

Towards a Christian Land Ethic

Rajula Annie Watson¹

Introduction

The land is a vast household of God, the *oikos*, which God created out of great chaos that was formless and void, to an order or harmony. Yet due to human transgressions, chaos returned in various forms, which we are experiencing and with which the whole land is struggling.² Today, land is in agony and groaning together with its poor, downtrodden, and deprived inhabitants. It is groaning for redemption from greed, injustice, discrimination, corruption, violence, economic inequality, judicial perversion, political oppression, abuse, famine, hunger, various diseases, plagues and many more sufferings. This disorder is ongoing evil, sin—chaos in the created order.

Although the social structure of our nations plays an important role in human history and leads to great progress and development, it often results in endless conflicts between various ethnic, linguistic and political groups within nations and between nations, ensuing in the disruption and devastation of the land and all those on it.

Thomas Berry rightly states that we are "closing down the major life systems of the planet" because we are involved in a "supreme pathology." He emphasises, "we are upsetting the entire earth system that has, over some billions of years and through an endless sequence of experiments, produced a magnificent array of living forms, forms capable of seasonal self-renewal over an indefinite period of time."³ Invented and developed by humanity, science and technology which are also human power, human brain and gain, are used and manipulated to meet the demands of the consumerist world rather than for the well-being of the whole creation.

Science and technology are not evil in themselves. Rather, the unwise use of science and technology and humanity's ignorance, greed and irresponsibility are the causes of the land crisis. The unwise use of science and technology has hampered the eco-environment to an irreversible extent. It has caused a devastating effect on the whole ecosystem and has massively damaged the earth as well. Humanity has failed to consider the impact of its activities, its technological innovation on the environment as a whole, and has disregarded the effects on land.

Human activities have impaired the natural balance of the earth systems and are the causes of

¹ The Rev. Dr. Rajula Annie Watson is Assistant Professor and Dean of the Department of Women's Studies in Karnataka Theological College in Mangalore, India.

² Isa. 24:4-5; Jer. 4:18-26. The judgement in Isaiah and the oracles of prophet Jeremiah speak of the land's suffering. Isaiah 24 speaks of God's judgment against people's corruption, whereas Jeremiah hears the land crying out to God for the people whose corruption provoked the curse. The suffering of the land to a great extent is much more serious today than in the time of the prophets Isaiah or Jeremiah.

³ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 206.

the crisis. Land has been considered only for its material value, as an object meant for human wants rather than human needs, and is not considered for its intrinsic worth. The untoward, thoughtless, and unconcerned development programmes have shattered the eco-balance and as a result the whole of land is in distress. This is especially right in developing countries.

This pattern of development continues to create imbalances between different sectors, and allows massive exploitation of land and natural environment for the benefit of the dominant classes. If the wasteful lifestyle of the rich minority, the irresponsible use of natural resources and the degradation of environment by profit-oriented industries have led to land crisis at large, and deprived the poor masses of their rightful living, the poor in turn are forced to resort to destroying land and nature for their survival.

This means that real spirituality and justice are lacking. If spirituality is not practised and justice is not maintained, then respect and care for one another, real love, peace and harmony in the land would be a sheer dream. As long as injustice exists, the land exists as the exploited poor, and stands in danger of extinction along with its impoverished inhabitants.

In this post-modern era and materialistic world, humanity is moving away from spiritual life, or rather, embracing God only for convenience and for materialism. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the present Indian president, correctly commented that "science led to technology and technology to material wealth." Yet "to become an integrated human being, material wealth alone was not enough; one should graduate to spiritualism." For him, "the blending of science and spirituality could bring happiness to humanity."⁴ Scientific revelations and spiritual disciplines should go hand in hand.

Therefore, the land crisis is not just a social problem but also an ethical and spiritual problem which needs immediate response and action from humanity to avoid further peril and destruction. In addition, restoring the health of the land is an immediate task not only because it is the ground of our sustenance and survival but also because land has intrinsic worth.

To this end then, from a Christian perspective, how and what can we contribute to the betterment of the land crisis and what is our ethic toward land—i.e. a Christian Land Ethic? We also ought to ask ourselves, as Christians, theologians, ministers, and civilians of the land, what is our responsibility towards the land? How do we equip ourselves and equip others to address the land crisis?

