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Ecological Commitment and the Following of Jesus

Making the connection between ecological commitment and Jesus of Nazareth is at the center of a Christian ecological theology. This connection is not something that can be taken for granted. It is far from obvious to many people that ecology has anything to do with Jesus. Numbers of Christians who are deeply committed to ecology find it easy enough to see their commitment in relation to God as Creator, but cannot see a connection with the story of Jesus.

It is an urgent task for theology to show the inter-connection between the living memory of Jesus and the issues that confront the global community. Only when this connection is made will ecological action be seen not only as ethically responsible, but also as radically Christian, as the faithful praxis of Christian discipleship. Only then will the wider Christian community be challenged from within its own Christian depths to ecological conversion.

According to the Gospel tradition, Jesus embodies the compassion of God in his person, his words and his actions. He offers healing and hope to those suffering illness and exclusion. He brings liberation and joy to those imprisoned by psychological bonds. He invites women as well as men into the circle of his followers to form a new family of sisters and brothers. He interprets God's gift of the *Torah* in terms of compassion. He announces forgiveness for sinners and celebrates festive meals with public sinners and outcasts that anticipate God's coming Reign. He teaches that love is the meaning of everything, love for God with one's whole self and love for one's neighbour as oneself. He insists that this love has no limits. It can have no borders. It is to embrace the enemy.

In the limited and finite life of Jesus there is unleashed an explosive dynamism of compassion that knows no boundaries. This is evident in every aspect of Jesus' ministry, but it reaches its radical expression in the absolute dark night of his death and in the disciples' experience of Jesus as the risen one. In encountering Jesus beyond death, the disciples discover that the compassion of God manifest in Jesus cannot be contained by the tomb, but breaks free as a dynamic power of liberation and hope. In a way that remains ever mysterious, the utter humiliation, ugliness and brutality of the cross has become a spring of compassionate life flowing out into the whole world. What flows forth is nothing less than the dynamic Spirit of God.

In all of this, the first Christians become convinced that a new stage in God's salvation history has been reached. They see what has occurred in Jesus as having universal meaning. The unstoppable dynamism of the Spirit leads them beyond the boundaries of Jesus' own ministry that had been centred on Israel. In the power of the Spirit, the disciples come to understand that fidelity to the God revealed by Jesus now demands a new universality. Divine compassion is directed to the whole world. It reaches out beyond the human community to embrace "all things" in the reconciliation of Christ (Col 1:15-20).

Through the ages, Christian saints and sages have recognized that this divine compassion does not stop with human beings. Paul told the first Christian community in Rome that the whole creation awaits its redemption in Christ (Rom 8:19-24). At the end of the second century, Irenaeus saw the whole of creation as recapitulated (summed up and transformed)

in Christ and as destined to share in Christ's victory over death. In the thirteenth century Francis of Assisi showed how the divine compassion embodied in Jesus reaches out to embrace individual animals and birds as brothers and sisters to us before God. In the early twentieth century, Teilhard de Chardin came to see the whole of evolutionary history as empowered by the risen Christ, the Omega who is the source and goal of the whole emergent process.

Christians who reflect on Jesus today, from the perspective of the twenty-first century, do so as participants in a human community engaged in the extinction of uncounted species of living creatures. This context challenges us to think again about the compassion of God revealed in Christ and its relationship to the non-human creatures of our global community. In this chapter, I will begin to take up this issue from what we know about Jesus' own attitude to creation. This will be followed by some reflections on the way that the first Christians understood Jesus in relation to creation, as the Wisdom of God in our midst. Then I will outline the notion of "deep incarnation" and bring the chapter to its conclusion by offering some thoughts on the meaning of Jesus Christ in the context of evolution. Chapter 5 will continue this exploration, focussing on the final transformation of all things in the risen Christ.

1. Creation in the Life and Ministry of Jesus

The living memory of Jesus was passed on orally in the liturgy, preaching and life of the first Christian communities before finding written expression in the Gospels. In this living memory, Jesus is not only celebrated as messianic Son of God, but also remembered as a great prophet and as an extraordinary teacher of wisdom. And like the long line of wisdom teachers of Israel, Jesus is remembered as someone who sees the natural world as the place of God.

