

Jesus and the Renewal of Nature: Reading Isaiah and the Gospels ecologically

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A persistent theme in the Christian tradition, though one that has all too often dropped out of sight, is the expectation that not humanity alone, but the whole creation, the whole community of God's creatures, will be transfigured in new creation and taken into the eternal life of God. This world is not a 'throw-away' creation, a merely temporary context for God to work out his purposes for humanity, a world in which, therefore, we do not really belong, and which will perish when it has served its purely anthropocentric purpose. Rather it is the whole community of creation for which God has a future, and humans will attain their eternal destiny only along with the other creatures with whom they are inextricably connected in the complex web of life. Such a vision of the renewal of nature has always been important, but assumes perhaps a special significance in the ecological crisis of creation through which we are now living. If the non-human creation also has a future in God's purpose then we must recognize the value of other creatures, in themselves and for God. They are not created for us to put them to whatever use we choose. Nor can the Christian churches confine their attention to the spiritual salvation of humans as though in the last resort we can hold ourselves aloof from the rest of creation, indifferent to its fate because we do not really belong to it. It is not as though Christians, with a hope of salvation from the world, have less reason to care for creation in its current plight than other people have. Rather, with their hope of salvation for the whole creation, Christians have more reason than many others to care for creation in its current plight.

A Christian vision of cosmic redemption, the renewal of all creation, is certainly rooted in the Bible, but expositions of this theme have a strong tendency to pass rather quickly over the Gospels and to focus on other parts of the Scriptures (such as the Pauline letters). In this lecture I want to do a little to correct the impression that the Gospels have not much to offer on this subject, but the main key to correcting that impression lies in appreciating links between the Gospels and the Hebrew Bible, which the Gospels themselves of course everywhere presuppose. So I shall begin, not in the Gospels, but in Isaiah.

The peaceable kingdom of the Messiah (Isaiah 11)

In Jewish messianic expectation in the time of Jesus, one of the most popular messianic prophecies was Isaiah 11. It offers one of the fullest descriptions to be found in the Old Testament of an ideal ruler from the royal line of David and continues with a memorable description of his kingdom, which in English-speaking discussion is often known as the peaceable kingdom. The account begins by describing how this scion of David will be equipped for his rule by receiving no ordinary royal anointing, but the sevenfold endowment of the Spirit of God (v 2). It proceeds to describe his exercise of justice, which, as so often in the Old Testament, takes the form of justice for the poor and oppressed and against their oppressors (vv 3-5). In this way he brings an end to the violence by which some people victimize

others. Then comes the so-called peaceable kingdom, in which the end of violence is extended from human society to the world of animals (vv 6-9). Although the Messiah himself is not mentioned within these verses, the structure of vv 1-10 makes clear that they do describe the effect of the Messiah's rule. The structure is chiasmic or concentric:

- A. A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse (v 1)
- B. The knowledge of the LORD will rest on him (v 2)
- C. The ideal age: right relationships in human society (vv 3-5)
- C¹. The ideal age: right relationships between human society and wild animals (vv 6-9)
- B¹. The knowledge of the LORD will fill the land (v 9)
- A¹. A root of Jesse will stand as a signal (v 10).

Our special concern now is with verses 6-9:

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
 the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
 the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
 and a little child shall lead them.
⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
 their young shall lie down together;
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
 and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
⁹They will not hurt or destroy
 on all my holy mountain;
 for the land will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
 as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Occasionally this passage has been read as an allegory of peace between nations, while inattentive modern readers sometimes see it as a picture simply of peace between animals. In fact, it depicts peace between the human world, with its domestic animals (lamb, kid, calf, bullock, cow), and those wild animals (wolf, leopard, lion, bear, poisonous snakes) that were normally perceived as threats both to human livelihood and to human life. For the Israelite farmer, the unacceptable face of wild nature was these dangerous animals. What is depicted in the prophecy is the reconciliation of the human world with wild nature. Significantly, humans and domestic animals are all represented by their young, the most vulnerable. Each of the pairs of animals in verses 6-7 is carefully chosen, so that each predator is paired with a typical example of that predator's prey. Especially from verse 7, it is clear that this peaceful condition is possible because the carnivorous animals have become, like the domestic animals, vegetarian. No doubt, this also includes humans. The pairing of the snakes and the children (v 8) differs from the other pairs in that the child is not the prey of the snake, but its poison is nonetheless dangerous to a child who ignorantly interferes with its hiding-place.

