THE NEW RAINBOW SERPENT
OF PEACE, JUSTICE AND
THE INTEGRITY OF
CREATION

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S.S.C.
The ACSJC is pleased to present to you the second in its series of Occasional Papers.

This paper, by Fr. Sean McDonagh SSC, was given in Melbourne on 5 July, 1988 as the 1988 Helder Camara Lecture. It challenges us to move beyond an anthropocentric cosmology towards a more holistic understanding of Creation, and the place of the human person in it. It challenges us to authentic stewardship.

Fr. McDonagh, who also made a submission on the same subject to the Bishop’s inquiry on wealth distribution in Australia, brings to the environmental debate a distinctively Christian approach, calling for a new creation — centred spirituality as a basis for action.

John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici reminds us that all members of the Church have a ‘vocation and mission in the Church and in the world...’ Part of this mission is to advance the concept of authentic development, which "... cannot ignore the use of the elements of nature, the renewability of resources and the consequences of haphazard industrialization — three considerations which alert our consciences to the moral dimension of development" (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis No 34).

While ACSJC Occasional Papers do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, they are published to provide information and to stimulate public discussion on social justice issues.

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Bishop of Wagga Wagga
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I am an Irish Columban missionary who has spent the past 20 years on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. During that time I have become more and more aware of how the Christian Churches in both First and Third World countries have been enriched by each other's response to the challenge of the Gospel. Missionaries — who are today seen more and more as agents of dialogue between the Churches — have played an important role in initiating and sustaining these mutually enriching exchanges. Those who have experienced the economic oppression, political brutality and social inequality of Latin America and South- east Asia have brought back the praxis of liberation theology to First World countries. This has helped Christians in these Churches to become more critical of the global, political and economic structures which oppress the vast majority of humanity and marginalise ever growing minorities in the First World countries themselves. Much of this teaching on social, economic and political issues is reflected in the recent Encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis. Nos. 15, 16, 20, 21 and 39 spring readily to mind. (1). Here the Church commits herself to the option of preference for the poor and marginalised and readily accepts the implications of this option in individual countries and across the global scene. (SRS No. 42).

We Are Killing The Earth
My missionary experience convinces me that this dialogue needs to move on to a new and, in a sense, more far reaching and comprehensive agenda. Every person in the world today, no matter where they live, needs to grapple with, and respond to a most important challenge of our times — the rampant and often irreversible destruction of the natural world. There is an urgent need for a new awareness by governments and by the major institutions of society, and concrete action by everyone to stem the tide of destruction before it is too late. A large segment of the human community and many of our fellow creatures, who share this earth with us, are doomed to extinction if we do not wake up and see what price the community of the living and the earth itself has had to pay for what many people call "progress".

The authors of The Global 2000 Report to the President, (2) published in 1980 and Our Common Future (3) published in 1988 chronicle what is happening to the living world in some detail. The authors of Global 2000 put it bluntly in their letter of transmittal to President Carter. They state that "there is a potential for global problems of alarming proportions by the year 2000". Speaking in 1980 they contend that, unless strong conservation measures are taken, the next 20 years will see a "progressive degradation and impoverishment of the earth's natural resources." That warning is even truer today; this gives the human community 12 years in which to halt our present dangerous course and to devote our creative energies to protecting the dynamic stability and regenerative powers of the natural systems in every corner of the globe. Warning signals of future catastrophes are flashing all around us. Almost every night we see on our TV screens images of
starving people, clutching food bowls in their spindly hands, begging for food. They are the human victims of the creeping deserts and soil erosion in Africa. The nuclear accident at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986, spewed a cloud of radioactive dust across Northern Europe. Some of the most remote communities like the Welsh-speaking sheep farmers of North Wales and the Sami people of Scandinavia are among the worst affected by the disaster. In a report in the Sydney Morning Herald June 24, 1988, entitled "Greenhouse — Science's Nightmare Now Reality," scientists blame the present disastrous drought which has gripped the breadbasket of the world on the creeping "Green House" effect. Hardly a month passes by without an account of toxic waste or nuclear effluent being leaked into our rivers or flushed out to sea to poison our marine environment or pawned off on unsuspecting Third World countries.

