

Jesus and the Earth, Walking Our Christology

Edward P. Echlin

Our way of proceeding in Christ talk and action today, is first to look hard at the context in which we and our fellow earth creatures live. That context is the relentless destruction of the earth, often called development or growth. People find difficulty in responding to the needs of the earth. We cannot relate to the earth as a community of subjects, fragile, interdependent, reliant on a sustainably functioning humanity. We can declare ‘war on terrorism’ as long as that terrorism is other humans, easily demonised, even though the ‘terrorism’ itself may in fact be retaliation against western fire-powered injustice in the Middle East. Addicted to fossil fuelled mobility, even most aid agencies are in denial of climatic disruption wrought by western technological ‘development’. George Marshall and Mark Lynas write,

In the US, unions joined the Christian right in opposing the Kyoto Protocol, while in the UK, development and aid organisations have maintained a baffling silence in the face of a threat that will wipe out most, if not all, of the benefits of their work. Among the major groups, only Christian Aid has called openly for stronger political action on climate change.¹

Jesus and Our Response

We best respond to this challenging context by discovering the earth embeddedness, the ecology, of God made flesh in Jesus, and living an earth embedded Christology in our own lives. When addressing sixth formers, I have learnt that mere talk about Jesus and the earth rings few bells in challenged, and challenging, young hearts. Teens ask hard, pointed, personal, fair questions about my own practice. They leave few hiding places. That is why I include ‘walking our Christology’, in my title. Jesus and the earth is the defining Christology of our century.

We cannot reconstruct, even with careful modern methods, the real Jesus of the earth, exactly as he was encountered by parents, siblings, friends, and disciples, who transmitted to us their experiences. The

¹ George Marshall and Mark Lynas, ‘Why we don’t give a damn’, *New Statesman* (1 December, 2003), p. 19. Cafod’s Chris Bains writes complacently of eroding overseas soil as ‘the fields that grow our food.’ *The Tablet*, 15 Jan 2005, p. 5.

first Christians enjoyed an unrepeatable perspective. In wise and haunting words Albert Schweitzer warned that attempts to rediscover Jesus historically are coloured by the questor's own presuppositions. We can still find him, thought Schweitzer, but in our daily experience,

As one unknown and nameless He comes to us, just as on the shore of the lake He approached those men who knew not who He was. His words are the same: 'Follow thou Me!' and He puts us to the tasks which He has to carry out in our age. He commands. And to those who obey, be they wise or simple, He will reveal Himself through all that they are privileged to experience in His fellowship of peace and activity, of struggle and suffering, till they come to know, as an inexpressible secret, Who He is . . .²

Jesus' contemporaries preach Jesus illuminated by Easter light. They transmit memories of Jesus in literary forms, metaphors, and pictures of their own time, always interpreted in Easter light. Through their gospel we encounter Jesus in that same light that still shines. For our context, in which we need to reintegrate with the earth as a community of subjects, we may consider that the human Jesus, who walked through Galilee, remains with us filling the earth today. In a profound, influential lecture, the biblical scholar Ernst Käsemann, arguing that we can discover more of the real Jesus than Albert Schweitzer thought, reminds us that the earthly Jesus and the risen Jesus are one, 'The earthly Jesus cannot be understood otherwise than from the far side of Easter, that is, in his majesty as Lord of the community and . . ., conversely, the event of Easter cannot be adequately comprehended if it is regarded apart from the earthly Jesus.'³ I would add that bringing the earthly and risen Jesus to the suffering, indeed diminished earth is, in Schweitzer's words, 'the task which he has to fulfil in our time.' Cormac Cullinan gives a good description of this 'our time',

Scraping topsoil, plants and the rich community of life off land and covering it with concrete is also an assault on our inner world. If we continue too long on this course our consciousnesses, and those of the generations who follow us, will no longer be shaped through interaction with the beauty, diversity, and sheer unexpectedness of nature.⁴

Intimately related to ecological Christology is the relationship of God's constitutive act in Jesus to other world religions, or ways. When, finally, we genuinely respond, in Christ, to the possibly terminal cry of the biosphere, we will be empowered readily to relate Jesus to other religions, not excluding John O'Donohue's 'passion of the nature goddess.' Response to the cry of the earth, together

² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (London, 1954), p. 401.