As a wisdom teacher, Jesus speaks of God and God's Reign in parables and proverbial sayings. He is a gifted parabler, communicating the deepest things of God in stories and images from the natural world and from the cultural world of human communities. His images come from the whole of life: the beauty of wild flowers, the growth of trees from tiny seeds, crops of grain, bread rising, a woman sweeping a floor looking for what was lost, children playing games, the relationship between a shepherd and the sheep, the birds of the air, foxes and their lairs, rain falling, and the generosity of a parent to a wayward child.

The parables reflect a close observation and delight in the natural world as the place of God. They could arise only in a person who looks on creation with contemplative and loving eyes. As C. H. Dodd concludes in his classic study, the parables reveal that for Jesus there is an "inward affinity between the natural order and the spiritual order." Dodd argues that "the sense of the divineness of the natural order is the major premise of all the parables."¹ Jesus' parables of the Reign of God are the products of one who sees creation as the gift of God and as the place of divine presence.

The memory of Jesus' prayer in the wilderness is a further witness that for him, as for other mystics in the Jewish and Christian traditions, the natural world is a place of encounter with the living God. His prayer in the desert and in the hills of Galilee points to the wilderness as the place where he found communion with the God he proclaimed. The Gospels report Jesus going out into the wilderness for thirty days at the beginning of his ministry. There he experiences temptation and, we are told, "he was with the wild beasts" and "the angels

ministered to him" (Mk 1:15). It seems that Jesus experiences the wilderness and its wild creatures as the place of divine communication. The Gospels tell us that during his ministry Jesus regularly goes into the wilderness to find God. Mark describes Jesus getting up early and going out to a deserted place to pray (Mk 1:35). Luke, in one of his many references to Jesus at prayer, tells of him going out to a mountain to pray and spending the night in prayer (Lk 6:12). As his passion approaches, the three synoptic gospels tell of Jesus praying outdoors in the garden of Gethsemane, where he struggles in darkness and pain and entrusts his life and death to God.

The gospel memory of Jesus' parables taken from nature and his prayer in the wilderness provides a context for interpreting Jesus' explicit sayings about God's compassion for non-human creation. These are the well known texts, where Jesus teaches that God feeds and clothes each bird of the air and each lily of the field (Mt 6: 28; Lk 12:27) and where he speaks of God's care for every individual sparrow that falls to the ground (Mt 10:29; Lk 12:6). The focal point of these sayings is God's provident care for human beings. But the assumption made in them is that every sparrow that falls to the ground matters to God. There is no doubt that the Gospels present God's provident care for human beings as unique and special --"the hairs on your head are all counted" (Mt 10:30) -- but they also present this compassion and provident care as involving *every single sparrow*.

Jesus sees God as the one who can be addressed in a familial and very human way as "Abba" (Mark: 14:36). He clearly sees God as a God for human beings, a God bent upon us with love, a God who cherishes human beings and brings them liberation and hope.² But for Jesus this Abba is also the Creator God, the one who makes the Sun rise and who sends rain upon the just and the unjust (Mt 5:45). The God of Jesus is a God who is radically a God for human beings, but also a God for all creatures. When Jesus' words about wildflowers and sparrows are understood in the context of his other parables taken from nature and his practice of prayer in the wilderness, I think it can be said with confidence that Jesus looks on wildflowers and sparrows with loving eyes and sees them as both loved by God and as revelatory of God.

2. The Early Christian Community Sees Jesus as the Wisdom of God

The experience of Jesus' resurrection radically transformed the battered and defeated followers of Jesus. In the process it led them to reflect on his meaning and identity. It convinced them that what was present with them in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was nothing less than God. They were well aware of the humanity of Jesus. They had lived through the events of Jesus' ministry and humiliating death. They now needed to find a way of telling the story of Jesus as a story that begins from God. They needed to be able to speak of God's self-giving to us in Jesus. They needed to find ways of speaking of Jesus as "God-with-us" (Mt 1:23).