1. Church's Theology and Mission

Certainly, the church, through her theology and mission, has an important and responsible role to play in contributing a Christian land ethic. Having a wider cosmic vision, opening itself to other faiths without prejudice, and accepting and drawing from cultural and moral values, especially from the lifestyles of the indigenous people who sustain and preserve land and community, the church would be an effective instrument in building up the new world where peace and harmony will endure. In Christ all are one; there is no distinction between

⁴ See the report of 28 March, "Kalam asks MAHE [Manipal Academy of Higher Education] to develop Nalanda-like edn [education] Centre," at www.deccanherald.com (March 29, 2003).

Jews and Gentiles, female and male, master and slave, rich and poor.

Therefore, the church through her theology and mission, bearing real witness to the 'living Word,' needs to have a healthy inter-religious dialogue with other religious faith groups, and to work hand in hand with other earth-affirming, earth-friendly, eco-environmental grassroots movements. The church, through its affiliated organisations and institutions, can play an important role in bringing the most required changes in peoples' lives and in society, where the whole of land community can live in harmony. Although the church cannot directly interfere in development policies of the government, through lobbying and agitation, joining hands and working with earth-friendly grassroots movements, the church can influence government policies.

As a first step in this new paradigm, the theological community as well as the community of believers must liberate themselves from the captivity of a paradigm which places them *over* and *against* the cosmic community. If the church and its own community are neither liberated nor equipped with an awareness of its call to be responsible stewards of God, how can it be the messenger of the good news of a "new heaven and a new earth," or tell of the kingdom of God to the rest of society?

Therefore, it is necessary for the theological community to be liberated from its traditional dominant paradigm, and seriously consider the land crisis. The church's theological vision and moral outlook should be broadened to include a paradigm shift. What Richard Baer says must be taken seriously: "the church today stands at a time of decision. If she is to remain true to her prophetic heritage, she must confront the power structures of society with a fresh and (rational) cogent ethic of land usage. She must also explore new avenues of action-involvement."⁵ In the same line, Mary Evelyn Jegen suggests that the church as a community of disciples, as a mother and as a teacher, has special role in "healing the earth."⁶ Taking after this, the Indian church ought to participate more fully and actively in developing a renewed vision of God's creation and humanity's relation and attitude to land and to God—a new paradigm in theology and ethics.

Theological colleges and institutions as well as churches should be the means for developing a renewed and continuing identification of the creator and the healing of God's creation. As Karen Longman said, Christian colleges and institutions play an important role in addressing and implementing a Christian Land Ethic.⁷ Within the Christian community, churches and educational institutions, especially where leadership training for young people is carried out, should execute the means to further develop this paradigm with a vision to be responsible stewards of God. These are the generations to go into the world with the 'good news' of 'a new heaven and a new earth,' the reign of God.

⁵ Richard A. Baer, "Land Misuse: A Theological Concern," in *Christian Century* (October 12, 1966):1241.

⁶ Mary Evelyn Jegen, "The Church's Role in Healing the Earth," in *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*. Ed. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 93-113.

⁷ Karen A. Longman, "Equipping Students with a Christian Land Ethic: The Role of Christian Colleges," *Au Sable Forum Papers: 1987: A Christian Land Ethic* (Mancelona, MI: Au Sable Institute of Environmental

Christianity is rich in its eco-environmental ethics. There are numerous significant passages in the Bible that could be sufficiently emphasised to appropriate a theology and ethic to the contemporary crisis. We need to accept the messages that they impart and consider them seriously in our theology and ethics. However, it is not enough to take these texts and biblical passages seriously. They need to be carefully sorted through and reinterpreted in terms of land affirmation. As Santmire suggests, to respond properly to the problems of our time, biblical insights should be understood, reflected and communicated to the community in our own words and terms to "allow the claims of biblical faith to be heard as claims in our day."⁸ It is also necessary to have a radical renewal in our own Christian faith. Thus, theological endeavour should take the following seriously in its theological and ethical articulation.

1.1 Descend Oneself from Patriarchal Patterns and Monarchical Model of God

Traditionally Christian theology is shaped by a patriarchal worldview, which includes imaging God as an otherworldly monarch, a heavenly king, rather than as a God who is transcendent and immanent in creation. In addition, cosmic dualism has been embraced in Christian theology in which God is projected as spirit, infinite, and omnipotent, while creation is matter, powerless, finite, and irrational. Being created from the dust of the earth, humanity is matter and finite, but nonetheless imbued with the very spirit or mind of God. This cosmic dualism of body and soul was further represented in humanity's relationship with the rest of creation and even between male and female—male as mind and the controlling power over the female and creation which are considered just as body, material universe and inferior. This dualistic worldview of spirit and body, which alienates masculine from feminine and humanity from the rest of creation, is argued especially by feminist theologians to be the main cause of all forms of oppression and crisis in the world today.

