal cancer in mid-life, leaving him wheelchair bound, may well be the ultimate goal of all pastoral care:

> When you undergo huge traumas in middle life, everyone is in league to deny that the old life is ended. Everyone is trying to patch us up and get us back to who we were, when in fact what we need to hear: you're dead! Who are you going to be tomorrow?[1]

It's a brave pastor who would ask that question of any unless there is a pastoral relation of love and trust between minister and people. But then, is not the pastoral and evangelical question: Who are you going to be tomorrow?

Alan Reid is a retired UCA minister with experience in parish ministry, chaplaincy, indistrial mission, worker ministry and as a psychologist.

[1] *A Whole New Life* (Scribner, 1982).

through a glass darkly

Joan Fisher

Trials and Temptations

a Lent sermon – Luke 4:1-13, Romans 10:8b-13

If you've seen the film *Chocolat*, you'll recall that it's set in a French village during Lent. The locals are vigorously denying themselves every pleasure for the season of Lent, and in doing so, squeezing all joy out of their lives. They are horrified when Vianne's chocolate shop opens—don't she and her chocolate delicacies epitomize the worldly temptations they are working so hard to avoid?

Perhaps there are remains of this thinking in our congregations today, as we journey once again through the season of Lent. During this period, do we see our discipleship as becoming an exercise in denial? Today's gospel reading has some important teaching for us about the topic of temptation.

Here we meet Jesus after he has spent about thirty years growing up in the town of Nazareth. He has observed small-town life: among other things, the religious observances of the townsfolk, and the injustices under which they struggled every day.

Then at his baptism in the river Jordan, Jesus takes a step of commitment. He steps away from his former life, and accepts his commission for the remaining years. His life is surrendered to God; and his identity is confirmed in the words "You are my Son, the beloved" (Luke 3:22).

We learn that the next step in his preparation for mission is to be led by the Spirit into the wilderness, the traditional place of testing for the people of God. This wilderness testing also offers the possibility of learning, of discovery. The gospel mentions *forty days* of temptation, indicating that this was a long period.

The reading vividly describes an *internal struggle* for Jesus; a considerable time of reflection on his calling. "What will shape my ministry? How will it unfold? What message am I to bring, and in what form?"

As God's beloved Son, the temptation is to attract the crowds' attention in spectacular fashion: to turn stones into bread; to take control of the world; to be rescued from harm by angels of God.

But his knowledge of the Torah, the way of God, stands him in good stead. Jesus rejects all these options: "This is not *God's* way". He refuses to take the easy way to gain a following, by dazzling people with his use of power, by serving his own needs.

Instead, Jesus says "Yes" to a different way. His ministry will involve coming alongside people in all the messiness of their lives; accepting the vulnerability of human nature: theirs and his.

through a glass darkly

Jesus will reveal that God's way is contrary to people's expectations. It is the way of self-emptying, of giving away power; not using power to persuade people, or force their hand.

In becoming fully human, and accepting all the attendant limitations and vulnerabilities, Jesus can look each of us in the eye and say, "I understand what you're going through". As the writer to the Hebrews expresses it: *[He] in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin* (4:15).

Just as the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for his initial time of testing, we find that the many references to the Spirit during his ministry alert us to the fact that he will face constant challenges and tests. There will be various temptations awaiting him at every turn.

We also learn that temptation doesn't originate in a God who attempts to "catch us out", or keep score of our mistakes. Temptation is related to our inner struggle: "Will I settle for second best here? What is the best that God may have in store for me in this situation?"

The story of Jesus' temptation teaches us that each of us faces temptations according to who we are; according to our particular points of weakness. No two people will be susceptible in just the same ways. As someone has joked, "I can resist anything except temptation".

So it's helpful for us to reflect on: "Where are the wobbly places in my spiritual life? Where do I feel insecure, unsure of myself? In which situations do I forget that I too am God's beloved child?"

Paul, in his letter to the church in Rome reassures us as he quotes the words of Moses to the Israelites: *The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart* (10:8).

The truths about God aren't beyond our grasp. Scripture is shot through with reassurances of God's strength for each difficulty we will face.

Learning to be the best we can be, to live our lives to the full, begins when we are able to declare that *Jesus is Lord*. When Jesus has first place in our lives, all else will follow from that, because we will be living out of his resurrection life in us. Our Christian life is never designed to be an add-on to the rest of our living.

Sometimes in the church we make reference to the fact that "Jesus saves us". You may have seen this on a bumper sticker! What do we mean?

One answer can be found in today's story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. As a fully human being, Jesus faced temptations that touched his particular areas of vulnerability. And he allowed God's Spirit to possess him fully; he chose to live a completely God-centred life, as no-one has done before or since.

In doing so, Jesus showed us what it is to be a "human being fully alive". He embodied what it means for a person to reach their full potential, by showing us what a life lived in deep relationship with the Creator God looks like. And in this way, Jesus "saved us": he showed us how to live, so that we too can become the best we can be. This is good news.

Joan Fisher is a Uniting Church minister in the Albury-Wodonga region.

on Areopagus Hill

Max Wright

Sabbath, Church and the Economy

Synopsis

A rigorous Christian practice of the Sabbath,[1] observed on Sundays, has all but disappeared in the secular culture and economy of Australian society. As Christians we need to recognize, understand and confess how far we have drifted from observance of the "commanded holy day", and respond accordingly. At the same time, that community of Christians known as the church needs firstly to understand itself as an "alternative *polis*", and then (amongst other things) to support its members in exploring the concrete, awkward implications of regularly honouring God in a particular way on the first day of the week. In turn, such Sabbath keeping may have broader beneficial consequences, notwithstanding the marginalized place of the church in our society. It contains the potential for the church to (again) model, in a small way, constructive changes to the foundations of our economy, with the associated flow on benefits to our natural environment.

Sabbath

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Karl Barth argues that to be a man (or woman) means to be caught up in responsibility before God.[2] He first explores the particular thing that God wants from each person in relationship to Godself under the concept of the "commanded holy day". God claims not only the whole of our time, but also a special time. The Sabbath commandment limits our activity, and requires from time to time a concrete interruption, a rest, a temporal pause—to reflect on God and God's work. On this day we are to celebrate, rejoice and be free.

The holy day draws a clear-cut boundary. By taking up time in the midst of human undertakings and achievements, the holy day gives concrete temporal expression to God's free grace.