And yet, despite all the mounting evidence around us and warnings from international organisations like the United Nations and respected scientists like Rene Dubos, Norman Myers and David Suzuki to mention just three, our awareness of the overall impact of what is happening right before our eyes is minimal. Many of us live in cities and thus are insulated from experimental contact with the processes of the natural world. Maybe this is why we fail to see that many of the processes of our modern technological, consumer, throw-away society are progressively changing the chemistry of the air, poisoning our water, causing massive soil erosion and killing off innumerable species of our fellow creatures on land in the seas.
Ecology
Yet there are signs of hope. One of these is the growing interest in ecology among ordinary people in almost every country in the world. Ecology attempts to study the web of interactions between living beings in a particular area and the non-living entities of the place which is being studied. This inter-relatedness is, according to Barry Commoner in The Closing Circle, (4) the first law of ecology — everything is connected to everything else. This dynamic inter-relatedness accounts for the diversity and fruitfulness which characterise living systems like rainforests, or coral reefs. But, unfortunately, the same interconnectedness can also be seen in the chain of death which is now encircling some of the most fruitful eco-systems on Earth.

T'boli Example — A Pathway of Death
This has come home to me very forcibly during the past 10 years living and working among the T'boli people of South Cotabato in the Philippines. Until relatively recently, almost all of the Philippines was covered by dense, tropical rainforest. But over the past 40 years the forests have almost disappeared. Lumber companies have attacked them with a vengeance in order to supply an insatiable appetite for tropical hardwoods in Japan, Europe, Australia and the United States. Landless peasants, often evicted from their land to make way for agribusiness plantations, have followed the loggers into the hills and taken their own toll of the forest. The scale of destruction is horrendous and its scope reaches far beyond the boundaries of the forest.

The Response Of Our Society
Let us take a brief look at how the various institutions of our society are responding to this problem. I think we can honestly say that none of them are giving it the attention and consideration that it deserves. Take the politicians for a start; neither at a global or local level have they felt the need to mount a massive "defence initiative" on behalf of planet Earth. The short-term benefit in terms of employment for their constituents, profits for their friends and government revenue takes precedence over the long-term despoliation of land and the contamination of fertile life-systems. Sure, a certain amount of money is allocated for desalination work on the Murray-Darling, and international conventions have agreed to limits on various toxic substances, but the commitment is neither adequate nor far-reaching enough. The business, banking and manufacturing communities, which see themselves as the power-houses of our industrial economies, do not seem to be aware that, if Earth goes broke through myopic and insane economic policies, then there is no long-term hope for any other corporation on this Earth.

Educators have introduced some environmental programmes into the school system, still these subjects often have a Cinderella status. They are the first to go when budgetary cuts are mentioned. As a result many students leave school without any adequate understanding of the beauty and fragility of the natural world. The magnitude of the problem we face is not imprinted on students' consciousness, nor is there a really concerted effort to introduce students to alternative, less destructive ways of living on this Earth.

News items on ecological damage do appear in the press, but usually on the inside pages. No general circulation newspaper that I know of has a regular ecological section where the authors move beyond reporting events to regularly engaging in some in-depth analysis of what is happening. It is ironic that sport, finance and often fashion have their own sections, but not the Earth itself.
The first to suffer are tribal peoples like the T'boli whose whole lives are bound up with the forest. The forest is their garden. Not too long ago it provided them with an amazing variety of edible plants, nuts, berries, fruits, animals, reptiles, insects, fish, crustaceans and birds. The wood for their homes and fires comes from the forest. Their medical lore and practices depend on plants and herbs which grow only in the forest. Their intimate relationship with the forest does not end with satisfying their bodily needs. T'boli music, poetry, dancing, art and ritual are also rooted in the music and movement of the forest. The death of the forest means the death of T'boli culture. In the present world it may also involve their extinction as a people.

The bad news does not stop there. With the felling of the trees and the burning of the vegetation the fragile topsoil is exposed to wind and rain. With no trees or vegetation to soak up the monsoon rains, flood waters laden with rich top-soil spill down the mountain slopes causing serious flooding and loss of life in coastal towns and cities. The flood waters also silt up river beds and estuaries rendering useless many expensive irrigation projects. These depend for their effectiveness on an extensive forest cover so that a constant supply of water is gently filtered down to the rich alluvial plains. The cycle of destruction does not end with this body blow to food production. The murky waters in estuaries and lagoons choke delicate coral polyps, thus destroying the breeding ground for fish and crustaceans.