This is a utopian (or, we might say, ecotopian) picture of the future kingdom of the Messiah that harks back to the primeval utopia that Genesis depicts as the beginning of human history. Originally, all the creatures of the earth were vegetarian (Gen 1:29-

30), and violence both among humans and between humans and animals came with the degeneration of life on earth that provoked the Flood (Gen 6:11-13). Isaiah's description of the peaceable kingdom probably also alludes to the human responsibility for other living creatures that God gave humans at creation (Gen 1:26, 28). The first depiction of animals at peace (Isa 11:6) concludes: 'a little child shall lead them.' This is a reference to shepherding practice, in which the domestic animals willingly follow the shepherd who leads them to pasture. Even a small child can lead a flock of sheep or herd of goats, because no force or violence is required. In the ecotopia of Isaiah the little child will be able to lead also the wolf, the leopard and the lion. It is a picture of gentle and beneficial service to wild animals, which the animals now willingly receive. It is how we might imagine Adam and Eve related to the animals in the garden of Eden. This is not to say that the messianic kingdom is merely a return to the garden of Eden. It is more than that, but the original innocence of humans and animals does provide a model for the way this prophet envisages the future.

Wild animals appear in the biblical literature mainly as threats to human life and livelihood. Ancient Israelites didn't hunt them for food – or rarely did so. They did not need to envisage our contemporary situation in which the roles are reversed. On balance, it is now humans who are a threat to wild animals, destroying their habitats and driving whole species to extinction at an alarming rate. In the Israelite prophets' visions of the ideal future, the priority was to protect humans from wild animals, but it is worth noticing that, whereas in Leviticus and Ezekiel this is achieved simply by removing all wild animals from the land (Lev 26:6; Ezek 34:25), Isaiah offers a much more positive picture, as well as a more transformative one. Enmity is ended, not by removing one of the parties, but by reconciliation that benefits both. Such a vision of peace between humans and wild nature offers a utopia to our world of human violence against nature as well to Isaiah's world of animal violence against humans.

However, we must also be realistic about biology. We now know that, while bears could survive on a vegetarian diet, this is biologically impossible for lions. A vegetarian lion would be so different from the lions in our world as to be another species. We have to see Isaiah's vision as imaginative rather than literal, but, especially when taken up into the wider biblical vision of new creation, it remains a promise of a new creation from which violence will be absent, not only within the human world, but also between humans and animals. It suggests the possibility of relationships between humans and other creatures that are peaceable, companionable and mutually enriching. We cannot say how this will be possible, but there is a great deal about the new creation to which the same applies. New creation is a transformative, newly creative act of God comparable only with the original creation. It lies beyond our conceiving. But it matters that it promises a new future for the whole creation, not just for humans.

It matters because biblical prophecy is not merely predictive but calls its readers to appropriate action now in the light of the future it outlines. With Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom in view, we cannot simply acquiesce in human violence against animals, any more than we can renounce attempts to promote peace, rather than war, in human society. In both cases peace is God's promise, but in both cases we can live in ways that correspond to the promise and hope that God gives us. We can do this so long as we do not suppose we can pre-empt God's eschatological action itself. Human

attempts at utopia, as we learned so well in the twentieth century, are invariably destructive because they reach beyond human limits. We can only seek humbly to live in harmony with nature as far as is possible, anticipating God's kingdom in ways that are realistic and appropriate to our human limits.

The peaceable kingdom of Jesus the Messiah (Gospel of Mark)

Now I want to suggest that we should read the opening section of Mark's story of Jesus in the light of Isaiah 11. What happens is that, first, Jesus at his baptism is equipped for ministry by the Spirit, like the Messiah in Isaiah 11. Then the Spirit drives him away into the desert for a period of forty days. Now Matthew and Luke at this point tell the extended narrative of Jesus' temptations, but Mark has a much briefer account of Jesus in the wilderness, so brief that readers are prone to pass quickly over it as though it were no more than a summary account of what Matthew and Luke relate at more interesting length. But Mark's brief account is carefully designed, and it includes an element unique to Mark: the wild animals:

[Jesus] was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan;
and he was with the wild animals;
and the angels ministered to him (Mark 1:13).

