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# Reconsidering a ‘Cosmic Fall’

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*The doctrine of the cosmic fall teaches that all or part of creation was directly affected by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The idea has been part of Christian thought since the second century, and has been used to explain a whole range of things that seem difficult to reconcile with the purposes of a loving God (popularly summed up as ‘natural evil’). The doctrine is in conflict with a world-view informed by modern science, yet it remains deeply embedded in much evangelical thinking and is widely assumed to have a strong biblical basis. This paper questions the usual interpretation of relevant biblical texts, and suggests that the nature poetry of the Old Testament points in a different direction. Finally the paper looks at recent alternative responses to natural evil.*

**Keywords:** Cosmic fall, creation, death, predation, nature, natural evil, curse, decay, kenotic theology.

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### Introduction

In the rambling galleries of the Vatican is a small room containing works by the artist Wenzel Peter.<sup>1</sup> One wall of the room is dominated by his *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise*. Over two hundred animals and birds populate this huge canvas. In the foreground oxen and sheep safely doze while a lion and lioness stroll by; a tiger stares at a badger with curiosity but no hint of malice; a rabbit sits cleaning itself while an eagle perches on an overhanging branch. Further off, surrounded by numerous other species (including, of course, a snake), Eve offers Adam an apple. Other paintings in the room show an owl with its prey, a leopard killing a zebra and a lion fighting a tiger.

The message of this small collection echoes a view that can be found in Christian writings as early as the second century: namely, that animal predation did not exist before the Fall, and arose as a direct consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that other parts of creation were directly affected by the sin of the first human beings is known as the doctrine of the cosmic fall. At times in the

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1 Johann Wenzel Peter, 1745-1829; the collection is in Room XVI.

2 Theophilus of Antioch (c. 115-185), *To Autolychus*, Bk. II, Ch. 17. Theophilus argued that God made nothing ‘evil or venomous’ at the beginning, ‘but the sin in which man was concerned brought evil upon them. For when man transgressed, they also transgressed with him.’ He reasoned that, as a corrupt master tends to corrupt his servants, ‘He [man] being master, all that was subject to him sinned with him.’ However, such views were not universally held in the early church (see below).

history of Christian thought it has been called upon to explain a whole range of things that seemed difficult to reconcile with the purposes of a loving God who declared his creation to be 'very good'. Calvin, for example, wrote:

For it appears that all the evils of the present life, which experience proves to be innumerable, have proceeded from the same fountain. The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought, hail, and whatever is disorderly in the world, are the fruits of sin. Nor is there any other primary cause of diseases.<sup>3</sup>

He also regarded 'the existence of fleas, caterpillars, and other noxious insects' as a sign of 'some deformity of the world, which ought by no means to be regarded as in the order of nature, since it proceeds rather from the sin of man than from the hand of God.'<sup>4</sup> It is not clear whether Calvin held this low opinion of butterflies as well as caterpillars.

The idea of the cosmic fall was particularly influential in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> In *Paradise Lost*, Milton mentions those who think the earth's axis was shifted 'twice ten degrees or more' after the Fall in order to produce extremes of climate. Meanwhile in the animal realm, death was 'introduced through fierce antipathy':

Beast now with beast gan war, and fowl with fowl,  
And fish with fish; to graze the herb all leaving,  
Devour'd each other.<sup>6</sup>

Although the notion of a cosmic fall is not articulated so often today, it remains strongly implicit in a good deal of evangelical thinking. As R. J. Berry recently observed, 'Some Christians interpret any facts which they find morally difficult as 'results of the fall' (such as 'nature red in tooth and claw', or the enormous number of human foetuses which spontaneously miscarry).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, there is a widespread belief that the Bible supports this way of thinking.

Yet the whole idea of a cosmic fall is in tension (usually unacknowledged)

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3 Calvin, *J. Commentary upon the Book of Genesis* (1554), on Genesis 3:19 (translated by King, *J. Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, called Genesis*, vol. I, Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society (1847)). Calvin recognised that his text did not say all this, but argued that, 'from one example, we may learn that the whole order of nature was subverted by the sin of man'. Note that Calvin did not think all natural 'evils' had necessarily come into being at the Fall, but that, 'by the increasing wickedness of men, the remaining blessing of God is gradually diminished and impaired' (*ibid.*, on Gen. 3:18).

4 Calvin, *ibid.*, on Gen. 2:2.

5 A notable early critic of the idea was George Hakewill, whose book *An Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World* (1627; 3rd edition 1635) influenced the natural theology of John Ray.

6 Milton, *J. Paradise Lost*, Bk. X, lines 668-671 & 710-712.

7 Berry, R. J. *God's Book of Works: The Nature and Theology of Nature*, London: T. & T. Clark (2003), p. 231.

with a world-view informed by modern science. In view of this it is worth asking how well-founded in Scripture the view actually is. However, before tackling that question I will briefly sketch the growth of the current tension.

### A doctrine under strain

Between the death of Milton in 1674 and the birth of Tennyson in 1809, advances in science fundamentally changed perceptions of the natural world. A major shift in thinking came with the recognition of extinct species in the fossil record. This was a factor that prompted William Buckland to preach his 1839 sermon distinguishing animal death from the sentence of death pronounced on human beings at the Fall.<sup>8</sup> Tennyson reflected a changing mood in his elegy *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, begun around 1835 and published in 1850. Referring to the evidence 'from scarped cliff and quarried stone' that 'a thousand types are gone', he asks whether Nature cares at all about the survival of Man,

Who trusted God was love indeed,  
And love Creation's final law –  
Though Nature, red in tooth and claw  
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed –

Nine years later, the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* changed perceptions even more dramatically. In sharp contrast to the prevailing natural theology, which offered a naively optimistic view of nature and even tried to find moral truth embodied in it,<sup>9</sup> Darwin's theory made nature's redness in tooth and claw a fundamental tenet. It is well known that Darwin himself saw the 'misery' of the natural world as a theological problem. He wrote to Asa Gray in 1860:

I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and

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8 Buckland, W. *An Enquiry Whether the Sentence of Death Pronounced at the Fall of Man Included the Whole Animal Creation or was Restricted to the Human Race*, London (1839). The sermon was preached in Oxford on 27 January that year. Smith, J. P. *The Relation Between the Holy Scripture and Some Parts of Geological Science*, London (1839), also argued that the command 'to be fruitful and multiply' (given to creatures other than human beings in Gen. 1:22) presupposed the death of one generation to make way for the next, so that the earth would not become overcrowded. He also argued that the threat of death would have been incomprehensible to Adam and Eve if they had not been able to observe death among the animals. See Lucas, E. 'Some scientific issues related to the understanding of Genesis 1-3', *Themelios* (1987) 12(2), 46-51 (p. 50).