The patriarchal structures and cosmic dualism reflected in socio-economic patterns of modern industrial society destroy the harmony of nature. In modernity, land and its resources are considered as mere resource for development and are thus exploited and abused. These patriarchal structures, namely cosmic, ontological dualism between masculine and feminine, humanity and nature, ought to be restructured. Since these patriarchal hierarchical, anthropocentric and androcentric paradigms dominate, subjugate and exploit nature and everything that is feminine and poor, the theological principles that govern them need to be radically reinterpreted and transformed.

In our Christian theology, the "exclusively male" language and image of God ought to be transformed because it has become a "critical issue of contemporary religious life."⁹ Our theology should view God more as a loving "Parent," "Redeemer," and "Liberator," who is immanent in creation and relates to the world *from within* to all forms of life, through the Son and the Holy Spirit, very intimately and impartially. As a parent, the *creative love* is expressed in

⁸ H. Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God and Ecology in time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1970), 100-101.

⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Female Nature of God: A Problem in Contemporary Religious Life," *in God As Father?* Eds. Johannes-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (New York: Seabury, 1981), 61.

the creation of the universe and is continued in the passionate *salvific love*, which is manifested in the incarnation of the Christ, through whom the last and the least, both human and non-human beings, the whole world, are accepted and reunited, redeemed and liberated, and constantly nurtured in sustaining love, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. God mediated through Christ and, by his blood on the cross in human history, sought to restore everything back to a right relationship.¹⁰

The Trinitarian concept can be understood in this life-giving, redeeming and sustaining matrix, the innate underlying font of God's being from whom every life form emerges, and who maintains the life-process of all beings, both heavenly and earthly community. As eco-feminist theology understands, this matrix or the font of God, which is also the "judging and renewing insurgency of life," from which every being in creation "co-arise[s]," sustains life-giving interdependency and enables creatures to overcome the distortions which threaten healthy relations.¹¹ Thus, on every level of reality, life exists as inter-relational creativity, through the dynamic process of diversification, interrelationship, and communion.

Therefore, this Trinitarian paradigm, the primal font of God, ought to be understood in the context of life-giving, life affirming, and loving relationality. Moltmann names this life-giving insurgency, which is the mutual indwelling of the creator, redeemer and sustainer as "perichoresis" or as "mutual interpenetration" which determines the ecological doctrine of creation. "God's infinite intensity of life is manifested in the eternal perichoresis of the divine Persons", which is present in the created order with mutual interrelationship.¹² In this mutual relationship there is no one-sided dominance, inferiority, command, obedience, master or servants. Instead, in trinitarian unity, the divine persons manifest relations to one another. This mutual interpenetration of the divine persons presents the "archetype" to comprehend the relationships in the created order, and God in the world and the world in God.

This understanding of God in the world and the world in God is the concept of Panentheism, which emphasises God's presence in all, and all in God, yet all differentiate from God. The created order bears the "traces of God." God's transcendent energy is significantly immanent in the world which "penetrates everything, shines in everything, and sustains everything," and this reality can be experienced mystically. For God is not only the creator, but also the "spirit of the universe" who "indwells" in creation, giving life and leading through to the new kingdom. The spirit of God, "the fountain of life", is given to all. Likewise, every created order manifests in its own ways the divine presence. All members of the created order are interrelated in the community of fellowship, existing, living, and moving in, with, and for one another "in the cosmic interrelations of the divine Spirit."¹³ We observed that in ancient religious understanding, the distinction between God, who was seen as the monarch and king, and the rest of God's creation as matter, led to the domination and exploitation of creation,

¹⁰ Col. 1:20; Rom. 8:18-30.

¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, eds. Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 106-107.

¹² Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 16.

¹³ Moltmann, 11.

which resulted in the present crisis. Therefore it is imperative to have a different approach, a new understanding of God and God's relationship with the world, in which a harmonious and righteous relationship is re-established between God's creation and with God.

1.2 Re-imagining the Image of God

Having understood the matrix of God as the loving *parent*, *redeemer*, and *liberator* in our theology, the next step is to re-image ourselves in the model of God. Being created in the "image of God", humanity is to represent the same loving, caring, redeeming, and liberating God. Corresponding to the image of God, humanity should relate to land, and the land community ought to be attuned to the creative rule of God, taking care of nature responsibly. This is the genuine aspect of being created in the image of God. 'Being created in the image of God' specifies a relationship with God, a relational structure, and therefore a relational being both with God and the whole of creation. In addition, humanity is formed for God and is expected to be in relation with God, through Christ, from whom all things proceed and ultimately will end.