This period in the wilderness intervenes between Jesus' commissioning for his ministry, at his baptism, and the beginning of his ministry proper, his proclamation of the kingdom of God in Mark 1:14-15. So why must Jesus go into the wilderness? Because the wilderness is the non-human sphere, a place where humans cannot live, but other creatures do. It is there that Jesus must meet three categories of non-human being: Satan, the wild animals, and the angels. He has to establish his relationship as Messiah to all three of these before he can embark on his mission in the human world, which fills the rest of the Gospel.

Brief as Mark's account of Jesus in the wilderness is, each part of it is of importance. The order of the three beings he encounters - Satan, the wild animals, the angels - is not accidental. Satan is the natural enemy of the righteous person and can only be resisted. Angels are the natural friends of the righteous person: they minister to Jesus. But between Satan and the angels the wild animals are more ambiguous. On the basis of the common perception of wild animals as a threat to humans, we might expect them to be dangerous enemies, especially when located in the wilderness, the habitat that belongs to them and not to humans. But, on the other hand, since Jesus is the messianic king, inaugurating his kingdom, might we not expect his relationship to the wild animals to be appropriate to that kingdom, the return to Eden we find in Isaiah 11?

Whereas Satan is simply an enemy of Jesus and the angels simply his friends, the wild animals, placed by Mark between those two, are enemies of whom Jesus makes friends. Jesus in the wilderness enacts, in an anticipatory way, the peace between the human world and wild nature that is Isaiah's peaceable kingdom. Mark's simple but effective phrase ('he was with the wild animals') has no suggestion of hostility or resistance about it. It indicates Jesus' peaceable presence with the animals. The expression 'to be with (*meta*) someone' frequently has, in Mark's usage (3:14; 5:18; 14:67; cf. 4:36) and elsewhere, the sense of close, friendly association. Mark could

have thought of the ideal relationship between wild animals and humans, here represented by their messianic king, as domination over them or as recruiting them to the ranks of the domestic animals who are useful to humans. But the simple 'with them' can have no such implication. Jesus befriends them. He is peaceably 'with' them.

It's one small word, but 'with' is a significant word, characteristic of the Bible's relational understanding of being. Creation is a community of interrelated beings, made to be with each other. For Adam, Eve is the woman God gave to be 'with' him (Gen 3:12). Genesis repeatedly describes the animals in the ark as those who were 'with' Noah (Gen 7:23; 8:1, 17; 9:12). Throughout the Bible God himself promises to be with his people. 'With' is the covenantal word, the way God and his people are related (e.g. Ezek 34:30), while the most significant biblical statement about the new creation is that 'God's own dwelling is with humans, and he will dwell with them' (Rev 21:3). Jesus is Immanuel, 'God with us,' the incarnation of God's radical 'being-with' his creation. In the Gospels Jesus chooses his disciples in the first place simply to be with him (Mark 3:14; Luke 8:1-2) and only secondarily for mission, and when he does send them out, his final promise is to be with them always until the end of the age (Matt 28:20). 'Being with' is the fundamental form of loving relationship, prior to and deeper than any kind of hierarchy or subordination.

So I don't think it is reading too much into Mark's little phrase – Jesus was with the wild animals – to see it as evoking Isaiah's vision of reconciled creatures and the possibility of peaceable relations between humans and wild creatures.

The kingdom of God as the renewal of creation

From the wilderness Jesus returns to the human world to begin his ministry of proclaiming and inaugurating the kingdom of God. In the Synoptic Gospels the kingdom of God is the term that sums up the subject matter of all of Jesus' preaching and teaching, and it is of course to humans that Jesus preaches the kingdom. Unlike St Francis of Assisi, he is not reported to have preached to the birds. It would not be difficult, from a cursory reading of the Gospels, to get the impression that the kingdom is about the relation between God and humans, and has nothing to do with the rest of creation. But this would be to neglect two things. First, there is quite enough in the Gospels to show that Jesus presupposed the rich creation theology of the Hebrew Bible, which taught, not only that God created all things, but also that God cares generously and tenderly for all his creatures, not only for humans. So too the Father of Jesus feeds the birds and clothes the wild flowers. Jesus is unlikely to have isolated humans from their relationships with other creatures, especially as the parables show him to be a man of the countryside more than of the city.