Recent scholarship has shown that devotion to Christ as one with God arose very early in the life of the church, as early as the pre-Pauline Christian community centred on Jerusalem.³ In Paul's own writings it is simply taken for granted. Paul also takes it for granted that the risen Christ has a cosmic role. In a remarkable text Paul writes: "Yet for us 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" (I Cor 8:6). Clearly Paul sees "all things" in the universe as in some way having their existence through Christ. And he sees Christ as not

only involved with the origins of things but with their final transformation. He sees the whole of creation as finding redemption and final liberation in Christ (Rom 8: 21).

How does this cosmic view of the risen Christ arise? It seems that one of the contributing factors was the already existing theology of the Wisdom of God. In the biblical Wisdom literature, God's self-communication is beautifully personified in female terms as the *Wisdom Woman* (*Hokmah* in Hebrew, *Sophia* in Greek). In these Wisdom writings, the Wisdom Woman is not understood as a second God alongside the God of the Covenant, but as a way of talking about the presence and action of the one God of Israel.

There are two central characteristics of the Wisdom Woman. First, *she is intimately involved with the whole of creation*. She is pictured as with God in creation, a co-creator with God, a companion with God delighting in all God's creatures (Prov 8:22-31; Sir 24:3-7; Wis 7:25-8:1). Wisdom is a "tree of life" (Prov 3:18). It is by her that God founds the earth, establishes the heavens, breaks open the deep, and enables the clouds to drop down their dew as refreshing, life-giving rain (Prov 3:19-20). Second, *she comes to dwell in our midst*. She makes her home with us, sets her table, prepares her great banquet and invites the poor and needy to come to eat and drink of what she has prepared (Prov 9:1-6; Sir 24:8-22). Wisdom is both the one in whom all things are created and the one who has now come to dwell amongst us.

While Jewish believers could see God's gift of the Law (*Torah*) as the Wisdom of God who has made her home amongst us (Sir 24:23), early Christian believers could identify Jesus as the Wisdom of God in our midst. Paul insists, against all competing human claims to wisdom, that the Wisdom of God is found revealed in Christ crucified (I Cor 1:24, 30). He argues forcefully that God's Wisdom is revealed precisely in what seems like the utter foolishness and powerlessness of the cross. Matthew, see Jesus as the Wisdom of God in our midst. It is Jesus who does the healing and liberating deeds of Wisdom (Mt 11:20) and who as Wisdom come to make her home with us cries out: "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). In the Gospel of John, Jesus-Wisdom is proclaimed as the Word made flesh (Jn 1:1-18), and is presented as the one who invites the poor and needy to his table and gives himself to them as the Bread of Life (John 6). Throughout the New Testament there are texts that may be remnants of early Christian hymns, which sing of Jesus in terms that echo the wisdom tradition. In the short hymn in the opening of Hebrews for example Christ is presented, like Wisdom, as the one through whom God creates all things (1:2). We read that Christ is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word" (1:3). The description of the risen Christ, as the "reflection" and "imprint" of God and the one who "sustains" all things, echoes the *Wisdom of Solomon*, where it is said of *Sophia* that she is "the image of God" (Wis 7:26) and that "she reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well" (Wis 8:1)."

It is worth noting how in each of these hymns, the words "all things" form a constant refrain. The repeated use of this expression points insistently to the cosmic meaning of Christ. A second example of a Wisdom-type hymn to the risen Christ is found in the opening chapter of John's Gospel. Here Jesus is again understood in categories and in language taken from the Wisdom literature⁴, but he is described as the Word of God rather than the Wisdom of God:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one

thing came into being...He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.... And the Word became flesh and lived among us (Jn 1:1-14).

Jesus is celebrated as the Word made flesh. But we are being told that the story of this Word does not begin with the life of Jesus. The Word was with God in the beginning and had an active role in the creation of "all things." According to this hymn, everything that has ever come to be in the long history of creation exists only in and through the Word. In terms of what we know today, this would involve seeing this Word of God as the Word of the Big Bang, the primordial hydrogen, star formation, the Milky Way Galaxy, planet Earth, bacteria, clams, frogs and chimpanzees. It is this endlessly *creative* Word that is made flesh in Jesus. What is further suggested is that the whole process of the creation of the universe is directed towards the Christ event.