9 See Gould, S. J. *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, London: Heinemann (2001), pp. 179-190; Hunter, C. G. *Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press (2001), pp. 117-143. This is the view of an all-ordering Providence expressed in C. F. Alexander's hymn 'All things bright and beautiful', especially in its original version. For recent discussions of the issue see Drees, W. B. (ed.), *Is Nature Ever Evil? Religion, Science and Value*, London: Routledge (2003).

omnipotent God would have designedly created the *Ichneumonidae* [parasitic wasps] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.<sup>10</sup>

It is now accepted that death and predation are part and parcel of the natural order of things, and a good many modern theologians have abandoned the doctrine of the cosmic fall. Others, however, are unhappy with this development. Michael Lloyd laments the fact that, 'since Darwin', the scope of the Fall has been 'reduced from the cosmic to the merely human, and its nature changed from the explanatory to the merely paradigmatic.'<sup>11</sup> Andrew Linzey finds it regrettable that the evangelical contributors to *The Care of Creation* – a collection of essays on environmental issues<sup>12</sup> – say nothing about the fallenness of nature.<sup>13</sup>

But what are the alternatives? The so-called 'Creation Science' approach, which rejects evolution in favour of the scientific accuracy of Genesis 1-3, is not a valid option. It involves both poor hermeneutics and bad science.<sup>14</sup>

Many (perhaps most) Christians in the UK accept that evolution occurred and that it was the means by which human beings came into existence. As a corollary they accept that predation and parasitism existed before humanity appeared on the scene, and were therefore not a consequence of human disobedience. Nevertheless, some find it difficult to believe that a good God would have created a world in which predation, parasitism and death play such a prominent role. They find an answer to this enigma in the tradition that the human Fall was preceded by a fall of rebellious angels. In this view, the world of nature had been corrupted by the fallen angels long before humanity evolved. The first human beings were then presented with a choice: they could either obey God, subdue the fallen world and bring it back into line with the Creator's will; or they could disobey, join the rebellion and make matters worse. They chose the latter.

This view was given wide currency by the *Scofield Reference Bible* of 1907, and also popularised by C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*.<sup>15</sup> A number of mod-

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10 Quoted by Gould, *op. cit.* (9), p. 189. It is interesting to speculate what Calvin would have made of the *Ichneumonidae*, highly efficient destroyers of the caterpillars he called 'noxious'.

11 Lloyd, M. 'The Humanity of Fallenness', in Bradshaw, T. (ed.) *Grace and Truth in the Secular Age*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1998), pp. 66-82 (quotation from pp. 66-67). Whatever we think of this shift, it is a mistake to blame it solely on Darwin; as noted above, a change in thinking was well under way in the first half of the 19th century.

12 Berry, R. J. (ed.) *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*, Leicester: IVP (2000).

13 Linzey, A. 'Good News for the World?', *Third Way* (2000) 23(6), 23-25.

14 Berry, R. J. *God and Evolution*, London: Hodder (1988), pp. 103-127; Alexander, D. *Rebuilding the Matrix: Science and Faith in the 21st Century*, Oxford: Lion (2001), pp. 289-329; Lucas, E. C. *Can We Believe Genesis Today? The Bible and questions of science*, Leicester: IVP (2001), pp. 67-106.

15 Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*, London: Geoffrey Bles (1940), pp. 121-124. See also Schaeffer, F. A. *Genesis in Space and Time: the flow of biblical history*, London: Hodder & Stoughton (1972), p. 62, where the idea is expressed more cautiously.

ern theologians have adopted it in some form.<sup>16</sup>

But this approach is unsatisfactory on several counts. Most obviously, a pre-human fall of the non-human creation is referred to nowhere in the Bible. It can only be shoe-horned into Genesis 1:1-2 by strained exegesis that goes against the grain of Hebrew grammar and syntax.<sup>17</sup> In addition the idea is at odds with other biblical texts to be considered shortly.

In view of these difficulties it is worth taking another look at those biblical texts in which support for the doctrine of a cosmic fall has traditionally been found. In examining its biblical basis I will be asking whether the doctrine is worth defending or should be laid to rest.

### Examining the biblical texts

According to F. F. Bruce, 'This doctrine of the cosmic fall is implicit in the biblical record from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22...'<sup>18</sup> Readers will be relieved to know that I do not intend to review the whole Bible in order to test the doctrine's scriptural credentials. The fact is that most of the Bible is completely silent on the matter, and the doctrine actually depends on the interpretation of a few key texts. I will, however, treat those texts in canonical order, beginning with Genesis 3.

#### 1. Genesis 3:17-19

In response to Adam's disobedience, God declares the ground/earth/land/soil (*hā<sup>a</sup>dāmāh*) to be cursed. What does this entail?

As traditionally translated, God's words to Adam are: 'Cursed is the ground because of you.' However, Hamilton prefers a relational to a causal reading, and translates: 'Cursed is the ground in regard to you.'<sup>19</sup> Lucas also argues that the essence of the curse is relational,<sup>20</sup> and this understanding has much to commend it.

In context, the essence of the curse is simply that Adam will henceforth find it harder to get his food from the soil. Note that work was already involved in

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16 Lloyd, *op. cit.* (11), p. 80, lists Dom Illtyd Trethowan, Eric Mascall, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Alvin Plantinga and Stephen Davis. This is also the position Lloyd himself adopts.

17 See Blocher, H. *In the Beginning*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press (1984), pp. 41-43; Hamilton, V. P. *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17 (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1990), pp. 115-116; Lucas, E. C. *op. cit.* (14), pp. 91-92. For theological critiques (aimed specifically at C. S. Lewis's articulation of the theory) see: Geach, P. *Providence and Evil*, Cambridge: CUP (1977), pp. 69-70; Page, R. 'God, Natural Evil and the Ecological Crisis', *Studies in World Christianity* (1997) 3(1), 68-86, especially pp. 76-77.