The Age of Slaughter
More ominous still, because it is irreversible, is the degradation of the habitat for hundreds of thousands of species of plants, insects, animals and birds. When their habitat is destroyed they face extinction as living species. Some biologists reckon that human activity during the next 20 to 30 years will cause the extinction of 25% and possibly up to 50% of all life forms on earth. The loss to the human and earth community of such genetic diversity is incalculable. On a purely selfish note, many of the plants and animals are essential for our food and medical needs.

But the impact on the biosphere — the delicate web of life on earth — is even more incalculable and frightening. Some biologists use the analogy of rivets on a plane. A passenger may not be unduly perturbed if he or she sees one rivet flying off while the plane is in flight. If, however, one third of the rivets begin to fly off every passenger knows that disaster is imminent. One way of understanding the sheer scale of what is happening in the space of a few short decades is to remember that we are witnessing the most dramatic change in the biosphere since the dinosaurs became extinct over 60 million years ago.

What I see taking place before my eyes almost every day is not confined to Mindanao. Rainforests are being ravaged in Latin America, West Africa and South-east Asia to provide wood and cheap beef for First World countries. Each year an area as large as England is despoiled. Since the rainforests are not inexhaustible many experts predict that by the year 2020 they will all have been felled except for a small strip in the West Amazon and West Africa. If this happens the areas which they once covered will become desolate, resembling a lunar landscape and all life on Earth will be impoverished.
Some may say "too bad for the Philippines and Latin America, but things are fine here in this vast land — the lucky country". The bicentennial celebrations affords an opportunity for all Australians to reflect on how the newcomers cared for the land during the past 200 years.

A feature article in Time Magazine, April 11, 1988 gives the European population low grades on a number of environmental issues. It says, "of the 5 million square kilometres used for agricultural and pastoral purposes about 2.7 million square kilometres are either affected by or in danger of wind erosion, water erosion or salinity. The land, bared and exploited by two centuries of bad management, is in trouble."

Sensitivity regarding the need to preserve adequate habitat in order that other creatures might survive has also been low. At the moment some 2,200 plant species — approximately one-tenth of Australia’s flora — are now classified as threatened, rare or endangered. Half the species of Australian mammals are threatened as are 10% of native birds and 20% of reptiles, amphibians and freshwater fish. (5). As the narrator of the last of the ABC, Nature Of Australia programmes puts it "the roll-call of extinction signal that the land which underpins our survival is now under threat".

Trees have been felled at an enormous rate. Since 1789 two-thirds of Australia's native forests and three-quarters of the country's rainforests have been removed. Even now Australian native forests are being harvested at a rate in excess of their natural regeneration.

The problems with the depletion of the ozone layer over large areas of the Antarctica will affect Australian crops and people.

This bird’s eye view of what has happened in Australia tells us that environmental degradation is a one-world issue. Industrial pollution and the deterioration of natural systems do not stop at national boundaries. In this, the garden planet of the universe, we live or die together. The 1987 Vatican statement on the International Debt crisis — An Ethical Approach To The International Debt (6) — has a striking phrase which captures what the fundamental task is for this generation of human beings. It speaks about solidarity for survival. As the poet James McCauley puts it poignantly in his poem "Tailings" (7).

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Response Of The Churches

Where have the Christian Churches been in all of this? Many commentators agree with the American historian Lynn White's indictment of the Christian tradition in his now famous article published in Science in 1967. (8). White maintained that Westerners feel "superior to nature, contemptuous of it and willing to use it for our slightest whim". He insists that this attitude springs from "orthodox Christian arrogant towards nature". This attitude is so deeply ingrained in Western consciousness that according to White "since the roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy also must be essentially religious, whether we call it so or not". White's thesis has been challenged by theologians, and scientists like Rene Dubos. They feel it is lopsided and that it is unfair to lay the blame exclusively here on the Catholic tradition alone.