A third example of a cosmic hymn to the risen Christ modelled on Wisdom is found in Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;
for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,
things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -
all things have been created through him and for him.
He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body the church;
he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.
For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,
and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
by making peace through the blood of the cross (Col 1:15-20).

Here the cosmic Christ is celebrated as both the *source* of creation and its *goal*: all things have been *created* in Christ and all things are *reconciled* in him. The words *all things* are constantly repeated throughout. All things are created in Christ who is the Image (*Icon*) of the invisible God. As in the Wisdom literature *Sophia* is with God in creation and continually sustains all things, so in Colossians the risen Christ is the one in whom all things are created and in whom all things hold together. The Colossians hymn goes further, asserting that in Christ and Christ's cross, God has reconciled all things to God's self. Everything in creation is created in Christ, sustained in him and reconciled in him.

The universal role of Christ is driven home not just by the oft-repeated "all things," but also by the repeated explanation that this involves everything in what were seen as the two great cosmic realms of heaven and earth, and by the further insistence that it includes all the cosmic powers - "whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers." In ancient cosmologies, these angelic beings were thought of as controlling the movements of the sun, the moon and the stars. It seems that some at Colossae worshipped these cosmic powers and the letter makes it clear that all cosmic forces are taken up by Christ and transformed in the power of the resurrection. Everything in the universe is to be transfigured in Christ-Wisdom, the *Icon* of the invisible God.

In Colossians, Christ's death and resurrection is understood as the beginning of the transformation of the whole of creation. This same idea appears in Ephesians, where we are told that all things will be gathered up in the risen Christ (1:9-10; 20-23). In Revelation, we hear of "a new heaven and a new earth" and the risen Christ is proclaimed the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Rev 22:13). In the yearly cycle of the liturgy, many Christians use these words from Revelation as they light the Easter candle from the new fire of the Easter Vigil. Then, illuminated by the light of the Easter candle, the symbol of the risen one, they listen to readings from Scripture that tell the story of salvation beginning with the Genesis account of the creation of all things. Every Easter is a celebration of the whole of creation transformed in the light of the risen Christ. Far from being restricted to human beings, the Christ-event involves everything on Earth, from ants and beetles to pelicans and whales. It involves every part of the 14 billion year story of our universe and of the 3.8 billion year history of life on Earth.

In recent years, feminist theologians have led the way in recovering a theology of Jesus in terms of divine Wisdom, or *Sophia*. Some, like Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza have focussed on Jesus as a child and prophet of *Sophia*.⁵ Others, like Elizabeth Johnson, have developed a christology of Jesus as the Wisdom of God. In this theology, Jesus is understood as revelatory of God symbolized as the female *Sophia*. This has the effect of breaking the stranglehold of androcentric thinking and points to the God-with-us in Jesus as beyond male and female, but inclusive of both.⁶ In my view this opens up to a viable and life-giving Wisdom christology, that is both feminist and ecological. Jesus the Wisdom of God can be seen as inclusive of both female and male, and of both human and non-human creation.⁷

Wisdom Christology, like Word of God Christology and Son of God Christology, involves a view of pre-existence and incarnation. It proposes that what we meet in Jesus of Nazareth is someone who is God with us, truly of God and sent by God. But Wisdom Christology contains a healthy reminder that what pre-exists is not the humanity of Jesus. It encourages a healthy negative theology about that which pre-exists in the divine life. It makes it clear that pre-existent Wisdom is neither male nor female, but transcends both. And it points to a divine Wisdom that finds expression not just in the human but in the whole of creation. This kind of wisdom theology is depicted in the beautiful mosaic in the church of *San Clemente* in Rome, where the cross of Christ is the tree of life for all creatures.

3. Deep Incarnation

As theologians have attempted to articulate a Christian ecological theology, they have turned to the central idea of incarnation. At the heart of Christian faith is the affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is the *Word made flesh* (John 1:14). What is meant by flesh in this affirmation is not only the fully human reality of Jesus, but the whole of humanity embraced by God in the incarnation. As the great patristic theologians like Irenaeus and Athanasius taught, in the Word made flesh God becomes human so that the whole of humanity might be healed, taken up into God and deified in God.