But the second point is that the term 'kingdom of God,' which Jesus used without explanation as though his hearers would have some idea of what it meant, has, of course, its own background in the Hebrew Bible. We could turn to Isaiah again, where the one 'who brings good news (this is the actual source of the word "gospel" in the Gospels), who announces salvation, ... says to Zion, "Your God reigns."' Or we could turn to Daniel, but the biblical book in which the kingship and rule of God are most prominent is actually the Psalms, and it is with the usage in the Psalms that we might expect Jesus' hearers to be most familiar.

In the Psalms the kingship and rule of God are closely related to creation. It is as Creator that God rules his whole creation (Ps 103:19-22). His rule is over all that he has made, human and otherwise (Ps 95:4-5; 96:11-13), and it is expressed in caring responsibility for all creatures (Ps 145). All non-human creatures acclaim his rule now (Ps 103:19-22; 148) and all nations must come to do so in the future (Ps 97:1), for God is coming to judge the world, that is, both to condemn and to save (Ps 96:13; 98:9). His own people Israel's role is to declare his kingship to the nations (Ps 96:3, 10; 145:10-12). When God does come to judge and to rule, all creation will rejoice at his advent (Ps 96:11-12; 98:7-8).

The kingship and rule of God in the Psalms have both a spatial and a temporal dimension. They are cosmic in scope, encompassing all creation, by no means confined to human society. They are also eternal, established at creation and set to last forever (Ps 93; 145:13; 146:10). Yet God's rule is widely flouted and rejected by the nations, and so it is still to come in the fullness of power and in manifest glory. The God who rules from his heavenly throne (Ps 11:4; 103:19) is coming to establish his rule on earth. It is this coming that Jesus proclaims. His distinctive phrase, 'the kingdom of God comes,' stands for the expectation of the psalms and the prophets that God himself is coming to reign. In the light of the Psalms in particular we can see that this reign is not some kind of replacement of creation, but the renewal of the creation itself, as cosmic in scope as creation.

The cosmic scope of the Kingdom can be seen in the opening three petitions of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's version:

Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:9-10).

The phrase 'on earth as it is in heaven' should probably be understood to qualify all three of the petitions. Presently, God's name is perfectly hallowed, his rule perfectly obeyed, and his will absolutely done in heaven, but all are neglected or contested on earth. Probably the emphasis is on humans coming to hallow God's name, to acknowledge God's rule and to do his will, but we should recall that in the Hebrew Bible non-human creatures also do these things, often when humans fail to do so (e.g. praising God's name: Ps 145:5, 13; acclaiming his rule: Ps 103:19-22; 145:10-11; doing his will: Jer 8:7). Moreover, the coupling of 'heaven' and 'earth' cannot fail to evoke the whole creation, everything God created at the beginning (Gen 1:1; 2:1, 4). God, it was standardly said, is the Creator of heaven and earth, and this is the basis on which his kingdom must come on earth as it is in heaven. The kingdom does not come to extract people from the rest of creation, but to renew the whole creation in accordance with God's perfect will for it.

As well as proclaiming and explaining the Kingdom of God, Jesus instantiated it in the many activities of his ministry. These included the miracles of healing, exorcisms and the so-called 'nature' miracles. They also included significant acts such as his demonstration in the temple, sharing meals with sinners, blessing children, washing the disciples' feet, and riding a donkey into Jerusalem. All these activities are to be understood as proleptic instances of the coming of the Kingdom, helping to define

how Jesus understood the rule of God, but more than just symbols of its coming. In such activities the Kingdom was actually coming, but in anticipatory fashion, in small-scale instances. Their small-scale nature comports with the way most of the parables represent the kingdom by events set in the ordinary world of Jesus' hearers. Just as a mustard plant, in the parable, grows to the dimensions of the mythical world tree, so, when Jesus stills the storm, a squall on the lake evokes the vast destructive power of the mythical abyss. Just as the extraordinary generosity of God in his coming Kingdom is figured, in the parable, when a master serves dinner to his slaves, so it takes place when Jesus pronounces the forgiveness of a notorious sinner who washed his feet.