18 Bruce, F. F., *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, London: Tyndale Press (1963), p. 169.

19 Hamilton, V. P. *op. cit.* (17), p. 195.

20 Lucas, E. *op. cit.* (14), p. 146.

acquiring a meal, as Adam was put in the garden of Eden 'to till ('*bd*) it and keep it' (Gen. 2:15); when he is expelled, it is 'to till ('*bd*) the ground (*hā'dāmāh*) from which he was taken' (Gen. 3:23). Hence Adam's basic activity does not change. The chief contrast he is to experience is between life in a 'garden' (*gan*) – implying a specially modified environment – and life among unmodified nature, where the ground brings forth 'thorns and thistles' (Gen. 3:17). In the latter his relationship with the soil will be different, because food will be harder to produce.<sup>21</sup> As A. H. Lewis comments: 'Nothing in the narrative suggests that the realm of nature has been altered in a fundamental way... There is no indication that the Lord God added thorns to the roses or sharp teeth to carnivorous animals.'<sup>22</sup>

In case this sounds like post-Darwin sophistry, it is worth pointing out that St Augustine took a similar view 1500 years ago. On the 'thorns and thistles' of Genesis 3:18, he wrote:

But we should not jump to the conclusion that it was only then that these plants came forth from the earth. For it could be that, in view of the many advantages found in different kinds of seeds, these plants had a place on earth without afflicting man in any way. But since they were growing in the fields in which man was now labouring in punishment for his sin, it is reasonable to suppose that they became one of the means of punishing him. For they might have grown elsewhere, for the nourishment of birds and beasts, or even for the use of man... I do not mean that these plants once grew in other places and only afterwards in the fields where man planted and harvested his crops. They were in the same place before and after: formerly not for man, afterwards for man.<sup>23</sup>

Augustine rightly saw that there are no grounds in the text for thinking that new plants were created, or that nature underwent some ontological change because of human sin.

## 2. *Isaiah 11:6-10* (cf. *65:17-25*)

Describing the new order that will come with a future Davidic king, Isaiah

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21 cf. Wenham, G. J. *Genesis 1-15 (Word Biblical Commentary 1)*, Waco: Word Books (1987), pp. 82, 89. Note also that the curse of Gen. 3:17 is not addressed to the earth (in contrast to the curse upon the serpent in Gen. 3:14).

22 Lewis, A. H. 'The localization of the Garden of Eden', *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1968) 11, 174, quoted (approvingly) in Blocher, H. *op. cit.* (17), p. 183.

23 Augustine, *De Genesi ad Litteram*, book 3, chapter 18. The translation is that of Taylor, J. H. *St. Augustine: The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Mahwah: Paulist Press (1982), vol. 1, p. 94. In the 17th century it was the majority view that thorns and thistles had existed before the Fall; see Almond, P. C. *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999), p. 204. For similar views among modern conservative commentators, cf. Kidner, D. *Genesis (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)*, London: Inter-Varsity Press (1967), p. 72: 'They [thorns and thistles] need not be envisaged here as newly created, but as henceforth a perennial threat...; for man in his own disorder would never now "subdue" the earth.' Also Blocher, *op. cit.* (17), pp. 183-184.

says:

The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,  
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
as the waters cover the sea.  
In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples...

The traditional interpretation of this passage is well represented by Alec Motyer's comments. With the coming of the Messiah 'new life for people becomes possible on a world-wide scale and the life of nature itself is transformed'. In verse 6 'predators... and prey... are reconciled', while verse 7 amplifies this in terms of 'a change of nature within the beasts themselves: cow and bear eat the same food, as do lion and ox. There is also a change in the very order of things itself: the herbivorous nature of all the creatures points to Eden restored...'<sup>24</sup>

While Motyer's reading of the passage is highly literalistic, it is surely more appropriate to see metaphorical language here. Take for example the line about the lion eating straw like the ox. A non-predatory, herbivorous lion would need a different digestive system, different teeth, a different kind of jaw structure, a different musculature and overall anatomy – in short, it would cease to be a lion in any meaningful sense.<sup>25</sup> Taken literally, the passage would indicate the abolition, rather than the redemptive transformation, of lions! Note also that when this line is repeated in Isaiah 65:25, it is followed by the clearly metaphorical statement, 'and dust shall be the serpent's food'.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, to see in the passage a description of predators and prey being reconciled is to miss an important emphasis. The prophet is not concerned with

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24 Motyer, J. A. *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, Leicester: IVP (1993), p. 124.

25 See Oswalt, J. N. *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 1-39 (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1986), p. 283. For metaphors as 'the lifeblood of prophecy' see Sandy, D. B. *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic*, Leicester: IVP (2002), pp. 58-74.

26 It may also be worth noting that Is. 11:10 is quoted by Paul in Rom. 15:12, a passage which finds the fulfilment of this and other Old Testament texts in the unity of Jews and Gentiles within the early church. Unless Paul was wrenching the verse out of context, he does not seem to have expected a literal fulfilment of Is. 11:6-10.

predation among animals as such, but with the danger certain animals pose to human welfare. This is clear from the fact that the animals that enjoy safety from former predators are the lamb, the goat, the calf and the cow – *domesticated* animals that were vital to the ancient Israelite economy.<sup>27</sup>

This I believe takes us to the target meaning of the metaphor: the passage is primarily a promise of security for God's people under the Messiah's rule. This is underlined by references to the protection of children in verses 6 and 8. When the passage is echoed in Isaiah 65:17-25, it is even clearer that the emphasis is on protection and fruitfulness for God's people.<sup>28</sup> If this text were really about the transformation of all nature and the removal of predation, we would expect to read of the wolf lying down with the rock-badger, the leopard with the gazelle, and the lion feeding with the ibex!

On the other hand Motyer may well be right to detect a return-to-Eden motif in the passage. (Again, however, we must be wary of pressing literal meanings onto metaphorical language; Eden was a stock image for the security and abundance with which God would one day bless his people, e.g. Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 36:35.) It is certainly the case that some later Jewish writings saw the Fall as the reason why wild animals could attack human beings. In the Apocalypse of Moses, when a wild beast attacks Seth and is rebuked by Eve, the beast speaks and delivers some home truths (11:1-2): 'The rule of the beasts has happened because of you. How is it that your mouth was opened to eat from the tree concerning which God commanded you not to eat from it? Through this also our nature was changed.' Later in the same work (24:4), God's words in Genesis 3:18-19 are expanded to include: 'And the animals over which you ruled will rise up against you in disorder, because you did not keep my commandments.'<sup>29</sup>

Clearly the author of this work saw the hostility of certain animals towards human beings as a consequence of humanity's loss of dominion. What is far less clear is whether predation *in general* was regarded as a result of the Fall. Gen-

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27 See also Bauckham R. J. 'Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age' in Green J. B. and Turner M. (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press (1994), pp. 3-21, especially p. 15.