1 The Biblical tradition moves beyond the Sabbath day to the Sabbath year, where the land lies fallow, and to the year of Jubilee, every seventh Sabbath year—the year of freedom and redistribution. For an analysis of the justice and economic dimensions of the year of Jubilee, refer (amongst others) to Ched Myers, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics* (Washington DC: Tell the World, 2001). The focus of this paper is the Sabbath day.

2 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.4* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1961) 47.

The Sabbath commandment demands a faith in God which, according to Barth, brings about renunciation of oneself, both as a general attitude and as a particular and temporal activity and inactivity on the Sabbath. This self-renouncing faith has two benefits: it frees one from oneself, and from the care of work, for oneself—in a special way; and it frees oneself for God in a special way.

Barth goes on to assert that the proper contribution of the church is the proclamation of the gospel, of the history of salvation and the end, and that this will always become the proclamation of the Sabbath commandment, the call to the self-renouncing faith in God in the concrete form of celebrating this day.

Yet how are Christians to celebrate this day? The question goes beyond the freedom to worship for one or two hours on a Sunday morning, to which many Christians have adjusted, and which is tolerated in our Australian context as an acceptable if relatively inconsequential activity. The commanded holy day is a day (24 hours), one day in seven, it is intended to be holy (set apart), and it has been commanded.

In a society whose dominant culture is secular, pluralist, postmodern and individualistic, integrated with the materialism of a neoliberal capitalist economy, we have for the most part lost any sense of the holy. Furthermore, our Australian history and psyche carries an embedded questioning of authority, so that any reference to "command" may well grate, if not alienate. In such a society, where on Sundays many shops are open, sport is played, entertainment is offered and the associated employees are expected to work, can one expect parents to exclude their children from football or netball, or scouts, or the opportunity for some casual employment at the local fast food outlet? Not surprisingly, the days of regular attendance at Sunday School of a significant number of children seem to have passed for many churches, in turn raising questions around the future of Christian education. And what is the church's "proper contribution" to such a society?

For that small minority which is persuaded by the merits of the Sabbath, several references describe its benefits, and how individuals and families can reclaim its rhythm, discipline and joy. In his classic text on the subject, Abraham Heschel, writing within the Jewish tradition, observes that "Judaism teaches us to be attached to *holiness in time* … [and that the] Sabbaths are our great cathedrals".[3] Furthermore, he notes that for all the romantic idealization of the Sabbath, it remains a concrete fact: "There is no danger of it becoming a disembodied spirit, for the spirit of the Sabbath must always be in accord with actual deeds and abstentions. The real and the spiritual are one."[4]

From the Christian tradition, Wayne Muller describes the Sabbath as a "far-reaching revolutionary tool for cultivating those precious human qualities

[3] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951) 8.

[4] Ibid., 17.

that grow only in time",[5] and proceeds to explore it both as a specific practice, and as a larger metaphor. He affirms its priority, reminding us that the instruction to remember to rest is not a lifestyle suggestion, but a commandment. Muller, with others, also emphasizes the capacity of the Sabbath to nourish and sustain the soul, and so the wellbeing of the whole person.

Matthew Colwell has prepared a useful booklet *Sabbath Economics: Household Practices* arising from his experience as part of a Christian community in the USA, covering topics on capital, giving, green living, consumption, etc., with questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.[6] Also writing in the American context, Dan Allender makes the case for celebrating the Sabbath "as a day of delight for both body and soul".[7]

Yet without the support of the wider Christian community, the actions and inactions of individuals or families may be difficult to initiate, and almost certainly will be difficult to sustain, given the pervasive influence of our dominant culture. If the church is to proclaim the Sabbath commandment, it must be willing to live it. It must embody its proclamation, and support its members accordingly. The challenge of the Sabbath is to the body as a body, as well as to its members. Yet the church as a whole is subject to the same pressures of enculturation and accommodation as its individual members.

Church

In their challenging book *Resident Aliens*, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon argue that "the call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a counter cultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called church … The challenge of Jesus is the political dilemma of how to be faithful to a strange community, which is shaped by a story of how God is with us."[8] They are serious about the body. They argue strongly that conversion is more than simply an isolated decision of an individual—that it involves becoming part of a community, and that in turn that community is qualitatively different from its surrounding wider community by virtue of its allegiance to Christ in both word and deed. That qualitative difference is counter cultural, to the point where the members of the community are described as alien. This difference between the church as a body and its surrounding community ought to be visible.

However in reality things appear to be otherwise, at least in Australia. Neither the church collectively, nor

[5] Wayne Muller, *Sabbath Rest: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (Oxford: Lion, 1999) 15.

[6] Matthew Colwell, *Sabbath Economics: Household Practices* (Washington: Tell the World, 2007).

[7] Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath* (Tennessee: Nelson, 2009).

[8] Stanley Hauerwas, & Willam H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know that Something is Wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 30. "Counter cultural" is meant in the sense of counter to the dominant secular, pluralist, individualistic and materialistic culture.

many of its members, are visibly different from the rest of society, buildings and worship services aside. Hauerwas and Willimon argue that the church has become basically accommodationist, or "Constantinian",[9] in its approach to the issue of church and world. Both liberal and conservative churches have wrongly assumed that "the church's primary social task is to underwrite … democracy".[10] The church has simply become another social organization in our pluralist society.

Hauerwas and Willimon go on to argue that Christianity is more than a matter of a new understanding. Christianity is an invitation to be part of an alien people who make a difference:

> because they see something that cannot otherwise be seen without Christ. Right living is more the challenge than right thinking. The challenge is not (just) the intellectual one but the political one—the creation of a new people who have aligned themselves with the seismic shift that has occurred in the world since Christ.[11]

These writers are not alone in their vision of how the church ought to be. As they observe, Barth knew that the fundamental theological challenge was the creation of a new and better church:

> [The Church] exists … to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to [the world's] own manner and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise.[12]

In seeking a framework to understand the church, Hauerwas and Willimon draw upon the typology of John Howard Yoder, who distinguishes between the *activist* church, the *conversionist* church, and the *confessing* church. According to Yoder:

> The *confessing* church is not a synthesis of the other two approaches … Rather it is a radical alternative. Rejecting both the individualism of the conversionists and the secularism of the activists … the confessing church finds its main political task to lie, not in the personal transformation of individual hearts or the modification of society, but rather in the congregation's determination to worship Christ in all things…
>
> The confessing church, like the conversionist church, also calls people to conversion, but it depicts that conversion as a long process of being baptisimally engrafted into a new people … a counter cultural social structure called church. It seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and never can be, lacking the gift of faith and vision, which is ours in Christ. The confessing church seeks the *visible* church.[13]

The church needs to embrace a radical understanding of the Sabbath, and to sit (and stand) with its members who are prepared to do likewise. As part of that

[9] In Constantinian times, "we could convince ourselves that, with an adapted and domesticated gospel, we could fit [our nation's] values into a loosely Christian framework, and we could thereby be culturally significant. This approach to the world began in 313 (Constantine's Edict of Milan)" (Ibid., 17.).