That having been said, we must humbly face the fact that the Christian Churches have not been in the forefront on this issue. They did not feel called upon to critique or challenge the exploitative chemical, electrical or nuclear technologies as they emerged in the late 19th early 20th century. In more recent times they have not been at the cutting edge of the ecological movement. Though Rachel Carson's book Silent Spring (9) was published in 1962 the Bishops at Vatican 2 had nothing to say about the despoliation of the Earth outside the context of nuclear war. Progressio Populorum is rightly considered one of the finest of the Social Encyclicals, nevertheless its attitude to the natural world still smacks of the war against nature approach. "Industry is necessary for economic growth or human progress — by persistent work and the use of his intelligence man gradually wrests nature's secrets from her and finds a better application for her riches". (10).

Only in very recent times have the problems of industrial pollution and ecological devastation crept into the thinking of the magisterium of the Catholic Church. We find them alluded to briefly in The Apostolic Letter to Cardinal Roy (11) and in a speech given by Pope John Paul II at the United Nations Centre for the Enironment in Nairobi in August 1985. (12). The perspective in both cases is exclusively focussed on the needs of the human component of the earth community. My brief look above at the cycle of death which follows in the wake of the destruction of the rainforest shows that this is not an adequate framework through which to grasp the scale of the present destruction.

Happily the recent encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (13) addresses the question in a more adequate way. The issue is first raised in Chapter 3 which surveys contemporary problems. Here the Pope reminds us that "man must remain subject to the will of God, who imposes limits upon his use and dominion over things". (no. 29). In the chapter IV On Authentic Human Development the Pope insists that any attempt at development must respect the natural world. (No. 34). While I am very happy that the ecological issue is now firmly planted in the agenda of the Catholic Church, I feel that the recent pastoral letter of the Philippine Bishops', What Is Happening To Our Beautiful Land? (14) goes beyond the encyclical and captures both the magnitude of the environmental problems facing the country and the Earth and the urgency with which it needs to be faced. In the introductory paragraph the bishops state that the present social and economic decline is intimately linked to a deteriorating environment and that the damage is both extensive and often irreversible and thus will plague every succeeding generation of Filipinos:

The Philippines is now at a critical point in its history. For the past number of years we have experienced political instability, economic decline and a growth in armed conflicts. Almost every day the media highlights one or other of these problems. The banner headlines absorb our attention so much so that we tend to overlook a more deep-seated crisis which we believe lies at the root of many of our economic and political problems. To put it simply: our country is in peril. All the living systems on the land and in the sea around us are being ruthlessly exploited and the damage to date is extensive and sad to say it is often irreversible.

The slow response of the Catholic Church to this issue at the official level has now been mirrored I am sure at the local level. How many of us have ever heard or given a sermon on the destruction of creation which is taking place around us? This is hardly surprising since creation was barely mentioned in the traditional theology books which were used in most seminaries. It was simply taken for granted as the stage on which human history and salvation was to be worked out, or oftentimes it was seen as evil and in need of redemption. Our spiritual traditions were especially ambivalent about the world, so it was easy for us not to notice when it was being despoiled and certainly not to see such destruction as a profound moral issue. We tended to focus on one or two areas of the moral life. This allowed little time or psychic energy for other issues! In looking at the Church's response to this issue I have focused exclusively here on the Catholic tradition. I am aware that The World Council of Churches has engaged this issue in a more active way. At the moment it is busily preparing for a conference on Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation which is scheduled to take place in Geneva in 1990. It is a pity that we Catholics cannot join hands with them on this issue.

The Scriptures

Of course we are beginning to realise that our blindness to what is happening to creation is really a travesty of our tradition. There is a wealth of insight into how we should relate to the natural world in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. First and foremost the Bible affirms that the world was created by a loving personal God. (Gen 1:1). This affirmation is extremely important. It is set against a background of other Near-Eastern creation stories which taught that, since the Earth was subject to decay and death, it must have been created, at least, in part by an evil spirit. The Bible vigorously denies this. God contemplates the world which he has made and "sees that it is good".

Furthermore, God is not removed from this universe, hiding away in some inaccessible place. The Psalmist rejoices in the presence of God which he sees in creation:

"The heavens declare the Glory of God, The vault of the heaven proclaims His handiwork. Day discourses of it to day, Night to night hands on the knowledge. (Ps. 19:1)."