The activities of Jesus were small-scale anticipations of the Kingdom that heralded its universal coming in the future. What is notable about them, for our purposes, is the way that their holistic character points to the coming of the kingdom in all creation. Jesus brought wholeness to the lives of the people he healed and delivered: reconciling them to God, driving the power of evil from their lives, healing diseased bodies, making good crippling disabilities, restoring social relationships to those isolated by their misfortune. Jesus does not isolate their relationship with God from their bodily and social existence. Something of the same kind of holistic vision of the world appears in the so-called nature miracles. At least some of these anticipate the transformation of human relationships with the non-human world in the renewed creation. In the feeding miracles God's generous provision for his people through the gifts of creation takes place even in the barren wilderness, as had happened in the first exodus (Ps 78:15-16, 23-25) and was expected for the new exodus (Isa 35:1, 6-7; 41:18-19; 51:3; cf. Ezek 34:26-39). When Jesus walks on the water and stills the storm, God's unique sovereignty over the waters of chaos is evoked, with the expectation that in the renewed creation the destructive powers of nature will be finally quelled. While most of Jesus' activities focused on humans and human society in relation to God, there are sufficient indications that Jesus and the evangelists also embraced the fully inclusive understanding of God's rule over all creation that is so prominent in the Psalms.

So it is not enough to say that the kingdom of God is the renewal of all creation. We must also say that it is the renewal of all the creatures in their interrelationship and interdependence, what we could call an ecological renewal. I use the word 'ecological' obviously in a broad sense: the biblical writers know nothing of scientific ecology. But they do have a strong sense of the interconnectedness and interdependence of God's creatures. The bodily-ness of humans makes them inextricably part of the rest of the material creation, bound up with other creatures, for good or ill, in all sorts of ways. The nature miracles are important indications that Jesus did not envisage the extrication of purely spiritual persons from those material entanglements, but rather the healing and perfecting of such relationships among the creatures. As an example, we shall look more closely at one of these miracles.

Jesus pacifies the forces of chaos in creation (Mark 4:35-41)

You will remember the story: Jesus and the disciples are in a fishing boat on the lake of Galilee when a storm gets up and puts them in serious danger. The disciples wake Jesus up. Mark's version of the story then reads: Jesus 'rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.' The

disciples fear of the storm gives place to awe of Jesus, and they say to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?' (Mark 4:37-41)

The key to understanding this story is to recognize its combination of, on the one hand, a realistic situation, and, on the other hand, mythical overtones. The situation is a quite realistic description of the hazards of sailing on the lake of Galilee, and also stands for the kind of quite frequent situations in which first-century people might find themselves in danger from the forces of nature. The mythical overtones of the story do not cancel the realism but say something of religious significance about such a realistic situation.

The myth is one to which the Old Testament refers on a number of occasions. It speaks of the primeval waters of chaos, the destructive powers of nature imaged as a vast tempestuous ocean, which God in creation reduced to calm and confined within limits so that the world could be a stable environment for living creatures. These waters of chaos were not abolished by creation, only confined, always ready to break out and endanger creation, needing to be constantly restrained by the Creator. For Israelites the waters of the mythical abyss were not simply a metaphysical idea. In something like a storm at sea, the real waters of the sea became the waters of chaos, threatening life and controllable only by God. In the case of this story, a squall on the lake of Galilee (notice that Mark calls it the sea) is enough to raise the spectre of elemental chaos.

When Mark says that Jesus 'rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!,"' he recalls the most characteristic ways in which the Hebrew Bible speaks of God's subduing the waters of chaos. The 'rebuke' is God's powerful word of command, as in Ps 104:7: 'at your rebuke the waters flee.' The word that silences the storm occurs, among other places, in Job 26:12: 'By his power he stills the sea,' again referring to the creation myth. It is the Creator's rebuke to chaos, then, that Jesus utters, and the peace of the creation secured against chaos that Jesus restores. This is why the disciples ask, 'Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?' Only God fits that description.

By telling the story with these mythical overtones, therefore, Mark invites us to see the event as a small-scale enactment by Jesus of God's final elimination of chaos from the natural world, when, as the book of Revelation has it, there will be no more sea (21:1). Jesus' miracle presages one of the key distinctions between the present creation and the new or renewed creation, and this is how the event functions in the Gospel story as a sign of Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom of God. It goes to the heart of the hostility between humans and nature, promising that the destructive power of the forces of chaos still active in the natural world against living creatures will in the end be pacified by God. It is notable that even in this image of God's renewal of creation, he does not meet the destructive violence of nature with destructive violence of his own. He pacifies, he brings peace to a disordered world. For the forces of destruction in nature – the earthquakes, the tsunamis, the volcanoes, the hurricanes, and the hidden forces of climate change, to name only some of the most fearful – are not, as we now know from science, intrinsically evil. They are manifestations of fundamental forces, without which this planet could not be the home to living creatures that it is, but which from time to time, sometimes with human connivance, act with destructive force against living creatures.