[10] Ibid., 32.

[11] Ibid., 24.

[12] *CD* IV.3.2 (quoted in ibid., 83).

[13] Ibid., 45f.

process, it must be willing to explore the pointy ethical tensions which Sabbath adherence raises. The church is well placed to move between the pastoral and the political in such matters, from listening and support to analysis and advocacy.

Hauerwas and Willimon tell the story of Gladys and the child care centre. After several months in his first parish, a young pastor proposed that the congregation open a day care centre for children. Such a project would be good stewardship of the property, it may attract new members, the church could be social activist and evangelistic at the same time, and it would provide another source of income. However at the committee considering the proposal, Gladys queried why the church was in the day care business. The project was not targeted to low income families struggling to make ends meet. It was in response to those families where both parents had to work full time:

> [in order to have] two cars, a VCR, a place at the lake or a motor home. That's why we're all working hard and leaving our children. I just hate to see the church buy into and encourage that value system. I hate to see the church telling these young people that somehow their marriage will be better off or their family life more fulfilling if they can only get another car, or a VCR, or some other piece of junk. Why doesn't the church be the last place courageous enough to say, "That's a lie. Things don't make a marriage or a family." This day care centre will encourage some of the worst aspects of our already warped values.[14]

[14] Ibid., 119.

We need to create a context in which conversations with similar passion, insight and honesty can occur about the Sabbath. It is one thing to personally struggle with understandings and applications of holiness, and to make individual choices about what one buys, or attends, or how one otherwise spends one's time on a given day. It is quite another when others are affected. The pressures of peers to join a sports team, the desire of parents to encourage and support their children, the attraction of some independent income, are powerful social forces in our community. And how is the Christian parent employed, or seeking employment, in the agricultural or mining sectors, or in the emergency services expected to respond? The church is, at least potentially, in a position to gather its members affected by these awkward questions, and together discuss the dilemmas, prayerfully reflect, and explore options and practical strategies for response, from the personal to the structural.

Through this process and beyond it, the church as a body needs to come to an understanding as to what a rigorous observance of the Christian Sabbath would look like in our culture, and speak, act and live accordingly. Such an approach will inevitably lead to engagement with the surrounding community, including those in authority, and to conversations about values, priorities and worldviews. Furthermore, it would fundamentally challenge many of the values underpinning secular society, and naturally become an expression of the

mission of the church. As with Yoder's confessing church, the Christian community influences the world by being the church.

Objections

Before proceeding, several questions if not objections may have come to mind. Of these, three are briefly addressed.

(i) Law and Grace

Some may object to any attempt in the 21st century to frame Sabbath keeping in the context of the decalogue. In postmodern society, mention of religious laws is simply out of place. Further, even within the Christian story, do we now not live under grace, rather than the law? Have not the ten commandments been superseded? Tomes have been written on these questions, which will not be summarized here. However it is important to bear in mind that the law (Torah) given by God to Israel was itself provided out of grace. It was not an imposition, but an insight into the way God had ordered creation, a guide to the laws of nature and to how things work.

Furthermore, each of the ten commandments were designed not simply as statement about individual morality, but as guides to a healthy community. It is true that by the time of Christ the Jewish leaders had expanded the fourth commandment to a complex and detailed array of regulations, interpretations which Jesus challenged on more than one occasion. It is also true that the church itself has at times travelled down a similar path, as for example in the experience of Sabbatarianism in the English and Scottish Reformation of the 17th century.[15] Nevertheless, Christ himself affirmed that he had come not abolish the law of Moses and the prophets but to fulfill it.

This tension can be reframed in the dialectic around abundance and limits. God's grace is abundant, and there is an argument that such abundance ought to be particularly celebrated on the Sabbath. Alongside this, it is also true that the Sabbath is about limits, about saying "no", stopping, even some prohibitions. There needs to be some concrete demonstration of its holiness, of ways in which the Sabbath can be set apart, and honoured. The challenge is to somehow find authentic expression for both dimensions.

(ii) Saturday or Sunday?

Whilst for most of Christendom the Sabbath is celebrated in some form on the first day of the week, the practice is not unanimously supported. The Seventh Day Adventists continue to observe the Sabbath on Saturday. And from a theological perspective, Jürgen Moltmann has argued that it is "wrong" to transfer the Sabbath commandment to the Christian Sunday, or to attempt to replace the one with the other.[16] (At the same time he has argued for the importance of preserving the link between the Christian feast day and Israel's Sabbath—"for otherwise the

[15] F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: OUP, 1974) 1217.

[16] Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985) 294.

Christian feast day is threatened with paganization").[17] On the other hand, as Barth has observed, and as the vast majority of the Christian tradition has accepted, New Testament Christianity did not proclaim an annulment of the Sabbath commandment, and began "quite naturally" to celebrate this holy day on the first day of the week, as the day of Christ's resurrection was the day after the Jewish Sabbath.[18]

The question of when the day commences is of course a separate matter. In many Christian traditions the observance of the holy day begins at dusk on Saturday—a practice which has some attraction.

(iii) Paganization and Hope

For many, talk of revisiting Sabbath observance in any concrete, rigorous form in this day and age will be simply unrealistic. Even accepting that it may have some merit in principle, in practice it will be seen as either too hard, or too late, or both. The paganization to which Moltmann has referred has certainly arrived in Australia, and is well entrenched. The prospect of challenging the dominant assumptions and expectations of our culture and economy in such a way seems futile.

Here we return to our understanding of ourselves, and of church. For those who are accustomed to accommodating to the surrounding culture, it may be difficult to see what the fuss is all about. On the other hand, where one identifies primarily with a radical counter cultural Christian community, which sees itself as such, is determined to love and worship Christ in all things, and in God's strength to seek to live accordingly—both individually and corporately—hope remains, and it is possible to follow a different ethical path for the Sabbath, and beyond.