Stewardship

Many attempts by Christians to develop an ecologically sensitive theology and to situate the human within this new understanding begin with the text of Genesis 1:28:

"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the Earth and conquer it." This is the Jerusalem Bible's translation of the Hebrew. Other translations substitute "subdue the Earth" or "have dominion over it". Given the very active human shaping of the Earth which is echoed in the text many interpret it as saying that the natural world has no inherent value apart from its usefulness to human beings. This interpretation seems highly unlikely since God affirmed His creation as "good" and proceeded to make human beings in-

"Our own image, and in the likeness of ourselves." (Gen. 1:28).

It seems from the text of Genesis and other books in the Bible, especially, the book of Job that the commission is
best understood as a call to human beings to act as God's representative or viceroy's on the Earth. This involves being faithful stewards of God's creation and thereby co-operating with the processes of the natural world in order to enhance and preserve their fruitfulness. Human beings are called to live in harmony with each other, to be sensitive to the needs of the less fortunate and to care for creation.

The Covenant in chapter 3 of the book of Genesis is made between God and Adam and Eve. The focus of God's gracious love is widened to include "everything that lives on the Earth", in the Covenant made with Noah after the flood. (Gen 9: 7-17). The rainbow which we see in the sky is a continual reminder of that covenant.

This inclusive covenant is at the heart of stewardship. The harmony which should exist between humans and the rest of the natural world emerges from a clear understanding of their interdependence. To recognise, cultivate, sustain and celebrate this dynamic web of life is the heart of stewardship. Human beings must come to realise that, to act in God's name in relation to creation is a privilege bestowed on us by God. By responding to it in an authentic way we grow in the image and likeness of God. But like all privileged callings in the Bible, those who are called will be held responsible for their behaviour. The Genesis account of creation provides no licence to the human community to "hack and rack the growing green!" to use the pain-filled phrase of the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins "Binsey Poplars". (15). There is no mandate to despoil and deplete the natural resources of the earth or to poison and kill off hundreds of thousands of living species and leave a wasteland for future generations. It should evoke a new feeling for the fragility of our world where to quote Hopkin's words again.

"where we, even where we mean
To mend her, end her,
When we hew or delve:
After-corners, cannot guess the beauty been."

The demands of stewardship are enshrined in the Torah. The land was seen as a gift of God. (Ex 19:5). What was given was not outright ownership but the right of tenancy. Yahweh who remained the true landowner, decreed that: "the land must not be sold in perpetuity, for the land belongs to Me and to Me you are only strangers and guests." (Lev. 25:23).

Respect for Yahweh's overlordship, care for the land and
concern for the less fortunate members of society go hand in hand in an earlier text regarding the observance of the sabbath year:

"But in the seventh year, the land is to have a rest, a sabbath for Yahweh. You must not sow your fields or prune your vines, or harvest your ungathered corn or gather your grapes from your untrimmed vines. It is to be a year of rest for the land. That sabbath of the land will itself feed you and your servants, men and women, your hired labourers, your guests and all who live with you." (Lev. 25:4-7).

Modern agriculture which utilises marginal lands and squeezes all land to the point of exhaustion in order to maximise short-term profits has forgotten the wisdom contained in this text. Land is not allowed to lie fallow in order to regain its fertility through natural processes. It is only taken out of use when economic factors indicate that a smaller crop is necessary to "stabilise" markets. The farmer was enjoined to show respect for his work animals.

"You must not muzzle an ox when it is treading out corn." (Dt. 25:4).

This respectful attitude is not confined to domestic animals. In an earlier text in Deuteronomy it is extended to wild-life as well:

"If, when out walking you come across a bird's nest in a tree or on the ground, with chicks or eggs and the mother sitting on the chicks, let the mother go; the young you may take for yourself. So you shall prosper and have a long life." (Dt. 22:6-7).
This is the heart of ecological wisdom. Like many other creatures in the earth community we do not create our own source of energy, but live by consuming others. We are, however, called to do it with both profound gratitude and a caring attitude which strives to preserve the fruitfulness of life forms. We may eat the young, but we must be careful to conserve the breeding stock. We may enjoy the grain harvest, but we must not eat the seed grain even when famine threatens.