28 Note that the OT contains various 'solutions' to the problem of dangerous animals. One view, found in the passage under discussion and in Is. 65:17-25 and Hos. 2:18, looked forward to an eschatological restoration of peace with the wild beasts (perhaps through a regained dominion, as implied by the child's role in Is. 11:6). Lev. 26:6 promises that wild animals will simply be banished from Israel's territory if God's commandments are kept (cf. Ezek. 34:25-28, speaking of Israel metaphorically as sheep). There was also the view that, even in this age, the righteous individual 'shall not fear the wild animals of the earth' (Job 5:22-23; perhaps Dan. 6:22 and Acts 28:3-6 should be read in this light?). These ideas are also echoed in later Jewish literature; see Bauckham, *op. cit.* (27), pp. 11-19.

29 The Apocalypse of Moses is a Greek version of a work which also survives in Latin as *The Life of Adam and Eve*. Both are thought to derive from an original Hebrew work composed in the 1st-2nd century AD. A translation and introduction by M. D. Johnson can be found in: Charlesworth, J. H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, London: Darton, Longman & Todd (1985), pp. 249-295.

esis 1:30 has often been taken to mean that all creatures were originally herbivores,<sup>30</sup> but that is not the only possible reading.<sup>31</sup> If it had been the author's intention to say that all animals were created herbivorous, it is surprising that Genesis never mentions a subsequent change in the eating habits of numerous species (the one exception being humanity in Genesis 9:2-3).

It is interesting to note that the lack of explicit statements in Genesis produced different views on this matter among early interpreters. While Theophilus of Antioch believed that predation resulted from the Fall, Augustine felt it was simply an aspect of the created order that 'one animal is the nourishment of another. To wish that it were otherwise would not be reasonable.'<sup>32</sup> Later, Thomas Aquinas criticised those who thought there had been no predation among animals before the Fall: 'For the nature of animals was not changed by man's sin, as if those whose nature now is to devour the flesh of others (such as the lion and the falcon) would then have lived on herbs.'<sup>33</sup>

We have digressed somewhat from our original text because it is important to examine some of the assumptions which underlie the traditional understanding of it. The interpretation of Old Testament prophetic texts is never straightforward and humility is always called for. Nevertheless I think it is clear that this text (and Is. 65:17-25) should not be used to derive or defend the idea of a cosmic fall. The assumptions underlying the prophet's formulation of his message were probably very different from the ones we bring to its interpretation. I find myself in full agreement with Berry when he comments: 'It is highly dubious exegesis to argue from such apocalyptic passages as Isaiah 11:6-9... that particular ecological conditions were God's primary purpose.'<sup>34</sup>

### 3. Old Testament nature poetry

To set against the traditional interpretations of Genesis 3:17-19 and Isaiah 11:6-10 there is the striking fact that the rest of the Old Testament *implies nothing at all about the natural world being fallen or distorted in any way*. This silence is striking when we recall that 'animals are mentioned on nearly every one of the thousand pages of the Old Testament'.<sup>35</sup> In fact many passages imply that nature is still as 'good'/'very good' as God pronounced it to be in Genesis 1:25 and 1:31.

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30 e.g. Milton, *op. cit.* (6) and Motyer, *op. cit.* (24).

31 cf. Kidner *op. cit.* (23), p. 52 (on Gen. 1:29-30): 'The assigning of every green plant for food (RSV) to all creatures must not be pressed to mean that all were once herbivorous, any more than to mean that all plants were equally edible to all. It is a generalization, that directly or indirectly all life depends on vegetation, and the concern of the verse is to show that all are fed from God's hand.'

32 Theophilus of Antioch, *op. cit.* (2); Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, book 3, chapter 16; see also chapters 11 & 15, and his earlier work *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, book 1, chapter 16.

33 Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), *Summa Theologica* 96:1.

34 Berry, *op. cit.* (7), p. 231.

35 Wenham, G. J. 'The Old Testament and the Environment', *Transformation* (1999) 16(3), 86-92, quotation from p. 86.

The great nature psalm, Psalm 104, sees everything wonderfully and fittingly made: 'How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures' (Ps.104: 24). Even Leviathan, the terrifying sea-monster, is God's creation in this psalm (Ps.104: 26). Creation is nothing less than God's glory: 'May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; may the LORD rejoice in his works' (Ps.104: 31). Animal predation is not a problem for this psalmist: in a remarkable section describing how every creature has its ecological niche, we read: 'The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God' (Ps.104: 21), and towards the end of that section: 'These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When... you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things' (Ps.104: 27).

Psalm 145 contains the same idea: 'You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing' – and it immediately adds: 'The LORD is righteous in all his ways and loving towards all he has made' (Ps.145: 16-17).

The great nature poem at the end of the book of Job (Job 38:39 – 39:30) begins and ends with predators. The poet tells us that God provides the prey for lions and food for carrion-eating ravens (Job 38:39-41); that it is by God's wisdom that the hawk flies, and by God's command that the eagle soars and dwells among lofty crags: 'From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar. His young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there is he' (Job 39:26-30).<sup>36</sup>

In the middle of this poem we have a description of the ways of the ostrich. Her carelessness with her eggs (as it was seen in the folklore of the time) epitomises what some people today call the 'wastefulness' of nature. But even this strange behaviour is attributed to God, who has not given the ostrich 'wisdom' or 'good sense' (Job 39:17).

Robert Fyall states baldly that Job 39 shows 'that animal life is shot through with a savagery which mirrors ultimate cosmic evil'.<sup>37</sup> But this reading stems from an anthropocentric (and, indeed, ethnocentric) reading of the text. In fact the text contradicts it by directly attributing the ways of the hawk and eagle to the wisdom and command of God. A better grasp of the poet's intention can be found in Robert Alter's sensitive analysis. In Job 38-41, he argues, the author rejects an anthropocentric view of nature, portraying a natural world that is valuable in its own right. It is moreover 'a world that defies comfortable moral categorizings':

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<sup>36</sup> The Hebrew word *neshar* can mean either an eagle or a vulture (the latter being a scavenger, not a predator), but there is a consensus among translators and commentators that an eagle is intended in Job 39:27-30. Earlier in Job (9:26) the same word certainly means an eagle, as the reference there is to the speed with which it swoops on its prey. Job 39:30b ('and where the slain are, there is he') does not contradict this identification, as all the species of eagle found in the Middle East are carrion eaters as well as predators.