Beginnings of an Ethical Framework

In relation to ethics and the Sabbath, we walk a fine line. On the one hand the pedantic, legalistic path of some of the Jewish leaders in the time of Christ, or of the Sabbatarian Puritans, is to be avoided. At the same time, if the church is to wisely support its members in thoroughgoing Sabbath observance, presumably some form of ethical framework would be helpful.

> "Through its leadership, its proclamation, and its life the church needs to reassert the merits of the Sabbath, and its observance."

Barth has observed that theological ethics has handled the Sabbath commandment with a casualness and feebleness which do not match its importance in scripture or its decisive material significance.[19] He places the Sabbath command of God at the beginning of an investigation of the command of the Creator, and at the beginning of special ethics as a whole. He asks whether we can understand the working day, the day in

[17] Ibid., 294.

[18] Barth, 53.

[19] Ibid., 50.

relationship to our sisters and brothers, before we have understood the holy day.

At the same time, Barth cautions that no ethics of the holy day can come between God and the individual, nor can the particularity of the Sabbath commandment be reduced to general rules. Beyond this, he frames the question of Christian ethics concerning the holy day around a series of questions under four statements:

(i) The holy day does not belong to man or woman, but to God.

(ii) The meaning of Sunday freedom is joy, the celebrating of a feast. The freedom is for God, and for remembering God's rest, and the resurrection of Christ.

(iii) The holy day is not given to the individual in isolation, but in relationship.

(iv) The Christian interpretation of the holy day is not the last day of the week, but the first.[20]

To these four claims one could add a fifth from Moltmann:

(v) Creation and the Sabbath belong together—in fact the doctrine of creation is "completed" by the doctrine of the Sabbath.[21]

Perhaps these assertions at least provide a basis for prayerful reflection and analysis for the church and its members, in seeking to respect the commanded holy day in current times.

Sabbath, Creation and Economics

In 1972 *Limits to Growth* was published, a controversial book by D. H. Meadows et al. predicting ecological catastrophe within a century as a result of a combination of continued growth in population, production and consumption, and the depletion of resources and energy.[22] The analysis was greeted by some with scepticism, and the modelling upon which the projections were based was questioned.[23] However more recently the substance of their argument has been vindicated. Turner, for example, reviewing observed historical data for 1970-2000, concludes that the data closely match the "standard run" scenario of *Limits to Growth* for most of the outputs reported: this scenario results in global collapse before the middle of this century.[24]

There are some parallels between the concept of limits to growth and the Sabbath. However: a point of clarification and caution before we proceed. In keeping with Hauerwas and Willimon, these remarks are addressed primarily to the church, and its members. This paper

[20] Ibid., 71.

[21] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 276.

[22] D. H. Meadows, et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe, 1972).

[23] Some of the criticisms were technical, such as the non-inclusion of a price mechanism in the feedback mechanisms, and the high level of aggregation in the modelling, with no differentiation among different regions of the world. For a more detailed examination of the report, see Graham M. Turner, "A Comparison of *The Limits to Growth* with 30 Years of Reality", *Global Environmental Change* 18 (2008) 397-411. See also Peter A. Victor, *Managing Without Growth: Slower by Design, Not Disaster* (UK: Elgar, 2008) 90-94.

[24] Turner, 411.

does not purport to speak directly to the wider community, where for some belief in God has no relevance, and where for many of those who would affirm theism, the Judeo-Christian tradition has no particular meaning. A revisiting of the Sabbath is not of itself a prescription for public policy—although an optimistic interpretation would allow that it could have implications for public policy, over time. At the same time, it is critical that Christians, as members both of an alternative *polis* and the wider society, remain informed about their socio-economic context, and able to anticipate the potential implications of their beliefs and behaviour for that broader context.

The parallels between the Sabbath and limits to growth apply both as a specific practice and as a larger metaphor. Most obviously, Sabbath keeping involves (amongst other things) setting limits, and agreeing on some prohibitions, in order for its holiness to have meaning. In particular, a limit is placed on work and the working week. As a consequence the amount of economic activity, and potential for economic growth, in any given week is restricted.

More broadly, Sabbath reminds us of creation and in fact completes creation. As Moltmann writes:

> [The] completion of creation through the peace of the Sabbath distinguishes the view of the world as creation from the view of the world as nature; for nature is unremittingly fruitful and, though it has seasons and rhythms, knows no Sabbath. It is the Sabbath which blesses, sanctifies and reveals the world as God's creation.[25]

[25] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 6.

Furthermore, Sabbath reminds us of our place in creation, and challenges any anthroprocentric attitude and lifestyle. Certainly we have been created in God's image, and have a particular responsibility as "stewards". Yet at the same time we are part of creation, and interdependent with it—humankind is not the "pinnacle" of creation. The act of creation comes to its completion not on the sixth day with the creation of humankind, but on the seventh day with God's blessing of the whole. With its rest and rhythm of time, the Sabbath is a strategy "which can take us out of our ecological crisis, and often one sided progress at the expense of others, and *show us the values of abiding equilibrium and accord with nature*" (emphasis added).[26]

Returning to the broader social context—notwithstanding the warnings of 1972, and their subsequent endorsement, economic growth, driven by the need for (apparently) indefinitely increasing productive capacity to meet the demand (and perceived desirability) of higher standards of living, remains a top policy priority in most countries.[27] Such growth, with its associated consumption of resources, means that "nature's bounty is being run down, even to the point of exhaustion",[28] and is at odds with any notion of an "abiding equilibrium and accord with nature". Nevertheless the presumed case for

26 Jürgen Moltmann, *Creating a Just Future: The Politics of Peace and the Ethics of Creation in a Threatened World* (London: SCM, 1989), 66.

[27] Victor, 18.

[28] Ibid., 21.

economic growth is pervasive, and remains commonly accepted as conventional wisdom by most political leaders and the general public.

Whilst it is beyond the purpose of this paper to respond in any depth to this analysis, it must be noted that not all economists, nor all fellow citizens, share this view. Herman Daly for example has written extensively on this subject, articulating the interdependence between the economic, environmental and social elements of our society, and the consequent necessity for equilibrium and a steady state economy.[29] Building on the same assumptions, a Canadian economist, Peter Victor, has developed an economic model which demonstrates the possibility of moving to a low growth or no growth economy without triggering the negatives and fears commonly associated with a recession.[30] It remains for such a model to be refined and applied in an Australian context. Such an approach would be in keeping with the original concerns raised in *Limits to Growth*, and also sits nicely with the understandings of Sabbath and creation here outlined.

Next Steps?