³ Ernst Käsemann, 'The Problem of the Historical Jesus', in *The Historical Jesus Quest, Landmarks in the Search for the Jesus of History*, Gregory W. Dawes, ed., (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 290.

⁴ Cormac Cullinan, *Wild Law, A Manifesto for Earth Justice* (Dartington, Green Books, 2003), p. 206.

building God's reign, is a mission in which all earth religions are in full communion. Jacques Dupuis notes,

Christians and "others" are called to build together the Reign of God in the world down the ages. They can and must build together this Reign, in which they already share, through conversion to God and the promotion of gospel values, until it achieves, beyond history, its eschatological fullness (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 39).⁵

When we discover Christ, through the experience of the early Christians, we notice, perhaps for the first time, the immense impact of the prologue, or genesis, of John's gospel. Through God's own Word, God was in the beginning. Through God's Word, filling the universe, and present in the earthly and risen Jesus, all things are created. In Jesus immersed in the earth, God's Word is embedded flesh and dwelt among us. In Him is light and life, and important 'for the task which he has to fulfil in our own time', that light shines in unheeding darkness until we his followers, as Christ existing as community, radiate that light today (John 1.1–15). If we restrict Christology to soul salvation or psychologised spiritualities, we deprive the surrounding darkness of light. Paul of Tarsus grasped the relationship of Jesus with all creation, the light of Christ, celebrated in the Johannine prologue, shining in the darkness. 'It is God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4.6). In that first Christian century, when the Johannine prologue was being recited and refined in Christian houses, Paul proclaimed that Jesus was 'the first born (*prototokos*) of creation', that is, he is supreme, all things 'were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Col. 1.16–17).

That 'for' is itself supremely important for our distinctive *Christian* contribution to mutually supportive relationships between people, and the earth. When we live sustainably locally, because we, and the whole earth, are for Christ, we are the light of Christ in our damaged earth, we make sacraments everywhere, by conducting a cosmic chorus, a cosmic liturgy, as the explicit voice of the earth community. As 'the light of the gospel of God's glory', we Christians, like candles flickering in windows at Epiphany, are sparks welcoming and celebrating our Creator made flesh on earth. As Hildegard of Bingen wrote, 'How would we know God is life if not through living creatures glorifying Him? He has therefore created these living sparks to make bright his face.'⁶

⁵ Jacques Dupuis S.J., *Christianity and the Religions, From Confrontation to Dialogue*, (Maryknoll, Orbis, 2001), p. 202.

⁶ In H el ene et Jean Bastaire, *Le Chant des cr atures* (Paris, Cerf, 1996), p. 49.