<sup>37</sup> Fyall, R. S. *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of creation and evil in the book of Job*, Leicester: Apollos (2002), p. 130.

The animal realm is a nonmoral realm, but the sharp paradoxes it embodies make us see the inadequacy of any merely human moral calculus... In the animal kingdom, the tender care for one's young may well mean their gulping the blood of freshly slain creatures. It is a daily rite of sustaining life that defies all moralizing anthropomorphic interpretation. And yet, the series of rhetorical questions to Job suggests, God's providence looks after each of these strange, fierce, inaccessible creatures.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike many in the modern West, estranged from nature and inclined to sentimentalise it, the Hebrew poets had no problem with the natural world's being the way it is. They were fully aware of nature's redness in tooth and claw, and its apparent wastefulness, but did not find this incompatible with belief in a wise and loving Creator; they thus saw no need to invoke a 'cosmic fall' to excuse those aspects that we find offensive.

#### 4. Romans 5 & 8

Two passages from Paul's argument in Romans are often cited in connection with the cosmic fall. The first is Romans 5:12a: 'Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin...' But does Paul have in mind the phenomenon of death throughout the realm of nature? The passage continues: '...and in this way death came to all men (ἀνθρώποι), because all sinned' (Rom. 5:12b). Clearly Paul is talking about human death (and spiritual death at that),<sup>39</sup> and there is no reason to think that he regarded the death of plants and animals as a result of human sin.<sup>40</sup>

The second and more crucial passage is Romans 8:19-22:

<sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope. <sup>21</sup> For the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.<sup>41</sup>

F. F. Bruce comments: 'Like man, creation must be redeemed because, like

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38 Alter, R. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark (1985), p. 102.

39 Berry, R. J. 'This Cursed Earth: Is "the Fall" Credible?', *Science and Christian Belief* (1999) 11(1), 29-49; *idem*, 'Response to Philip Duce', *S & CB* (1999) 11(2), 165-167; cf. Lucas *op. cit.* (14), pp. 143-144.

40 Lucas *op. cit.* (14), pp. 142-144; Berry *op. cit.* (7), p. 229. See also note 8. However, this conclusion does not depend on modern science or even 19th century geology. Saint Augustine accepted that death among animals (including death by predation), belonged to the created state of things (*De Genesi ad litteram*, book 3, chapters 14 & 16).

41 All biblical quotations are from the New International Version, but here I have adopted the marginal reading for verses 20-21: *The Holy Bible. New International Version. Reference Edition with Concordance and Maps*, London: Hodder & Stoughton (1986), p. 1030, note i.

man, creation has been subject to a fall.<sup>42</sup> Andrew Linzey has gone so far as to assert that 'bondage to decay' (Rom. 8: 21) refers to 'predation and parasitism, all the apparent violence and cruelty inherent in the structures of nature'.<sup>43</sup> But it is unlikely that this is what Paul means by 'decay' (φθορα).

Verse 21 must be understood in the light of verse 20, so we must begin by asking what is meant by 'the creation was subjected to frustration'. 'Creation' (κτίσις) should not be limited to a particular part of the non-human world. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used of creation generally (Mk 10:6; 13:9; Rom. 1:25; Col. 1:15; Heb. 4:13; 9:11; 2 Pet. 3:4), and the fact that Paul adds 'all' in v. 22 (πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις) suggests that he has in view the entire material universe (distinct from humanity),<sup>44</sup> that is including sun, moon, planets and stars. In what sense has all this been 'subjected to frustration', and who is 'the one who subjected it'?

To the latter question, Cranfield gives cogent reasons why the subject can only be God.<sup>45</sup> It is commonly assumed that the occasion Paul has in mind is Adam's disobedience in Genesis 3. However, if the whole created order is in view, Paul's thought seems to go far beyond God's cursing of the ground. Dunn thinks that Paul's statement is in part influenced by the eschatological scenario of Jewish apocalyptic, in which 'the whole created order would be caught in the tribulations introducing the age to come'.<sup>46</sup> Chris Wright, on the other hand, thinks Paul is probably echoing Ecclesiastes.<sup>47</sup> Whatever the case, it seems certain that Paul has something more (and perhaps something other) in mind than Genesis 3:17-19.

What of the 'frustration' (μτασιότης) to which creation has been subjected? In its basic sense the word denotes 'the ineffectiveness of that which does not attain its goal'. Working with this definition, Cranfield argues that Paul means 'that the sub-human creation has been subjected to the frustration of not being able properly to fulfil the purpose of its existence, God having appointed that without man it should not be made perfect'.<sup>48</sup>

Elsewhere he puts it this way:

The whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties and all the varied chorus of sub-human life, created for God's glory, is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part.<sup>49</sup>

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42 Bruce, *op. cit.* (18), p. 169.

43 Linzey, *op. cit.* (13), p. 24.

44 Fitzmeyer, J. A. *Romans*, New York: Doubleday (1993), p. 506.

45 Cranfield, C. E. B. *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark (1975), p. 414.

46 Dunn, J. D. G. *Romans 1-8 (Word Biblical Commentary 38A)*, Dallas: Word (1988), pp. 469-470.

47 Wright, C. J. H. 'Theology and Ethics of the Land', *Transformation* (1999) 16(3), 81-86 (p. 82).

48 Cranfield, *op. cit.* (45), pp. 413-414.

49 Cranfield C. E. B., 'Some Observations on Romans 8:19-21', In Banks, R. ed., *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology presented to L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1974, pp. 224-230, quotation from p. 227.