When we reflect this story in contemporary context, it is important to keep in mind the lesson that this sort of control over the forces of nature is intrinsically divine and not human. The great scientific-technological project of the modern world went wrong to the extent that it over-reached itself and imagined that modern humanity could accomplish what belongs only to the omnipotence of God. In the project of harnessing and controlling nature, as though we could grasp the Creator's tools and remodel creation to our own design, achieved much, but often at the price of unexpected consequences that have proved increasingly disastrous for the rest of creation as well as ourselves. Climate change is the latest instance of the way our attempts to master nature can so easily end up releasing powers of nature inimical to human life. In this case it is we who have unwittingly unleashed chaos. The story of Jesus' pacification of the storm reminds us that control of nature is godlike and humans may rightly participate in it only as creatures, in a creaturely way, dependent on God and nature, respecting the given-ness of the created world and our own limited place as creatures within it, not gods above it.

Incarnation and resurrection (Gospel of John)

So far I have restricted the discussion to the Synoptic Gospels, but in this final section I wish to turn to John, the Gospel distinguished by its more explicit and extensive theological reflection on the history of Jesus. Significantly this Gospel embraces in its structure the full temporal scope of creation, beginning, in fact, before creation, where the Hebrew Bible itself began. The Prologue to the Gospel begins by evoking that 'in the beginning' of Genesis in order to retell the Genesis creation story with Christological intention. The Prologue depicts the pre-incarnate Christ as the divine Word of God who created the whole cosmos. In incarnation this Word's relationship to the cosmos goes a remarkable step further. The one who made the world enters the world (1:10). The strongest statement of this is in the words, 'the Word became flesh.' With this phrase John emphasizes the materiality of being human (cf. this Johannine use of 'flesh' in 3:6; 6:63). Flesh is human nature in its vulnerability and weakness. It is also human nature in its commonality and kinship with the rest of creation, human nature made out of the dust of the earth, utterly dependent on all the physical conditions of life on this planet, interconnected with other life in diverse and complex ways. Jesus in incarnation is not just one of us humans but part of this worldly creation, a member of the whole community of creation. When the church in the early centuries found a way of stating the full truth of the incarnation unequivocally, it said that Jesus is both fully divine, like God in every respect, and fully human, like us in every respect except sin. To be fully human Jesus must be as much part of this material world as the rest of us.

A prominent way in which John's Gospel understands the mission of Jesus – in his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and exaltation – is that he brings eternal life to this mortal creation. As can be seen in 3:3-16, 'eternal life' is John's equivalent to the term 'kingdom of God' as the Synoptics use it. God's renewal of his creation is the impartation of his own eternal life to it, so that it may not perish, as merely mortal life must, but live in union with God eternally. In the famous summary at 3:16, the explicit reference, as always in this Gospel, is to the salvation of humans, but we should note that it begins with the words: 'God so loved *the world (kosmos)*.' The renewal of all creation is certainly not excluded.

John's Gospel has sometimes been misread in a Platonic fashion as understanding salvation to be the salvation of pure spirits from the world of matter. But salvation is better seen as the giving of eternal life to humans in all their materiality. So the human commonality with the rest of creation is not something left aside in eternal life. Here we should notice that John's Gospel, like Luke's (Luke 24:40-42), puts considerable stress on the bodily materiality of the risen Jesus. He shows his disciples the marks of crucifixion on his hands and his side, and even invites Thomas to touch them (20:20, 25, 27). For Jesus himself resurrection was no mere spiritual survival, but the renewal of his full bodily reality. The same will be true of those to whom he gives eternal life (cf. 5:25-29). This perception of both Jesus' own risen life and the salvation of those who believe in him suggests that we cannot regard the rest of the *kosmos* as merely a temporary backdrop to the drama of salvation. We belong to it as well as to its Creator.

It is the resurrection of Jesus, therefore, that opens the way for the renewal of all creation. Let me end with a quotation from Vladimir Lossky, who said that 'since the victory of Christ over death, Resurrection has become universal law for creation; and not only for humanity, but for the beasts, the plants and the stones, for the whole cosmos' (*Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* [1978] p. 118).