Before considering the possibility of any further action, there are some prior questions. One must first accept that there is a problem, in terms of the lack of Sabbath recognition and observance by Christians. For many there is no such problem, perhaps because it is not seen, or because, if it is seen, it is minimized or reframed. For those for whom this is an issue, there is a second challenge—the ability to move beyond the sense of futility if not hopelessness noted earlier.

Assuming that in God's strength we are able to continue past these hurdles, a few suggestions are offered.

- *Personal*—Obviously any Sabbath observance must begin with oneself. Whilst individual practices will vary, nevertheless the discipline, nourishment and rhythm of particular activities and inactivities each Sunday start with, and continue with, each of us at a personal level.
- *Person-in-community*—As we have been consistently reminded, we have been created in relationship, as persons-in-community.[31] It is important that decisions about the Sabbath are made within the context of relationships, beginning for most people with their family or close friends.
- *Church*—For Christians one central form of community is (or at least ought to be) that gathered community engaged in worship and mission called church. Ironically, it may be here where the greatest challenge for Sabbath reverence lies. Through its leadership, its proclamation, and its life the church would need to reassert the merits of

[29] Herman E. Daly & John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon, 1989).

[30] Op. cit.

[31] We are created in God's image, by a trinitarian God whose very nature includes relationship. The particular phrase "person-in-community" is used by Daly and Cobb as an alternative paradigm to individualism (7).

the Sabbath, and its observance. This would involve (amongst other things) sitting with parents to explore the ethical tensions and options around competing Sunday schedules, perhaps supporting them in their challenges to schools or sporting bodies or other community groups, perhaps advocating publicly to revisit Sunday programming, and almost certainly considering in advance the implications for the parents and their children of being greeted with inertia—if not misunderstanding and hostility. Is it an unthinkable thought to frame non-participation in Sunday football, for example, as an act of Christian discipleship? If not, in what ways could the church community support the individual and their family in such an act? The church does need to be willing to see itself as an "alternative *polis*", and to actively support its members in living accordingly. It would also involve the church engaging in a wider conversations—local churches with their central denominational structures, churches across denominations, churches with the state, not to mention the significant potential (presumably down the track) for some serious Jewish-Muslim-Christian dialogue on respective observances of the holy day in current Australian society.[32]

Conclusion

This transition from Sabbath to economics does not imply a return to Christendom, where the church dominated society. The continuation of the freedoms and responsibilities associated with a pluralist democracy in Australia is assumed. However it does suggest that, through a renewed understanding and practice of "church", and Sabbath, one can join some dots between Sabbath observance and some broader elements of our society, including the economy. Such Sabbath observance, founded on notions of God, holiness and creation, both challenges and informs some of the fundamental values underpinning our society.

The church remains free to be the church, and to continue to faithfully explore its tradition, identity and place in society. Part of such reflection ought to include a revisiting of its understanding of the Sabbath in current times, and a commitment to courageously live out that understanding with all of its rich personal, social, spiritual, environmental and economic implications.

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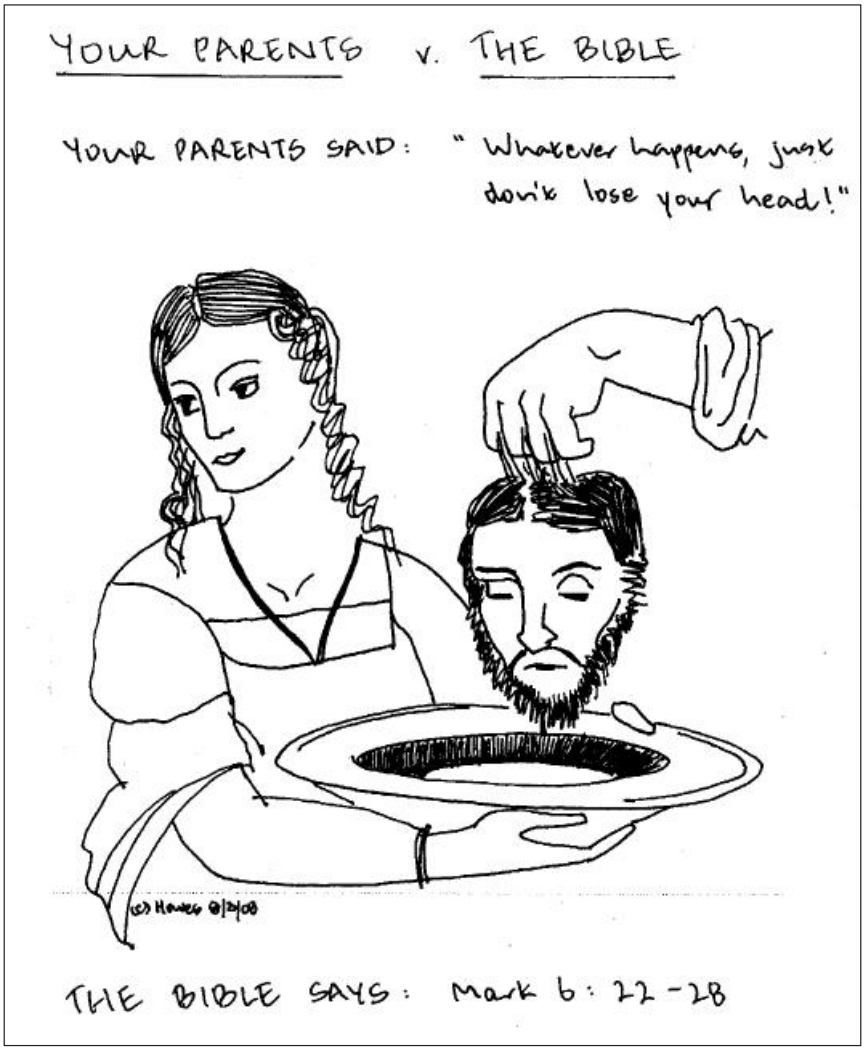
[32] Lee Levett-Olson has called for such a dialogue in an article entitled "An Environmental Sabbath" in *Gesher* 3.4 (2007), 43.

double take

Hilary Howes



credo

Michael Champion

Creator of Heaven and Earth

To affirm that God is the creator of heaven and earth is simultaneously to affirm every other article in the creed. That's the way creeds work. They are not individual propositions from which one may pick and choose. Rather, they are a total symbol of Christian belief. Just as one cannot delete one element of a painting without doing violence to the original, so creeds communicate and enliven as wholes. Therefore an explication of God as creator will necessarily name God as Trinity, identify the Father as the ground for the existence of the good creation, speak of the redemption of creation in the person of Jesus, and emphasise the vivifying Spirit and the mission of the church.