The Young Jesus

In the incarnation, God assumes and heals the earth community in all its biodiversity. ‘What is united with God is saved’, wrote Gregory Nazianzen. Jesus’ humanity is a microcosm of the earth, indeed the universe. We approach Jesus with wonder, contemplating him in his relationships with the earth community. What in Christ happens to humanity, happens to all the earth community within which people are embedded, and with which we live in mutually supportive relationships. The inspired gospel stories about the beginning of Jesus’ life on earth include domestic and wild animals. Matthew’s gospel echoes the star, or comet, foreseen by the magus Balaam, who is forever associated with a wise donkey who refused to carry him where God forbade passage. When Balaam struck the animal, the ass replied ‘Am I not your ass, upon which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to you?’ God intervened, siding with the animal, ‘I have come forth to withstand you, because your way is perverse before me; and the ass saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, surely just now I would have slain you and let her live.’ (Num. 22. 30–33). Similarly the Holy Family’s trip to Egypt echoes that of the first Moses who, in response to God, led his wife and son to Egypt ‘on a donkey’ (Ex. 4.20). Luke’s infancy includes the manger (*phatne*) associated with the ox and ass. Especially since Francis of Assisi’s most perduring sermon, his outdoor crèche at Greccio, these animals are included in Christmas. The adult Jesus too associated them with the manger, ‘Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?’ (Lk. 14.5; Is. 1.3). When we contemplate Jesus imaginatively with animals and other members of the earth community, we draw upon our own sense experience. As Karl Rahner wrote, ‘spiritual knowledge, no matter how subtle it may be, is included and filled with content by sense experience’.⁷ In Mark’s gospel, almost immediately, we find ourselves at the biodiverse Jordan Valley, and in the wilderness ‘with the wild animals’ (Mk. 1.13). Here, with this peaceful scene, we may wonder if Mark is not evoking the peaceable kingdom (Isa. 11.6–9). With Stanley Spencer, we may imagine Jesus with a scorpion in his hand. With Robert Graves, we wonder if a scapegoat, ‘poor innocent’, found and followed him. Mark stimulates us to ask if that ecologically sustainable age, which now seems so unattainable, that peaceful kingdom did not begin when God’s Word in Jesus entered our earth community. Animals are included in our

⁷ Karl Rahner, ‘The Theology of the Religious Meaning of Images’, in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 23, Joseph Donceel, S.J., and Hugh Riley, eds. (Crossroads, N.Y., 1992), p. 150.

future, as they are in the gospel prologues. When we, and our children, suffer from unsustainable earth abuse, so do the animals associated with Jesus when his human life began.

Nazir at Nazareth

Matthew suggests that the holy family went to Nazareth because Jesus *was* the peaceable king, the *nazir*, or shoot, from Jesse's stock (Isa. 11.1; Mt. 2.23). Nazareth was a fertile village of several hundred people. There, says Luke, Jesus was 'subject' to his parents, learning from them. He became a *tekton*, or craftsman, says Mark. He was 'the son of the *tekton*' adds Matthew. In Roman Galilee there were some rich, often absentee, landowners, Roman citizens, and courtiers, and many very poor tenants, craftsmen, servants, and even slaves. Craftsmen, such as Joseph and Jesus, belonged to the lower middle class, or if we consider just two classes, the upper strata of the lower class. Families lived simply, in homes of two or more rooms, clustered around a shared courtyard. No traces of mosaics, luxury trinkets, or splendid buildings exist. Jesus lived in a largely agricultural community, where even successful craftsmen supplemented income with food growing in family fields, in partial self-sufficiency. Nazareth, with its fields, orchards, and stock, was at least partly self-sufficient. Archaeologist Jonathan Reed writes,

The entire area seems to have been preoccupied with agricultural activities. On the outskirts of the village, traces of terracing have been found, as has evidence of a vineyard tower. Inside the village, wine-pressing vats with straining depressions, fermenting vats, and depressions to hold storage jars, along with grinding stones and silos are complemented by simple locally made pottery and household items, without any trace of imported or fine wares from the earlier periods.⁸

Family fields, with respected 'ancient landmarks', provided food security which is currently lacking in modern countries dependent on imports, with enormous damage to climate from unnecessary food trade, and air and lorry miles. Erik Millstone and Tim Lang note, 'More and more food is transported by air. Importing food from the opposite hemisphere makes possible a permanent "dietary summer", but is costly in energy and in environmental damage.'⁹

In food secure Galilee, eldest, and other, sons learned from elders the soil's needs and demands. The holy family did not know or grow potatoes and tomatoes, but probably grew lettuce, chard, leeks,

⁸ Jonathan Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilee Jesus, a Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, Trinity Press, 2000), p. 132.