However, the meaning of the incarnation, of becoming flesh, is not restricted to humanity. The flesh that is embraced by God is not limited to the human. It includes the whole interconnected world of fleshly life and, in some way, includes the whole universe to which flesh is related and on which it depends. On this basis, Australian theologian Duncan Reid

has argued for an eco-Christology in which affirmations about God's embrace of humanity in the incarnation are always to be understood in the context of the wider claim that the Word has become flesh. Flesh points beyond the humanity of Jesus, and beyond the human community embraced by God in the incarnation, to the biological world of living creature.⁸ Flesh evokes the whole world of inter-related organisms. It suggests that in becoming flesh, God has embraced all creatures in the interconnected web of life. New Zealand theologian Neil Darragh comments on this line of thought: "To say that God became flesh is not only to say that God became human, but to say also that God became an Earth creature, that God became a sentient being, that God became a living being (in common with all other living beings), that God became a complex Earth unit of minerals and fluids, that God became an item in the carbon and nitrogen cycles."⁹

In Jesus of Nazareth, God becomes a vital part of an ecosystem, and a part of the interconnected systems that support life on Earth. Danish theologian Niels Gregersen calls this the idea of *deep incarnation*. He argues that, in Christ, God enters into biological life in a new way and is now with evolving creation in a radically new way. In Christ God is with all forms of life in their suffering limitation. The cross of Christ reveals God's identification with creation in all its complexity, struggle and pain. Gregersen finds in the cross a microcosm of God's redemptive presence to all creatures that face suffering and death. He writes:

In this context, the incarnation of God in Christ can be understood as a radical or 'deep' incarnation, that is, an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature. Understood this way, the death of Christ becomes an icon of God's redemptive co-suffering with all sentient life as well as with the victims of social competition. God bears the cost of evolution, the price involved in the hardship of natural selection.¹⁰

I believe that this concept of deep incarnation is faithful to the Christian tradition, which claims with Paul, that the whole creation waits with "eager longing" for its liberation from "bondage to decay" and for "the freedom associated with the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:19-23). It is congruent with the Colossians hymn referred to above, in which Christ is celebrated as the "Icon of the invisible God," as the "firstborn of all creation," as the one in whom "all things in heaven and on earth were created," as the one in whom "all things hold together," and as the one through whom "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross" (1:15-20).

The concept of deep incarnation also reflects the insights of evolutionary biology concerning the interconnections of all living things in the one history of life on Earth. Biology does not allow us to see human flesh as an isolated reality. Human beings can only be understood as inter-related with the other life-forms of our planet and interconnected with the atmosphere, the land and the seas that sustain life. A theology that takes biology seriously can see human beings only as part of the 3.8 billion year history of life on Earth. And, precisely because theology is committed to God as Creator, it must take biology seriously. A biologically informed theology cannot think of the human without taking into account our dependence on the creatures that have gone before us in evolutionary history and our ecological interdependence with the biological systems of the planet.

Today, in a world where countless forms of life have been destroyed and many more are under threat, we need a deeper appropriation of the meaning of *God-with-us* in Christ. We

need to think of *God-with-us* in the sense of *God-with-all-living-things*. In the concept of deep incarnation, the Christ-event can be understood as God entering into the evolutionary history of life on Earth, embracing finite creaturely existence from within. In the Word made flesh, God is revealed at the heart of the human, and precisely as such, is revealed as at the heart of all life on Earth. The flesh of Jesus is part of the whole creaturely pattern of life on Earth. When the Word is made flesh, God embraces the long interconnected history of life in all its complexity and diversity. The incarnation is God-with-us in the “very tissue” of biological life. If God is with us in Christ Jesus in the very tissue of biological life, this raises further questions about the theological connection between the event of Christ and evolutionary history.

4. Jesus Christ in an Evolutionary World

Karl Rahner has offered some important reflections on the compatibility of Christology with an evolutionary view of the world.¹¹ He asks whether it is possible to find an inner relationship between the Christ-event and evolution. He seeks a coherent theology that is faithful to the Christian tradition’s deepest insights into the meaning of Christ and that also respects the findings of evolutionary biology.