Tom Wright's more recent treatment of Romans 8 leads to a broadly similar, though differently nuanced, conclusion:

The tragedy of Adam is not just that he introduced sin and hence death into the world, but that humans were made to be the creator's wise agents over creation, and if they worship and serve the creature rather than the creator this purpose goes unfulfilled.<sup>50</sup>

But fulfilment is made possible by the longed-for revealing of the children of God (Rom. 8: 19). Then creation is liberated from its bondage to decay 'unto the freedom of the glory of the children of God' (Wright's literal translation of εἰς την ἐλευθερίαν της δόξης των τέκνων του θεου):

Creation will enjoy the freedom which comes when God's children are glorified – in other words, the liberation which will result from the sovereign rule, under the overlordship of Jesus the Messiah, of all those who are given new, resurrection life by the Spirit.<sup>51</sup>

In this context, and bearing in mind that creation is personified throughout the passage,<sup>52</sup> the decay (φθορά) referred to in verse 21 is best understood as the mortality of creaturely existence. Without 'the freedom of the glory of the children of God', creation is in bondage to a transitory existence, its ultimate purpose blocked by the failure of humankind to fulfil its intended role.

If this reading is correct, creation itself does not need to be redeemed because it 'has been subject to a fall' (Bruce), but rather needs to be released from the transitoriness to which it is currently restricted. In other words, there is no reason to think that 'bondage to decay' refers to 'all the apparent violence and cruelty inherent in the structures of nature' (Linzey).

## 5. Colossians 1:20

Paul's great hymnic description of the work of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20 culminates with the statement that through him God was pleased 'to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross'. Eduard Lohse says of this verse: 'Although there has been no previous mention of it, it is presupposed here that

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50 Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, London: SPCK (2003), p. 249.

51 *ibid.*, p. 258. Elsewhere Wright describes living 'on an earthquake fault line, for instance, or by an active volcano' as living 'at the sharp end of the corruption of creation' – corruption that came about because, 'When humans rebelled and worshipped parts of creation instead of God himself (Rom. 1:21-23), creation fell into disrepair' (Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1, Chapters 1-8*, London: SPCK (2004), p. 151). Here I part company with him. It is hard to see how the spreading and subduction of tectonic plates, by which the lithosphere is constantly regenerated, can be regarded as 'disrepair' resulting from our failed stewardship – even though the process can give rise to destructive events such as the tsunamis of 26 December 2004. For an argument that plate tectonics are essential for the maintenance of complex life, see Ward, P.D. & Brownlee, D. *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life Is Uncommon in the Universe*, New York: Copernicus (2000), pp. 191-220.

52 Fitzmeyer, *op. cit.* (44), p.506.

unity and harmony of the cosmos have suffered a considerable disturbance, even a rupture.' In Lohse's view 'all things' (τα πάντα) means 'the whole universe'; 'the restored creation is reconciled with God'.<sup>53</sup> In short, the verse seems to presuppose a cosmic fall.

However, there are problems with this interpretation. Some commentators object that only persons can be reconciled, and therefore 'all things' cannot refer to the cosmos as a whole.<sup>54</sup> An alternative is therefore to take 'all things' to mean 'all personal beings', and to understand the phrase 'whether things on earth or things in heaven' to refer to humanity and angelic powers respectively. Other exegetes take the view that 'all things' refers exclusively to cosmic powers. Both views find some support in the earlier reference to 'powers or rulers or authorities' (Col.1:16) and in the later mention of Christ's triumph over 'powers and authorities' on the cross (Col.2:15). On the other hand, elsewhere in the same passage 'all things' seems to have a wider meaning than these interpretations allow.

This is one of a number of thorny issues which make the interpretation of this verse difficult. In fact the whole of Colossians 1: 15-20 has been described as 'one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament'.<sup>55</sup> The only thing commentators find it easy to agree on is that the emphasis of verse 20 is on Christ as the sole agent of reconciliation. Indeed the passage as a whole highlights the centrality of Christ, and shows no interest in answering the host of questions raised by its specific terms.

One way to resolve the difficulties is to say that, while human beings are the focus of God's reconciling work (Col.1: 22), the resulting change in relationships is not limited to them. As a result of their reconciliation to God, the topsy-turvy relationships described in Romans 1:20-25 (people turning from their creator to worship his creatures) are put right and 'all things' are restored to their proper places under the headship of Christ, for whom they were made. This subjective change takes on objective reality when reconciled human beings exercise faithful stewardship as God's agents.

In view of the uncertainties involved in the interpretation of this verse, it would be exceedingly precarious to use it to support the doctrine of a cosmic fall.<sup>56</sup>

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53 Lohse, E. *Colossians and Philemon* (translated by Poehlmann, W. R. and Karris, R. J.), Philadelphia: Fortress Press (1971), pp. 59-60.

54 See O'Brien, P. T. *Colossians, Philemon* (*Word Biblical Commentary 44*), Waco: Word Books (1982), p. 54. The verb ἀποκαταλλάσσειν (unknown outside the NT) occurs only here and in Eph. 2:16 and Col. 1:22, and in both those places it refers to the reconciliation of people to God. Likewise Paul uses the related verb καταλλάσσειν only of people reconciled to God or to each other: Rom. 5:10; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18-19. The last passage speaks of God reconciling the world (κόσμος) to himself, but in context this is clearly the world of humanity.

55 Houlden, J. L. *Paul's Letters from Prison*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books (1970), p. 155. It is widely thought that Col. 1:15-20 may be an early christological hymn which Paul has adapted.

56 O'Brien, *op. cit.* (54), pp. 53-57, discusses six interpretations, only three of which require the assumption of a cosmic fall.

## Implications and alternatives

The result of the foregoing survey is to suggest, against Lloyd, that those theologians who have reduced the scope of the Fall 'from the cosmic to the merely human' have been on the right lines after all. But where does this leave us? If animal predation and death, and the existence of 'natural evil', are not the consequences of a cosmic fall, what are we to make of them? How can we respond theologically to what Linzey calls 'the unChristlikeness of the natural order'?<sup>57</sup> Some new and fruitful avenues have recently been explored.

Ruth Page surveys a number of approaches to the problem of 'natural evil' and favours an extension of the free-will defence which is commonly applied to moral evil: God has given human beings freedom from his own determination in order that they might respond to him in that freedom; but a corollary is that they can use their freedom to commit acts of moral evil.

If the freedom given by God is understood to concern not only the human will in history but also the whole sweep of cosmic and natural evolution, then God may be seen to have given the created world freedom to develop as it could. In the process natural evils occur 'naturally'.<sup>58</sup>

In developing this thought Page resists the idea that God may have acted to ensure outcomes such as complexity, and even seems to deny him any particular aim beyond the creation of 'the possibility of possibilities'.<sup>59</sup> In this, if I understand her correctly, she veers too far from the biblical revelation. Yet the concept of God's giving creation its own freedom is an important one and has emerged with different nuances in the writings of other theologians.