⁹ Erik Millstone & Tim Lang, *The Atlas of Food, Who Eats What, Where and Why?* (London, Earthscan, 2003), p. 67.

brassicas, legumes, and even melons, all of which were widely grown in the Mediterranean bioregion. Here in Nazareth fields Jesus learned that, after the long dry season, autumn rain fell on good soil and bad, on just and unjust, that golden wildflowers glorify God in spring, then wither and die becoming useful fuel or compost, that small birds, beautiful in variant ways, are each known to God. Unlibrariated Nazareth fields were the school of later, still remembered eloquence.

Jesus grew food organically, following ancient wisdom transmitted from father to son for generations. Nazareth economy was circular, what was taken from the soil was returned, as compost or ashes, which nourished another cycle. Nazareth economy, unlike our own, was not linear, dumping waste into landfill, furnaces, or 'from the pipe's end'. Jesus knew, as his parables show, the value of manure, more vital for life than pearls of great price. Organic growing, whether on a farm or garden bed, is sustainable and satisfying, but not effortless. In the struggle for food, Jesus would have known friendly predators who restrain herbivore insects, invertebrates, and mammals. He would have saved heritage seeds from crops that flourished in family fields. Local seeds, crops, and recipes are sacred, intrinsic to life and a culture. As *Zambian Jesuits* warned at a Vatican conference on genetic modification, 'Food is not only another economic commodity governed in its productivity and distribution by the laws of the market. Since it is essential to life, it is both a sacred entity and a global common good.' The seeds and crops and fields worked by Jesus were not subject to external corporate control, patenting, genetic interference, and pesticides. Indeed some of the heritage crops we grow, and food we eat, may be genetically descended from seeds saved by Jesus near the white walls of Nazareth.

Jesus Never Without Water

Water, like seeds and food, is a global common good. A Qumran fragment, perhaps contemporary with Jesus, reflects water wisdom, '... see all the Lord has made, the earth and all that is in it, the seas and all they contain, and all the resources of water and torrents' (4Q521). Nazarenes harvested winter rains, and irrigated fields in the long, burning dry season. Tertullian said correctly in third century North Africa, 'Christ is never without water.'

Young men leave home because they have a star to follow, a dream to make, a mission to do. Jesus discerned that his destiny was to begin at the river where the wilderness prophet baptised with water. Tertullian was accurate; Jesus was near water all his life. Jesus sanctified the earth's waters. We can regard water reverently because Jesus assumed our flesh, irrigated Nazareth fields, and was baptised

by John in the Jordan. Christians especially have reason to be poetic about water. Karl Rahner writes,

The water which is seen by the human beings, which is praised by the poet, and used by the Christian in baptism – this water is not a poetic glorification of the chemist's water, as if the latter were the true realist. On the contrary the 'water' of the chemist is rather a narrowed down, technified derivative of a secondary kind from the water of humanity.¹⁰

Through Jesus' baptism all earth's waters are sanctified and included in his passion. A member of John's community wrote beautifully, 'Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood' (1 Jn. 5.6). If we recognise water as precious, included in our redemption, we will be less inclined to pollute, poison with chemicals, and squander it. Like Jesus at Nazareth, we will treasure and harvest rain, in butts and ponds, and use it for trees and gardens and wildlife, and especially in winter, for house plants and even for washing root vegetables. We sometimes can return such water to the soil. Armenian Christians call baptismal fonts, 'The Jordan'. All water, poetically and imaginatively, and even literally, is the cosmic Jordan. Through evaporation and precipitation, we all drink, baptise, bathe, irrigate, admire, and are given life in Jordan water. The Divine Office for Jesus' baptism, captures the ecological importance, 'Today the heavens are opened, the waters of the seas are made subject, earth is glad, the mountains and hills rejoice, because Christ is baptised in the Jordan by John.' Theological art portrays Jordan riverine creatures bowing to Jesus in the river. They too share our redemption. Scientific knowledge and 'the profit motive' alone are not enough to instil reverence for the water community. Science knows the salmon varieties born in the Columbia River, which depart to distant seas, returning finally to struggle awesomely upstream, to spawn and die beautifully in the circular mystery of life. Our scientific knowledge of the salmon and their journeys has not deterred us from extinguishing whole varieties, while reducing the remnant to a trickle, through extinction, pollution, and dam building. To treat water creatures as we treat the salmon and their rivers, to strip, scrape, and foul the North Sea, to damage climate with unnecessary air travel, is to miss the full significance of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan.