He begins from the fundamental *unity* of creation. This unity is found first in the fact that all things spring from the one Creator. Second, creatures are united now in one inter-related and interdependent evolving universe. And, third, the whole of creation will reach its culmination by being taken up as one into God. Creation is united in its one origin, in its self-realization as one united world, and in its one future in God. This unity as grounded in God’s purpose in creating a universe of creatures.

Rahner describes this purpose in his beautiful fundamental concept of divine *self-bestowal*. God creates a universe of creatures in order to give God’s self to them in love. Self-bestowal is the meaning of the universe. We human beings have experienced this self-bestowal in the Christ-event and in the experience of the Spirit in grace. In the Word made flesh and the Spirit given in grace, God is revealed as a God of self-bestowing love. Creation is the addressee of divine self-bestowal. This self-bestowal is already at work in our world in God’s creative presence to all things. It will reach its culmination only when the whole of created reality is transfigured in the power of the resurrection and taken up into God.

Rahner sees the incarnation as intrinsic to God’s purpose in creation. While one school of theology has seen the incarnation primarily as a remedy for human sin, another associated with Franciscan theologians like Raymond Lull and Duns Scotus sees the incarnation as always central to the divine plan in creating a universe of creatures. In this second school of theology, creation was *always* directed towards the Christ event. God always had the incarnation in mind.¹² Rahner takes up this Franciscan theology and argues that the universe exists only because God was always going to give God’s self to creation in love. This means that the incarnation is not something that comes about primarily because of sin--although in a sinful world it certainly is an event of forgiving grace. The incarnation was always at the center of the divine plan. For Rahner, creation and incarnation as two distinct parts of the one act of God’s self-bestowal to the world. They are two distinct dimensions of one process of divine self-giving. They always belong together.¹³

With this conviction in mind, Rahner begins to develop an evolutionary approach to Christology by pointing to the transitions that occur in evolutionary history. There are times when something radically new emerges, when more comes from less. Key examples are when matter becomes life, and when life comes to self-consciousness in human beings. Rahner insists that the emergence of the new comes about through natural processes that have their own integrity. It is the role of science to explain these processes at the empirical level. But he sees an important role for theology as well. Theology needs to account for these processes in terms of the creative act of God. This demands a new development. How can a theology of creation account for the emergence of the new?

In the traditional theology of creation God was seen as holding all creatures in being and as enabling them to act. Rahner finds this theology, important and fundamental as it is, in need of development. In the light of what science tells us about an emergent universe, creation cannot be thought of as God simply sustaining things in existence. Theology needs to give an account of God's creative act in such a way that it is seen as enabling the universe to *become*. God's creative act must be of such a kind as to allow the new and the unpredictable to emerge. God, then, needs to be thought of as empowering the universe from within, in such a way as to enable genuine novelty to emerge. As I pointed out in the last chapter, Rahner calls this creation's capacity for *self-transcendence*. This is a capacity that the universe and its creatures have within themselves to become. It belongs to the creature, but it is not due to the creature. It springs from the immanent creative presence of God enabling the creature not only to exist but to become what is new. As I proposed in the last chapter, it comes from the Creator Spirit present to each and every entity of the universe.

In Rahner's central idea, God is seen as inspiring and enabling a great pattern of evolutionary emergence. In this pattern, matter transcends itself to become life; life transcends itself in self-conscious human beings; human beings transcend themselves in union with God through grace; and in Jesus of Nazareth, the whole evolutionary process transcends itself radically into God.

From the perspective of Christian faith, the universe can be thought of as carried from the beginning towards a more conscious relationship to its Creator. In human beings, the material universe has become self-conscious. In humanity creation has come to personhood. As creation come to personhood human beings stand before God's self-offering love in the Spirit. As part of the universe, they are invited into an interpersonal relationship with the Creator. They are part of the universe that can turn back to God in love, thanksgiving and praise.