Over its history the church has used the doctrine of creation in just this way. Against Gnostics who denied the goodness of creation and the unified goodness of God, the early church developed a doctrine of creation from nothing which proclaimed God's sovereignty, emphasised his gracious providence as the ground of ethics, and bound creation with eschatology and soteriology by telling a story of salvation from creation to glorification in which Christ's redeeming work took centre stage. The one God created a good creation for the redemption of his creatures. Against Platonists who believed that the world emanated from a divine principle, Christians again used the concept of creation from nothing to preserve trinitarian freedom and a place for the radical transformation of reality in the event of redemption.

Yet the doctrine of creation from nothing today makes many Christians uneasy. The last thirty years has seen an explosion of thinking about the environment in the human and physical sciences. Environmental issues hold centre stage in contemporary politics and global warming demands a reassessment of how humans should interact with their environment. Environmentalists have pointed to the fragility of ecosystems and re-opened our eyes to the interrelations between humans and other beings in creation. Theology has grown new branches as part of this upsurge in interest in the environment. Yet in a flagship book for so-called "eco[logical]-theology", *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, the doctrine of creation from nothing hardly rates a mention in 614 pages. The Christian doctrine of creation is seen as part of our environmental problem. The image of God as the masculine, sovereign creator exerting his will and intellect over creation is troubling because it establishes

hierarchy and dualism. The monarchical mode of creation is taken to be at the heart of our exploitation of the natural environment. Creation is an unwarranted exercise of power which validates exerting cultural power to maintain dominance. Creation is colonization and God is a colonizer. White settlers in Australia could force their culture onto the aboriginal inhabitants since they, like God, started with a *terra nullius*. At the heart of these arguments is a fear of seeing creation as something really different from God. If creation really is different from the creator, so the argument goes, we sow the seeds for radical dualism, for hierarchy and for the associated cultural power structures which exploit the powerless and denude the environment.

In a provocative article, Catherine Keller presses such a critique. She argues that Christian theology has sought to achieve the vision of Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (21:1-4). The "sea" that is no more is the deep over which the spirit of God hovers at the start of Genesis. For Keller, that deep represents fluid, fleshy, female nature, which patriarchal visions of God have sought to eliminate or contain. The deep embodies three main symbolic meanings. First, it represents chaos: the creation story is a violent victory of logical order over chaos. The creation story thus proclaims that what is constructed as chaotic and alien by the dominant cultural powers is subdued and brought under their control. Second, the deep can be conceived of as the nothing from which God creates. In this version, the doctrine of creation from nothing actually eliminates the powerless and marginalized feminine deep. In its place resounds "the disciplinary word of the Father who creates with no preconditions, and thus owns and controls all his domains".[1] We return to creation as the grounds for domination. Keller sees this working itself out in an American version of our infamous *terra nullius*. She quotes an early explorer of the Americas who believed he had found the new heaven and earth of the Apocalypse. His sea was, like the deep conquered by God, something to be colonized. Keller concludes dramatically:

> The unprecedented "ecological imperialism" … coupled with genocidal impact suggest the aggressive carelessness toward that which comes before, towards the preconditions of the earth and its populations: toward all that is constructed as chaos. The long traditions of *ex nihilo* creation and apocalyptic eschatology join smoothly in a new gospel of annihilation.[2]

Such a critique, which indicts the classical doctrine of creation with a range of crimes from sexism to imperialism, logging to genocide, leads much contemporary feminist and ecological theology to reject creation from nothing altogether. In its place Keller and others propose what they view as a more eco-centric, organic and peaceful view of creation (e.g. McFague, *The Body of God*; Ruether, *Gaia and God*). In her third and preferred symbolic meaning of the deep,

[1] In Hessel & Ruether, 188.

[2] Ibid., 189.

Keller imagines it as the sheer potentiality of nature which is open to cooperation with the divine spirit. This view begins to elide the distinction between creator and creature: nature itself cooperates in creation. (How a pure potentiality cooperates actively is not made clear.) But it also values mortal, creaturely existence, by making it integral to the process of creation. Instead of eliminating the complex, fleshy, feminine and heterogeneous deep, Keller seeks to set it at the heart of a reinvigorated doctrine of creation. Since the deep represents, for Keller, all marginalized groups and powerless creatures throughout history, her doctrine of creation is intended to be grounded in ethics. Her version of creation demands that we fight for environmental and social justice. For McFague, the world is God's body, now imagined in feminine garb, and the birth of creation is an ongoing process where God acts to energize and facilitate human flourishing. Ruether treats creation as a living organism, where God gives birth as the "immanent source of life and renewal of life that sustains the whole planetary and cosmic community".[3] What such images emphasize is that creation is a process. God is approximately Tillich's "ground for Being" and creation is at least suffused with divinity if not itself divine. The images of an immanent God giving birth to creation and of the world as God's body are both meant to emphasise a continuum between creator and creature. We're back with Keller's cooperating potentiality.

[3] Ibid., 106.

While Keller's criticism strikes to the core of certain forms of Christian thinking about creation, her account is ultimately unsatisfying. I've noted some difficulties in her account regarding how to conceptualize the relationship between creator and creature. The images she and others propose to replace creation from nothing are themselves problematic. Is creation to be viewed as the body of God or is it the product of Big Birther? How do creatures (either as body parts or offspring) exercise real independence? Is nature sheer potentiality or is it active? How does either view sit with a scientific world-view which treats matter as non-purposive? If nature cooperates with God in creation, what is lost in our account of divine freedom? And does imagining the deep as feminine itself perpetuate an unjust essentializing of femininity? But I also argue that her criticism of the classical doctrine of creation from nothing is almost entirely misplaced. The creator of heaven and earth who creates out of nothing is not the caricature painted in Keller's argument. I claim that the doctrine of creation from nothing at its best provides rational grounds for believing in creaturely freedom, for overcoming oppressive and unjust power structures whether dualist or hierarchical, and for experiencing God, the creator of heaven and earth, as joyous and peaceful overflowing of love for all creation. So in the remainder of this essay I will try to explicate the doctrine of creation from nothing to see what it does say about the God who created the cosmos.