The Living Desert

There were in Judaism hopes for a prophet who would heal and minister even to the poor. With preaching and miracles would flow

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, 'Priest and Poet', *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, Karl and Boniface Kruger, eds. (N.Y., Seabury, 1974), p. 296.

life giving water, deserts would bloom. When John sent emissaries to question Jesus, Jesus referred to Isaian writings, which connote the luxuriant wilderness (Is.29.17; 35.6–7). Jesus' ministry also included communal meals, in one of which, mentioned twice by Mark and Matthew, the desert virtually flowered with food, with manna exceeding that of Moses. What precisely happened, when a surplus of food appeared, and remained, we do not know. We cannot exclude a literal multiplication of loaves and fish. We do know that, when people bring and share food at outdoor meals, or picnics, there is sometimes a surplus of food, some of which remains after the participants have departed. Joseph O'Hanlon observes of the feeding of the multitude,

It is difficult, if not impossible, for the historian or the exegete to say anything meaningful on the question of historicity. It is impossible for the hermeneutist, the teacher, the preacher, and the pastor, to be less than overwhelmed by the theological mileage invested in the rootedness of the story in memory, tradition, and sacramental intuition.¹¹

The point I am making here is that Jesus' reply to the Baptist, and his inclusive outdoor meal, or meals, may suggest the awaited flowering of the desert. I would add that living sustainably locally was a consistent component of Jesus' use of food, both at Nazareth, and later in his ministry as host at communal meals, and as a sharing visitor. Sharing meals with friends, neighbours, and fellow Christians, not excluding those of other ways, is a way of following Jesus.

The Shrine of Pan

A turning point in Jesus' ministry seem to have occurred 'in the district of Caesarea Philippi', again near water. The magnet of the district is the so-called cave of Pan, where, in a red rock cliff, there springs the source of the Jordan. The site was called Panion in honour of the Arcadian fertility god. Caesar Augustus awarded the district to Herod the Great, who dedicated a temple there to Caesar. Herod Philip established his capital there, hence the name when Jesus, and his disciples, visited the district. The site has undergone many vicissitudes since Jesus' visit, becoming a Jewish, then Byzantine centre called Baniyas, a wilderness, a Russian tourist attraction, a French mandate, a Syrian village, and since 1967, an Israeli occupied outpost. The district is associated with water and fertility, and is still visited by pilgrims of many faiths, and of none.

¹¹ Joseph O'Hanlon, 'A Glass of Blessings Standing By. . . .', *Doctrine and Life* (January 2004), p. 12.

In a universal church, even in an individualistic era, as the Christian churches continue to converge, and intercommunicate, a visible centre of unity, honour, service, and love seems desirable. The synoptic gospels portray Jesus' bestowal of a certain primacy on Peter, near the source of the Jordan. Despite its excesses, and intermittent difficulty in finding a servant's role, the Roman bishopric, the western patriarchate, does remain a desirable centre of ecological unity and service. Catholic expressions such as 'universal, ordinary and immediate jurisdiction' can and will be reinterpreted by theologians for our new context. Archbishops, patriarchs, and other religious leaders, with the papacy, can co-ordinate and lead the churches in a cosmic liturgy. Pope John Paul II, the poet and mountaineer Pope, has been a model of what an ecological primacy could be. Speaking last summer to 20,000 Scouts, the Pope said,