In recent years a number of theologians have explored a 'kenotic' theology of creation.<sup>60</sup> The idea of Christ's voluntary self-emptying, or kenosis, is familiar from Philippians 2:6-8. However, if Christ is truly 'the image of the invisible God', such that he can say 'He who has seen me has seen the Father',<sup>61</sup> there are implications for the doctrine of creation as well as for Christology. One implication is that, in creating the universe, God may have freely limited himself in relation to it, in order that his creation should have genuine freedom.

One scientist-theologian who has espoused and developed this view is John

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57 Linzey, *op. cit.* (13), p. 24.

58 Page, *op. cit.* (17), p. 83. Page points out that natural evil has traditionally been understood as 'the suffering humanity experiences from such natural events as earthquakes or cancer', but argues for the concept to be expanded to 'include evils suffered within the natural world' (pp. 71-72).

59 Page, *op. cit.* (17), pp. 83-84.

60 Polkinghorne, J. (ed.) *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, Cambridge: SPCK (2001); Murphy, G. L. *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross*, Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International (2003), especially ch. 6. The idea was explored earlier by Brunner, E. *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Dogmatics, vol. 2, London: Lutterworth (1952), p. 20.

61 Colossians 1:15; John 14:9. Note that the latter follows closely on Jesus' adopting the role of a servant and washing the disciples' feet.

Polkinghorne. In his view, as in Page's, the freedom God gives to his creation entails the possibility of natural evil. Hence he writes of the act of creation as 'therefore necessarily a costly and vulnerable action in which divine almightiness is qualified by the loving gift of an appropriate degree of independence to the beloved creature...'<sup>62</sup> He spells out the further implications as follows:

Exactly the same biochemical processes that allow cells to mutate and produce new forms of life will allow other cells to mutate and become malignant. The presence of cancer in an evolving creation is part of its necessary cost. It is neither a gratuitous horror nor the product of creatorly incompetence...

God allows tectonic plates to slip and cause earthquakes, and bacteria to multiply and cause disease, because they are 'free' to act in accordance with their natures, just as we are free to act in accordance with our nature. Such a world is of greater excellence than would be a rigidly mechanical creation under tight divine control.<sup>63</sup>

In terms of theodicy Polkinghorne has called this 'the free-process defence' of natural evil.<sup>64</sup>

It could be objected that Polkinghorne's model is no improvement on Page's, because it still places an unacceptable distance between God and his creation, ruling out his meaningful involvement with it. But a moment's reflection should show that this is not automatically the case. The free-will defence of the existence of moral evil is not usually criticised for implying that God is not involved with humanity. Likewise 'the free-process defence' need not imply God's non-involvement with the rest of creation. Clearly for Polkinghorne it does not carry that implication, and he has considered at length the ways in which God might interact with and influence his creation.<sup>65</sup>

Physicist and theologian George L. Murphy, who describes himself as work-

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62 Polkinghorne, *J. Scientists as Theologians*, London: SPCK (1996), pp. 45-46.

63 *ibid.*, pp. 48-49. Polkinghorne acknowledges a debt to theologians such as Austin Farrer and J. H. Vanstone. Writing in similar vein, Arthur Peacocke has argued for the necessity of predation and death in a universe in which complex, self-conscious life is likely to evolve: Peacocke, A. R. 'The Cost of New Life', in Polkinghorne (ed.) *op. cit.* (60), pp. 21-42.

64 Polkinghorne, *J. Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World*, London: SPCK (1989), p. 66.

65 Polkinghorne, *op. cit.* (64); *idem, op. cit.* (62), pp. 30-41; *idem*, 'The Metaphysics of Divine Action', In Russell, R. J., Murphy, N. & Peacocke, A. R. (eds.), *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, 2nd edn., Vatican Observatory Publications, Vatican City State, 1997, pp. 147-156; *idem*, 'Kenotic Creation and Divine Action', In Polkinghorne (ed.) *op. cit.* (60), pp. 90-106. The latter contains some modifications of his previous views. Note that the kenotic view of creation is not to be confused with ideas of 'process theology', from which Polkinghorne has clearly distanced himself (*op. cit.* (62), p. 33). Clark Pinnock has recently incorporated the thinking of Polkinghorne and other scientist-theologians into his 'openness theology'; see Pinnock, C. H. *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, Carlisle: Paternoster (2001), p. 131. However, Pinnock also holds onto the notion that 'particularly vicious, noxious and horrible forms of natural evil' may have been 'introduced into the world by rebellious spirits' (*ibid.*, p. 146; also p. 134).

ing 'in the tradition of the conservative reformation', has also developed a model of divine action in which kenosis plays a central role. Murphy offers what he calls a 'chiasmic cosmology', because its kenotic themes are related to Martin Luther's theology of the cross (which Luther contrasted with an erroneous 'theology of glory'). Central to Murphy's sophisticated model is 'the fact that the creator is the crucified'; Murphy insists on a doctrine of providence whose deity has 'the distinctive features of the God revealed in Jesus Christ'<sup>66</sup>. One implication of this is that God's power at work in the world is 'power made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor.12:9). Hence, 'Kenosis does not mean God's abdication but God working in a way that is not recognizable to theologians of glory. The one who had the "form of God" is present and active in "the form of a slave".'<sup>67</sup> Answering one possible objection to this view of divine action, Murphy writes:

If all kenosis did was to explain why the world can be described without reference to God, then it would be a mere face-saving device for theologians. It is quite a different matter to base such a concept on the theology of the cross and the belief that all God's activity has a cruciform pattern.<sup>68</sup>

The notion that a 'cruciform pattern' marks all divine activity can be compared with the view of philosopher Holmes Rolston III. Observing the interplay between life and death, suffering and creativity, Rolston finds a cruciform character in nature:

These experiences of the power of survival, of new life rising out of the old, of the transformative character of suffering, of good resurrected out of evil, experiences of the harshness of nature invite us systemically toward a natural theology, and one congenial with Christian theology... Nature is intelligible. Life forms are logical systems. But nature is also *cruciform*. The world is not a paradise of hedonistic ease, but a theatre where life is learned and earned by labour. Life is advanced not only by thought and action, but also by suffering, not only by logic but also by pathos... This pathetic element in nature is seen in faith to be at the deepest logical level the pathos in God. God is not in a simple way the Benevolent Architect, but is rather the Suffering Redeemer. The whole of the earthen metabolism needs to be understood as having this character.<sup>69</sup>

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66 Murphy, *op. cit.* (60), pp. 85 & 77.