In stark contrast to this sane approach to the earth and other creatures, modern profit-oriented agriculture is abandoning traditional varieties of seeds in favour of more lucrative hybrid ones. Many of these traditional varieties are now becoming extinct, since the transnational corporations involved in seed production prefer to market seeds which need high chemical input. The seed-companies are often linked to chemical companies, so the seeds — fertilizer — pesticide tie-up sends their profits soaring. But the earth suffers. In fact the "side effects" of this kind of farming, which in the short term produce large quantities of food, could endanger the long-term future of agriculture.

It means systematically chipping away at the genetic base on which much of our food crops is dependent. With the destruction of diversity, the hybrid seeds are extremely vulnerable to disease and infestation. A single disease can wipe out a whole crop and thus result in massive starvation. Modern geneticists are extremely worried by this loss of indispensable genetic raw material. They echo the wisdom of the Bible and tell us that what we are doing is like covering the roof of a house with rocks taken from the foundation. If we continue to hack away the day of reckoning and collapse cannot be far away.

**Jesus — In Him All Things Are Made**

A Christian theology of creation has much to learn from the attitude of respect which Jesus displayed towards the natural world. There is no support for our throw-away, consumer society in the New Testament. But more, important still, the Jesus reality is, as Paul tells us in Col. 3:11 and many other similar texts, the centre of the Cosmos. He is "all and in all". All the rich unfolding and creativity of this emergent universe, from the fire-ball until now are centered on Him. To wantonly destroy any aspect of creation and to sterilise the earth is to deface the image of Christ which is radiated to us through our world.

Jesus also shows us how to live our life to the full in the face of the mystery of death. There is no doubt in my mind that our frenzied grasping for more and more possessions arises primarily from our inability to accept our own death. By surrounding ourselves with more and more things we hope to avoid the reality of death and gain some measure of immortality. But our faith, and maybe also from our experience if we are lucky enough, tells us that this way of living is a blind and sterile alley. The great tragedy for ourselves and all of creation is, that in pursuing this illusion, individually and collectively, we are stretching the body of nature on the rack of human greed and exploitative technology. In seeking to avoid death, we are literally killing the planet. This is why Jesus's way of living his life into death, trusting completely in the love of our gracious God, must become the foundational reality in our lives. His death and resurrection is the basis of our hope. I am convinced that all of us, but especially, young people are desperately in need of this hope. This hope cannot, however, be articulated in the constricting ways which are so facilely offered by the legion of fundamentalist movements which are so active at this time. Rather it must be articulated and celebrated in a way that speaks to our concrete needs and yet, if it is to be authentically Christian, it must call us into a challenging future that is intimately bound up with all creation. Fired by this hope we can commit ourselves to building the kingdom whose boundaries reach beyond the limits of race, colour, creed or even species to include all of God's creation.
A Rich Tradition
There is much practical wisdom also in some of the great Christian movements down through the centuries. The tradition of the early Celtic monks was particularly sensitive to God's presence in Creation. Many of the Saints, including the patron of my own Society were on good terms with the animals, even foxes and bears. The Benedictine monks in Europe approached the natural world with respect and introduced farming methods and technologies which actually enhanced the natural fertility of the land. Francis of Assisi went even further. His life of fellowship with all creatures bursts forth in The Canticle of Brother Sun. We need to recapture Francis' sensitivity to the world around us and also be enriched by the insights from the Great Religions of Asia — Hinduism and Buddhism — and the intimate relationship which primal religions has fashioned between believers and the natural world in almost every corner of the globe.

 Australians who have come here during the past two hundred years have much to learn from the wisdom of the Aboriginal people of this land who, over the millennia, developed a sense of kinship with the rivers, mountains, animals, birds and reptiles that roam this land. As Judith Wright points out in her preface to Alan Marshall's, People of the Dreamtime, we will never be able to experience their sense of kinship, but we and all the community of the living can be enriched and healed through a creative dialogue with this tradition. The fruit of such a dialogue could be far-reaching and healing in its effects for the land itself, the black population and other ethnic groups in Australia.
The land would no longer be seen primarily as an economic commodity, to be used and abused as market force dictates. The black community could surely rejoice in that their living traditions are once again respected and seen as valuable by all the people and the white people might be able to overcome the alienation which has set them against the land and the black people. Thus the Rainbow Serpent could once again bond everyone with the land.