The protection of creation, in fact, is a distinctive feature of Christian commitment in the world . . . Where everything speaks of the Creator and his wisdom, from the majestic mountains to the enchanting, flower-strewn valleys, may you learn to contemplate God's beauty, and may your souls, as it were, breathe, opening to praise, silence and contemplation of the divine mystery.¹²

Similar leadership has been provided by other church leaders, not least the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

On the road to Jerusalem, Jesus and his close disciples ascended another mountain where, mysteriously, 'he was transfigured before them'. God's glory shone through. Mountains evoke God's presence, where human creatures remove their shoes. At Tabor Elijah appears, evoking the natural world, Moses represents salvation history, new Exodus. At Tabor Jesus appears as what he always is, in Chardin's words, 'the Divine Omnipresence sanctifying everything in nature'. At Tabor the Divine shines through 'blazing matter', through Jesus' human body, and his clothes. Or, is it really *the eyes of the disciples*, which are transfigured? Tabor reminds us that in Jesus, and in the church that is Jesus as community, God's presence radiates always. It is we, the beholders, who are wanting.

Paul describes God's light burning in the eyes of our hearts, 'It is God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4.6). Our mission is to make sacraments throughout the earth, to heal matter, to reintegrate with fellow earth creatures as subjects, to let God's glory through. Like Gerard Manley Hopkins' description of the Virgin Mary, we have one luminous work to do, to let God's glory through the earth,

¹² Pope John Paul II, 'Message to the Scouts', *The Ark* (Spring, 2004), p. 16.

who

This one work has to do –
 Let all God's glory through,
 God's glory which would go
 through her and from her flow
 Off, and no way but so.

'The Blessed Virgin compared to the air we breathe',

Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Jerusalem

Jesus' obedient life, and his freely offered death, begins the healing of relationships, including the earth-human relationship for which we, Christ existing as community today, are responsible. John Surette, S.J., co-founder of SpiritEarth says, 'The establishment of a harmonious relationship between earth and its humans has become an imperative. It is the defining issue of the 21st century.'¹³ Jesus' last days, like his entire life, included shared, communal meals, at Bethany and in a Jerusalem upper room, which included local bread and wine, this time probably from Judea, and his anticipated anointing for return to the earth, from which we all come, and to which we return. A woman anointed Jesus at Bethany. Significantly women remained with him, even beyond suffering, death, and burial. Women will always remain important in the healing of relationships. Before his final surrender to his executioners, Jesus spent some precious time in Gethsemane garden with close disciples. Elizabeth Johnson remarks, 'Despite his many gifts he needed to grow in self-awareness, discerning his vocation through his own historical experiences. His ministry and death were not preprogrammed but the result of decisions freely if not always easily made.'¹⁴ The Galilee olives remind us that the whole earth community, affected by our hereditary proneness to exploitation, shares our redemption. Restoring right relationships with other earth creatures, with the thorns and thistles and olives, in Surette's words, 'is the defining issue of the 21st century'. When our eyes are transfigured, when we grasp 'the Divine omnipresence sanctifying everything in nature', when we make sacraments everywhere, letting God's glory through, the whole earth rejoices in our local sustainable living for Christ.

On the cosmic cross 'the breadth and length and height and depth' (Eph. 3.18) of the love of Christ reaches out to all things. Jesus who

¹³ John Surette, S.J., 'Relationship between earth and humans as a defining issue', *National Jesuit News* (December, 2003), p. 18; cf. also Mary C. Grey, *Sacred Longings, Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization* (London, SCM Press, 2003) pp. 116–119.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly our Sister, A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (N.Y., Continuum, 2003), p. 111.

became an earth being brings to all earth beings the inexhaustible love of God. The cross is inherent to Christian ecology. Deacon Ephrem writes,

A bird grows up in three stages
 from womb to egg, then to the nest where it sings,
 And once it is fully grown it flies in the air,
 opening its arm in the symbol of the cross.
 But if the bird gathers its wings
 thus denying the extended symbol of the cross
 then the air too will deny the bird
 the air will not carry the bird
 unless its wings confess the cross.