67 Murphy, *op. cit.* (60), p. 81.

68 Murphy, *op. cit.* (60), p. 80. There are some similarities between Murphy's use of the kenosis concept and the ways in which it is employed in Haught, J. F. 'The Boyle Lecture 2003: Darwin, Design and the Promise of Nature', *Science and Christian Belief* (2005) 17(1), 5-20, especially 16-18. Haught's lecture was published after I had submitted the present paper, and before reading it I was unfamiliar with his work. In his response to Haught, Berry expresses reservations about the extent of kenosis, referring to Mark 4:41 (Berry, R. J. 'The Lions Seek Their Prey from God: a Commentary on the Boyle Lecture', *S & CB* (2005) 17(1), 41-56, especially 44-45); this point is at least partially addressed by Murphy's view on the exercise of divine power.

69 Rolston, H. 'Naturalizing and Systematizing Evil', in Drees, W. B. (ed.), *op. cit.* (9), p. 84 (his emphasis).

If we take death and decay in their broadest sense (increasing entropy), Rolston's analysis can be applied beyond 'the earthen metabolism'. Stars pass through several phases before either shrinking to a dense 'white dwarf' or, if they have enough mass, ending in a supernova explosion. William Stoeger observes:

It is only because of supernova explosions that we exist. Without them some crucial heavier elements like calcium would never be synthesized, and the full range of manufactured elements within the cores of stars would not be dispersed through intergalactic space for providing the building blocks for complex molecules and life.

...Supernova explosions, which destroy stars and anything near them, are essential to the evolution of a galaxy toward a life-bearing phase. So many processes that generate life and new possibilities do so only by taking life and destroying a previous generation of objects and organisms.<sup>70</sup>

Such observations and insights help us to see the non-human world – *as it is* – as the creation of a God of love and wisdom. In the light of them we may relate more strongly to the Old Testament faith that could say: 'How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures... May the glory of the LORD endure for ever; may the LORD rejoice in his works' (Ps. 104:24 & 31).

Notwithstanding those elements in nature that we humans may find distasteful, we can see how creation was, and is, 'good' and even 'very good', in the sense that it is ideally suited to God's purpose,<sup>71</sup> bringing into existence free, self-conscious beings capable of forming loving communities in relationship with Him.

### Three final reflections

- 1 As we have seen, Lloyd laments that in much modern theology the Fall has been 'reduced from the cosmic to the merely human, and its nature changed from the explanatory to the merely paradigmatic'. In fact he strongly implies that an unscriptural view of human nature is an inevitable consequence of rejecting the cosmic fall. Lloyd thereby sets up a 'house of cards' argument that is simply misleading. This should be evident from the work of those scientists and theologians who reject the cosmic fall but still hold that the

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70 Stoeger, W. R. 'Scientific Accounts of Ultimate Catastrophes in our Life-bearing Universe', in Polkinghorne, J. C. & Welker, M. (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International (2000), pp. 25, 28. See also Conway Morris, S. *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003), pp. 42-43, 45.

71 For 'good' meaning 'good for achieving its purpose', see Rogerson, J. *Genesis 1-11 (Old Testament Guides)*, Sheffield: JSOT Press (1991), p. 61.

human Fall was more than ‘merely paradigmatic’. Abandoning the cosmic fall need not lead to any of the dire consequences that Lloyd fears.<sup>72</sup>

- 2 Rejecting a cosmic fall is not the same as saying that the world of nature has not been affected by the Fall of humanity. Clearly, our selfish abuse and exploitation of ‘the environment’ (a tellingly anthropocentric term!) has caused immense damage and degradation, and continues to do so. In this respect, Calvin’s description of ‘unseasonable rains, drought, hail’ and so forth as ‘the fruits of sin’ is probably more accurate now than when he wrote it! But these effects of human sin on creation are secondary and consequential; they are not the fundamental and ontological changes that are traditionally meant by the term ‘cosmic fall’. This leads to my next point.
- 3 Linzey pertinently asks ‘why evangelicals have such enormous difficulty in taking environmental issues seriously’.<sup>73</sup> Ironically, one answer (and there are probably several)<sup>74</sup> may stem from a tradition of believing, like Linzey, in ‘the fall of creation’ (his term). Arguably, the notion of a cosmic fall has led many evangelicals to regard nature as radically corrupted and therefore devalued in God’s sight. If so, it is vital that we regain a biblical perspective uncluttered with preconceptions. An insight by Richard Bauckham is helpful here. After surveying biblical texts in which the worship of God is attributed to non-human creation, he concludes:

The creation worships God just by being itself, as God made it, existing for God’s glory... The key point implicit in these depictions of the worship of creation is the intrinsic value of all creatures, in the theocentric sense of the value given them by their Creator and offered back to him in praise.<sup>75</sup>

Regaining this perspective might increase our awe and wonder at what God has made and enlarge our reverence and concern for it. Seeing creation’s abiding value in God’s sight might even propel more of us into much-needed action.

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72 See Polkinghorne, J. *Reason and Reality*, London: SPCK (1991), pp. 99-104; Ward, K. *God, Faith and the New Millennium*, Oxford: One World (1998), pp. 132-139; Berry, R. J. *op. cit.* (30), pp. 29-49; *idem*, ‘The Fall is History’, *Science and Christian Belief* (2000) 12(1), 53-63; *idem*, *op. cit.* (7), pp. 225-250. Lloyd (*op. cit.* (11), p. 77) is on even shakier ground when he implies that the alternative to belief in a cosmic fall is that ‘nature is seen as unambiguously good as it is in the theology of Matthew Fox... then, theologically, it is but a short step to the worship of nature, and, ethically, our every instinct and urge will be thought of as unambiguously good too...’

73 Linzey, *op. cit.* (13), p. 24.

74 See Montefiore, H. ‘Why aren’t more church people interested in the environment?’, *Transformation* (1999) 16(3), 74-77, and McGrath, A. E. ‘Recovering the “Creation”’: A response to Hugh Montefiore’, *ibid.*, 78-80.

75 Bauckham, R. ‘The New Testament teaching on the environment: A response to Ernest Lucas’, *Transformation* (1999) 16(3), 99-101 (p. 101).