One of the most fundamental existential questions is: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Creation from nothing is, in part, Christianity's answer to this question. The doctrine is not, therefore, an answer to a scientific question about how something is as it is. (Hence the sterility of so much phony debate in science-religion controversy). To say that God is the creator of heaven and earth is to say that God desires what is not God. There is something rather than nothing because God decided to bring something into being. God is not a something, like other cosmic somethings, and God did not have to create the cosmos. God's eternal life as Trinity, a joyful interplay of difference, is sufficient in itself and he does not create in order to satisfy a deficiency in the divine plenitude. If he did, creation would be instrumental, to be used by God to satisfy his needs and hence creation would entail domination, even if by a benign dictator. But it is also impossible for Christians to imagine a God who did not create the cosmos, because creation is not accidental. There is something rather than nothing because God is the sort of God he is.

> "Images of creation which emphasize cosmic uniformity suppress real difference, a favoured technique of the powerful in maintaining their privileged position."

The doctrine of creation is therefore a meditation on the doctrine of the Trinity. The creative and harmonious interaction between Father, Son and Spirit constitutes the divine life. As Father, Son and Spirit, God is the embodiment of existing for others; his identity is relationship with alterity. Precisely as such, God is the creator of heaven and earth. As Williams has it, the life of the trinity, as the creation of the cosmos:

> gratuitously establishes God as the one who is supremely there *for* the world [and] it seems we must say that God is already one whose being is a "being for", whose joy is eternally in the joy of another.[4]

Hence there can be no question of the elimination or manipulation of "the deep" in the event of creation. God's creative word is a command which calls forth a reality which really is other than God. "Before" God speaks, there is nothing to which the word "before" can refer. The deep is not a substantive nothingness, and still less the suppressed multitude, feminine or otherwise; rather it is the beginning (not the precondition) of the history of God with his creation. This point requires emphasis because it is overlooked in the eco-feminist critique. Narration is, of couse, implicated in time, so the act of creation stretches the limits of narrative to breaking point. Yet with Augustine, we must declare that God's creative summons creates time itself: "You are the Maker of all time …time could not elapse before you made it" (*Confessions* 11.13). It is hence illegitimate to imagine a time or a mass

[4] Williams, 74.

before creation and therefore erroneous to imagine creation as the exercise of power by God over something.[5]

The creative command entails an obedient response, so Jenson is right to claim that the "event of obedience is the existence of the world".[6] The narrative of creation is, in a sense, the narrative of God's faithful relationship with Israel. It is built on the logic of command and obedience, promise and fulfilment. Israel comes into existence and continues to live "by every word that comes from the Lord" (Deut. 8:3). The Exodus is a story of creation through divine summons and obedience, gloriously reaffirmed in Isaiah 40-55 after the return from Babylon: "I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. They are created now, not long ago, before today you have never heard of them" (Is. 48:6f). The creation of the new Israel is again the obedient response commanded by this creative summons: "Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: I am he, I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they stand at attention" (Is. 48.12f). Again and again the biblical narrative has this logic of summons and obedience, where the obedient response to the summons is the creation of identity rather than the manipulation of pre-existing reality.[7] The call of the first disciples may be read as the same story. The deep which is literally nothing ("we have caught nothing") becomes new—full to bursting with fish—at the creative word of Jesus. Simon Peter's response ("Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!") is the obedient recognition of the distinction between creature and creator ("When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him") and the event is the creation of the church which extends God's promises to Israel to the whole world (Luke 5). To affirm that God is the creator is to affirm his desire for relationship with the whole creation. Ultimately, this universal summons is extended to all people in the total obedience to God's summons by Jesus who is both creative word and obedient response. The creative summons or command has as its goal the good creation. Thus creation has a purpose. The story of creation is the story of the world's redemption. Creation and resurrection are two sides of the same coin.

To point to the recurrence of these stories of command and obedience throughout the biblical narrative is to underscore the present reality of God's creative acts. As Irenaeus had it, "Adam never left the hands of God who made him and finally perfected him in Christ" (*Haer*. 5.1.3). We are sustained in being by God's creative word now, and we are redeemed by the incarnation. The doctrine of creation proclaims God's providential concern for his creatures throughout the history of creation. But while Irenaeus rightly emphasises divine providence, Thomas Aquinas reminds us that God's providence, while encompassing, is not "clingy": "in [God's] hand were all the

[5] Ibid., 68f.

[6] Jenson, 7.

[7] Williams, 68f.

ends of the world: … when his hand was opened by the key of love, the creatures came forth" (*In Sententiarum*, Prologue). Again, the characteristic of divine love is that it gives properly independent reality to what is not God.

Hence creatures are not merely potential. Rather, we are free agents with a God-given independence. Knowing that God is beyond the interplay of creaturely power-plays and negotiation of identity and that he is simultaneously what grounds my identity means that worldly claims by others to construct my identity for me are unmasked as illegitimate.[8] Only God is God. The principalities and powers of this world are conditional and contingent since reality is dependent on God alone. "There is one God, the Father from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor. 8:6). Creation liberates humanity from the pagan gods—the powers of this world—who would subject us to their will. "To believe in a free creator is to believe that nothing in the world can enslave us by being 'God' for us".[9] God's creatures are free creatures, able to respond to his creative command in obedience or disobedience.

Therefore creation from nothing establishes real difference in the universe and hence, *pace* Keller, establishes not pathological hierarchy but rather the possibility of loving the other as other, of seeing other creatures as absolutely valuable in their uniqueness and difference from ourselves. Creation from nothing is the doctrine which rules out treating other creatures as means to our ends. Since the creation is grounded in the triune God's free action of being with others, such real difference can only be elided by failing to see the world as it really is. Such failure is an ethical failure. The images of creation offered by Keller and others which emphasize cosmic uniformity suppress real difference, a favoured technique of the powerful in maintaining their privileged position. Keller's strange equation of the creator/creature distinction with patriarchal hierarchy may be read as an illegitimate claim to the power of a certain type of feminist discourse. That power claim is guilty of the same elimination of the biblical text she constructs in the classical doctrine of creation.

In *CP* 18, Bruce Barber reminded us that the doctrine of creation implies that the biblical text, the divine word, has "already 'out-thought' the categories required by the culture". This is perhaps a more comprehensive way of saying some of the things I've pointed to about the creative word rendering earthly powers contingent. The divine act of creation is the end of the binaries which have captured the modern imagination because everything and everyone is relative only to that act. All creaturely reality is bound together, directed towards obedient response to God's word of creation. God created no binaries, nor did he suppress opposing principles in creating the cosmos. Thus the dualisms by which we are so often constrained are merely our own constructions, powerless and ephemeral

[8] Ibid., 72.