The cross embraces all races of people, all creatures of land and sea, with its summit it touches the heavens, with its feet the depths of the earth, and with its arms it enfolds the atmosphere. The gospels describe earth creatures as moved by compassion for their Lord in his suffering. A bird, a rooster, protests at Peter's denial. As Jesus' life ebbs away, the earth darkens and quakes, rocks split open, dead reappear, the temple veil is torn. Ephrem comments, 'Because human mouths condemned him, the voice of creation cried out to proclaim him innocent. Men were silent, so the stones cried out.' Centuries later on the fringe of Europe, an Anglian writer hears the tree that is the cross speaking, 'I suffered many horrors on that hill. The wounds are plain to see. Deep dark gashes.' A millennium later, in the new world, an Afro-American hymn asks tremulously, 'Were you there when the sun refused to shine?' In our time, a Picardy poet, Paul Claudel, writes, 'It is not on the wood alone that redemption is granted, it is on the universe, of which the cross is henceforth the bond. He draws the entire world to himself, at each breath, rooted in the universe by the reach of his feet and hands'.

Creation, which shares the embrace of the cosmic cross, praises God with us in a cosmic liturgy. 'Open your eyes, prepare the ear of your soul, prepare your lips, apply your heart. All creatures will make you see, to hear, to praise, to love, to serve, to glorify, and adore your God', writes Bonaventure. The universe is not left out, the future is not anthroposolic, the animals and plants, habitats, waters, and whole natural world accompany us henceforth and forever. Church grounds, religious houses, retreat houses, conference centres, and schools, as centres of local sustainability, sacraments of Christ's healing presence, can lead our Christian contribution to earth healing and praise of God.

New Creation

There are two well-attested facts about the immediate effect of Jesus' resurrection: the empty tomb and numerous appearances to his disciples. Bishop N.T. Wright observes,

Christians saw Jesus' resurrection as the action of the creator god to reaffirm the essential goodness of creation and, in an initial and representative act of new creation to establish a bridgehead within the present world of space, time and matter ('the present evil age', as in Galatians 1.4) through which the whole new creation could now come to birth.¹⁵

The resurrection begins the transformed future of our own bodies, of our relationships with living and dead, with people and the whole earth community. Easter people are green people.

Of the recorded sightings of Jesus, an appearance on the Emmaus road, and its inn, to Cleopas and a companion, especially fascinates theologians, artists, retreatants, and all who contemplate the apparitions. I say 'recorded' because we may wonder if Jesus appeared first to his mother, as he is said to do in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It was, said Ignatius Loyola, what any normal man would have done. We are also free to wonder, and imagine, the identity of Cleopas' companion. Was it a woman? Perhaps his wife? Or Luke himself? We also wonder and ask about the scriptures Jesus quoted. Did he quote the older Genesis creation story? the Servant Songs? Exodus? Luke says it was in the breaking of bread, at a communal meal in the inn, that they recognised him. Titian and Caravaggio portray the moment. But Velasquez gets it best. Through the opened eyes of a startled servant girl, glancing through the serving hatch, we share imaginatively that momentous instant. Emmaus is about new creation. When, at human evolution's dawn, Adam and Eve stumbled, 'the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked' (Gen. 3.7). Near Emmaus, when Jesus took bread, and blest and broke it, 'the eyes of both were opened, and they recognised him' (Lk. 24.31).

The Emmaus event opens our eyes too. Our urgent mission in what life and time remains to us, and to the earth, is to tell people that through, with, in, and *for* Jesus is new creation. We are here to restore mutually supportive relationships between humans and the earth. We make sacraments throughout the earth. We let God's glory through in a cosmic liturgy. We live sustainably locally by walking our Christology.

Dr. Edward P. Echlin
13 Thornbank Crescent
Bexhill
East Sussex TN39 3ND

¹⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (London, SPCK, 2003) p. 730.