In the final programme of the Nature of Australia series the commentator reflected on the fact that while those who are gone before us could honestly claim that "they knew not what they did" we cannot claim such an excuse. In many situations we now know what we should do in order to avoid destroying the earth. So that all that seems lacking is the "political will". But is it as simple as that? My talk tonight argues that our needs go much deeper. We need a new story of the emergence of the Earth and of the proper function of human beings as the conscious creatures in which the Earth and the Cosmos can reflect on itself. Many of the strands of this story have already been woven. As Professor Tuzo Wilson puts it in The Making of the Earth "as befits a mighty subject, it has needed many Lilliputians to assemble our fascinating picture of a mobile Earth" (16). In his various writings but, especially, in The Phenomenon of Man, (17) Teilhard de Chardin has given a profoundly religious dimension to this New Story of our Earth. This is the story on which we can ground an adequate theology of creation. It is essential that we articulate it in our own locality or bioregional area if we are to energise Christians to care for our earth and push back the web of death which is encircling our globe before it is too late.

This point is not lost on secular ecological organisations. In September 1986, the World Wild-Life Fund celebrated its 25th anniversary by inviting leaders from the five Great World Religions to Assisi. There, representatives from Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Christianity pledged to mobilise the spiritual energies of their respective communities in the struggle to preserve this beautiful and fruitful planet. Only in this way will religious people fashion an adequate theology of creation to guide all the peoples of the earth in the difficult journey from our present destructive frenzy to one where we will begin to celebrate more joyously the beauty of the Earth and in the words of the Taoist aphorism live more lightly on Her.

What Can Be Done?
So how can we put all of this into practice? I cannot give you one single formula which will conveniently solve everything. Nevertheless one oft-repeated ecological aphorism, "think globally, act locally," should set the tone of our lives. Firstly of all, each of us are challenged to really inform ourselves about this issue. Books, articles and tapes are readily available. We should deepen our knowledge and be ready to share it with others. It is a survival issue and all of us have a role to play.

Concrete decisions depend on the circumstances of our lives. Many of you are I am sure taking decisions in areas of your lives over which you have control. These would I am sure include a ban on the use of sprays that contain chlorofluoro-carbons and a determination to lessen and eventually stop using chemical fertilisers and pesticides on our property if we are blessed to have the stewardship of some land. Guidelines are all that I can give. A basic one is a decision to use all the Earth's resources with great care, especially non-renewable ones. Many of us use paper so thoughtlessly. A sizeable amount of paper and much of the rubbish which accumulates in our houses could be recycled without too much trouble. There are quite a number of magazines available at news agents which deal with simple, ecologically sound living.

On the wider level we can become interested in environmental problems which effect our communities. Cooperation and interdependence are the hallmark of ecology. This has important political implications. Our united support, especially, if expressed through some organisation can be a powerful voice in determining public policy. Politicians and planners need to see that these are important issues for the people. It is unrealistic to expect politicians to lead. If, however, the tide of public opinion begins to turn in favour of good stewardship of our land they will readily follow our lead.

On the religious level, we should try to develop a theology, and spirituality which is sensitive to the presence of God in the natural world. Rituals that celebrate God's presence in
the world around us are vitally important in order to reconnect us in an integral way with the natural world. We should try to develop these for our homes and communities. This will call forth creativities which at present lie dormant within the community of the Church. In the sacraments we use symbols from the natural world, water, fire, air, oil, food, drink, but they are often so anemic that they alienate instead of connecting us with the natural world.

Let me finish on a hopeful note. On the Feast of Pentecost we call on the Holy Spirit. "Come, O Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your spirit and they shall be created and you will renew the face of the Earth." That is our challenge and that is our prayer. We know that God, who created this beautiful world mourns the destruction which is taking place in our times, and that he is calling all of us in our own way and some of us in a special way to dedicate ourselves to healing and caring for the Earth. The world-wide growth of the ecological movement is a sign, to use Hopkins' words again:

"that the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and ah!
Bright wings."
Footnotes
13. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, op. cit.,
This talk was given in Melbourne on July 5, 1988 as the 1988 Helder Camara Lecture.

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