[9] Ibid., 74f.

despite their proud appropriation of common sense. What remains is God's word, spoken in creation and made flesh in Christ. Since the event of creation is directed towards redemption, all such conceptual divisions are ultimately reconciled in the person of Jesus.

To know that God makes us free, independent creatures is to be able to approach God in prayer and joyful obedience and thus to be set free to live fully in the world. "The glory of God is a man fully alive", and Irenaeus, like God, meant "fully" (*Haer.* 4.20.7*)*. To be fully alive like Jesus was is to be open to God, open to the reconciling and reconciled word of God, open to other people and open to the whole creation. The doctrine of creation establishes what it is to be fully alive: to act in obedience to God's creative summons and thus to rejoice in relationship with others and unmask all strategies that take pleasure in negating or instrumentalizing the lives of others. Just as God's providential concern for us is a care that desires us to be free, so our care for others and for God's world is not an act of mastery but a hopeful and peaceful acknowledgement of our shared creatureliness and our shared purpose of glorifying God.

Therefore the classical doctrine of creation is a resource for all who would value the whole creation and seek to unmask its unjust practices, exploitative structures and unreconciled categories. To believe in God, the creator of heaven and earth, is to relativize all worldly claims to power, for there is but one God. It is to believe that creation has been judged good by God, and hence that every corner of it demands our care and love. It is to know our identity is found in obedience to the creative call of God on our lives and to be truly free to respond to that summons. It is to know that the whole creation is redeemed by God and will be transformed into glory. To affirm the first article of the creed is thus to know ourselves as God's creatures, with all the freedom, joy and thirst for justice and peace which that entails.

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Works Cited

Readers will note my dependence on the following and are referred particularly to Williams and Jenson for expansion and refinement of the points made in this essay:

Dieter T. Hessel & Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000. Especially chapters by Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, Rosemary Ruether and Catherine Keller.

Robert Jenson. *Systematic Theology*. Volume 2. Oxford: OUP, 1999. Chapter 1, "The Act of Creation".

Gerhard May. *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of Creation in Early Christian Thought*. Trans. A. S. Worrall. Edinburgh: Clark, 1994.

Rowan Williams. *On Christian Theology.* Oxford & Malden: Blackwell, 2000. Chapter 5, "On Being Creatures".

what are you reading?

Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land
by Chris Budden · reviewed by Adam McIntosh
Princeton Theological Monograph Series 116 · Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2009

Chris Budden's *Following Jesus in Invaded Space* is a thorough engagement in contextual theology. This book is written for the Australian context and is an attempt to do theology as "Second Peoples", which is Budden's description of all non-indigenous Australians. Budden's primary thesis is that Australian theology must take seriously the history of invasion and dispossession of indigenous people. We live on "invaded space" and theology needs to struggle with this context. The book is written with the explicit assumption that the Australian churches have internalized the values of an invading society with all its racist explanations of the invasion. Budden seeks to do "Second Peoples" theology by privileging the voices of indigenous people, which have been marginalized by the churches and mainstream Australian society.

The book is divided into two sections. In the first section, incorporating chapters one to three, Budden examines the context of theology in Australia and outlines a theological method for this discussion. His argument is that the primary defining context for those who live in Australia is invasion. Invasion is much more than taking land from indigenous people. It is about social location, economic activity, the sacred and political life. Budden challenges the Australian churches to do theology in the context of an invaded land acknowledging the massacres and frontier wars, the mistreatment of indigenous people, their exclusion from rights of law, deaths in custody, imprisonment rates and the various government policies of segregation, assimilation and integration.

Budden is ambitious in his attempt to cover complex historical and theological issues in a relatively small book. This is both an advantage and disadvantage. It is an advantage as it gives the reader a summary overview of complex issues in a clearly written style. The disadvantage is that there are generalizations made and summary descriptions that require further explanation. For instance, "Second Peoples" are all classified into a homogeneous group living with privilege and rights of access denied to "First Peoples". Although it is undeniable that indigenous people were denied many of the basic rights given to Second peoples, the experience of being Second peoples is quite diverse and complex according to gender, class, educational disadvantages and so on. Moreover, Budden's discussion of theological method only introduces

a possible direction, but again the reader is left wanting more details and clarification. These are limitations that Budden acknowledges and do not detract from the primary thesis of this book of how to do theology in an invaded space.

The second section, including chapters four to seven, is a thorough engagement in contextual theology. This is where the book has its greatest contribution and is very thought-provoking. Each chapter theologically reflects on a contextual issue. Chapter four considers the conflict of worldviews, engaging a wide range of issues from God and the european world, indigenous ways of speaking about God, providence and suffering and revelation. In chapter five Budden considers the Federal Government's intervention policy in the indigenous communities of the Northern Territory. Budden relates a trinitarian understanding of God and biblical approaches to justice and order in very concrete ways to the intervention policy. This is an excellent chapter and accomplishes something rarely seen in academic theology: a very practical application of a trinitarian theology.

Chapter six is a fascinating engagement in contextual ecclesiology. Budden draws on practical examples as he explores what it means to be the church in Australia. Again, Budden relates these to various models and images of the church. He argues that one of the marks of the church in Australia should be the presence of "First Peoples" as genuine partners. The church cannot be the church unless indigenous people are seen not as an object of the church's mission, but as a way that God is heard in the life of indigenous people. Budden highlights something that is often missing in a trinitarian ecclesiology: the contextual nature of the church.

Finally, in chapter seven Budden theologically reflects on reconciliation, covenant and treaty. He argues that a trinitarian account of God provides a model for relationships in the church as communal, relational and expressed in covenant. This has implications for the relationships between First and Second Peoples, especially the way power is used in these relations.

This book is provocative and confronting for Second Peoples. Indeed, Budden makes it clear that this is one of his aims in writing the book. He wants to create "disillusionment" in order to challenge what has been considered "normal" in Australian society in relation to the denial of the history of invasion. He has certainly achieved this aim. This book challenges mainstream theology in Australia to seriously engage in contextual theology that acknowledges Australia as an invaded space. It is also an excellent example of contextual Australian theology. Budden challenges the very notion of what an Australian theology is and how to take seriously the history of invasion in relation to indigenous people. It is by no means an exhaustive book and Budden does not come to many strong conclusions on different issues. However, Budden has begun a conversation and provided a model for a "Second Peoples theology". I highly recommend this book.

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Bill Loader
on sexuality in the world of Jesus and the future

Steve Taylor
responds to Garry Deverell on alternative worship

Martin Wright
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