In Jesus of Nazareth, this movement of grace reaches a moment when one human being is wholly and irreversibly responsive to God's self-giving love. In Jesus, one of us, part of the one universe and its history, is so radically open to and identified with God, that we can rightly say that he *is* the Wisdom of God, the Son of God. Like us, Jesus is the product of biological evolution. Like us, he is made from stardust. Like us, Jesus is inter-related to all other creatures in one global community of Earth. In Jesus, the movement of self-transcendence that has been going on throughout evolutionary history reaches its irreversible climax. In Jesus' complete yes to God, there is a radical and unique self-transcendence of creation into God.¹⁴

From the side of creation, then, the event of Jesus Christ can be understood as the self-transcendence of the created universe into God. From the side of God, Jesus can be seen as God's self-communication to creation. In Jesus, we find both God's self-giving to the universe

and the universe responding in radical creaturely acceptance. Because Jesus is both God's self-communication in our history and creation's radical yes to God, Rahner sees Jesus as the absolute Savior.

Jesus is the self-bestowal of God, but this divine self-bestowal occurs from within the evolutionary history of life on our planet. Evolutionary history thus becomes the place of divine revelation. It is embraced by God and taken up into God. In the incarnation within evolutionary history, and above all in the resurrection which is its fulfillment, there is a promise that the history of life is not meaningless and empty. This history can now be seen as occurring because God wants to give God's self to creatures in love. In the resurrection there is a promise that this evolutionary history and all the creatures that it brings forth are destined to be taken up into God and to find in God their healing and divinizing fulfillment.

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe ways in which the living memory of Jesus can be understood in relationship to ecological commitment. The starting point was with Jesus himself, with the memory of Jesus as a wisdom teacher who found God in creation and who saw God as involved with every sparrow that falls to the ground. At a second level, the first Christians see Jesus risen as the Wisdom of God, as the one in whom all things are created and finally reconciled. At a third level of reflection, I turned to the contemporary idea of deep incarnation, the idea that in the Word made flesh, God has embraced the whole interconnected world of biological life. Finally, I reflected on Rahner's insight that Jesus can be understood as both the self-transcendence of the evolving universe into God and as God's self-communication to the universe.

As this has made clear, bringing together commitment to Jesus Christ and commitment to creation is not a novelty in the Christian tradition. It can be grounded at the levels of the living memory of Jesus and of the Wisdom christologies of the early church. At the same time, recent scientific insights into the evolution of life and the interconnectedness of all life on our planet have led theologians to discover new levels of theological connection between Jesus and ecology, in the concepts of deep incarnation and the self-transcendence of creation. Each level contributes to the conviction that the following of Jesus in the twenty-first century necessarily involves ecological commitment. This will be taken further in chapter 6 in a theology of the transformation of creation in Christ. Before then, it will be helpful to explore the trinitarian God revealed in the Christ-event in relation to creation.

¹Notes

* *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006).

C. H. Dodd, *The Parable of the Kingdom* (Glasgow: Collins, 1961), 20-21.

² This is a theme of Edward Schillebeeckx in his *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979).

³ See Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2003).

⁴ For a good summary of the evidence see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I-XII* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), cxxii-cxxiii, 519-24.

⁵ See for example, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

⁶ See Elizabeth Johnson, "Jesus the Wisdom of God: A Biblical Basis for a non-androcentric Christology" in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 41 (1985) 261-94; *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); "Wisdom was made flesh and Pitched her Tent among Us" in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), edited by Maryanne Stevens, 95-117; "Redeeming the Name of Christ" in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), edited by Catherine LaCugna, 115-37.

⁷ I have developed the idea of wisdom Christology as an ecological theology in *Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

⁸ Duncan Reid, "Enfleshing the Human" in *Earth Revealing - Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*, edited by Denis Edwards (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 69-83.

⁹ Neil Darragh, *At Home in the Earth* (Auckland: Accent Publications, 2000), 124.

¹⁰ Niels Henrik Gregersen, 'The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World', *dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40 (2001), 205.

¹¹ See Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," *Theological Investigations V* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 157-192. See also his *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 178-223.

¹² For this early Franciscan theology, see Ilia Delio, "Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 3-23.

¹³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 197.

¹⁴ See Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 178-203.