It is humanity's special vocation to respond to God's love as responsible stewards of God's creation. As representatives of God, we are royal servants, administrators of the earth, "in God's image." Being royal servants and administrators does not mean that we have authority over the earth or that we are the exclusive owners of the earth. Rather, we are mandated as faithful servants to represent the loving and merciful God. This claim is not meant to separate ourselves from other species or imply that we are higher than other species. Rather, to say that humanity is made in the image of God means that a special gift was given to humanity to visualise and harmonise the relationship between itself and creation, and with God. In imaging God, humanity needs to reflect the love and care that God has for the whole creation. It is to follow God's way of being sovereign in serving justly, loyally, and compassionately. Humanity needs to liberate itself from the dominating monarchical model. It must embrace the servant model, which Christ has set forth by not counting equality with God. Though he was in the form of God, he humbled himself, taking the form of a servant, even unto death on the cross—a self-giving act.¹⁴ Being restored by the cross of Christ, we ought to enter into a new understanding, a new relationship, a new life of righteous relationship and co-operation with every life form on this earth without dominating and exploiting one another. The motto should be to serve and not to be served. The light of service should shine before others, that they may see the good works and give glory to God.¹⁵ Such an existence of the church has special significance for her life and mission in a pluralistic society such as India.

1.3 Recognising and Accepting Connectedness—An Ontology of Relations

Humanity should acknowledge having ignored its responsibility toward the land. It is necessary to acknowledge that land existed before humanity appeared on earth. God created the heaven and earth and the whole of the universe before humanity. God created the first human at the end of creation and out of the very stuff of the earth. The creation story in Genesis clearly states this connectedness between humanity and land. Creating humanity out of the

¹⁴ Phil 2:6-8.

¹⁵ Matt 5:16.

dust of the earth is a very powerful and symbolic way of indicating human connectedness to the biological order and to the earth. Therefore, humanity ought to recognise its connectedness with the earth with which it was made. Humanity is deeply rooted, connected, interrelated and dependent on land and its systems—an ontology of relations. God created humanity in such a way that it is connected to land at all times for its survival, and even at death it returns to where it was taken out and made of. At no time can humanity ignore the importance of the earth, even at death. To echo Santmire, humanity is "essentially united with nature" not only in its relation to its body, but to the whole world of nature, for it is immanent in nature.¹⁶ Humanity is essentially a fellow citizen of land.

Nevertheless, the earth's eco-system is a web of connections and dependence on one another, and humanity cannot exist without this web of connections. Humanity is linked together in this web of interdependence in a small planet, and susceptible to each other's activities and accountable for each other's lives. The earth could flourish without humanity, but not humanity without the earth and its resources. Humanity can neither live by itself without the support of nature nor without God. This ontological relationship to one another is a "triad" of God, humanity and nature, in which the existence of humanity inevitably involves right relationship with and within this "triad."

It is essential to recognise that the land belongs to God and the sole authority is God. Humanity is neither the owner nor the sole inhabitant of the earth. Land is God's gift not only to humanity but also to other species, both living and non-living. Humanity is only a creature among other creations of God, yet created in the image of God. Humanity's role in the interrelated and interconnected web of life is as responsible stewards or caretakers. Humanity's responsibility as stewards is one of the basic relationships it has with God. As stewards, humanity is to care for God's creation in the same way that God cares for it, not abusing or exploiting it. So we need to accept the natural world and the land as God's gift and treat it accordingly as long as we live. As land is God's gift, it must be conserved and preserved with care, love and reverence. As stewards, humanity is accountable and answerable to God. The church has a special responsibility to teach her community about this connectedness and interdependence of humanity to land and other beings and about their responsibility and accountability to God who entrusted the land to their care.

1.4 Repentance and Reintegration

Our sin is not just our estrangement from God, but also transgression against God's creation. Land is groaning because of humanity's unjust involvement and brutal assault for material wants. Hence, the next step toward building up a land ethic is to recognise and repent of our human transgression against land through greed, materialism, and unwise use of technology and development policies. Yet, recognising and repenting of one's transgressions is not sufficient. Through God-given wisdom and knowledge, humanity must work together with God to restore the health of the land. Science has enabled humanity to understand the inherent capabilities of resources in creation, and provided immeasurable creative competencies. Scientific knowledge and scientific revelation could be used wisely for the good of the land,

¹⁶ Santmire, *Brother Earth*, 139-140.

rather than using it to satisfy insatiable material wants.

It is necessary to think of a development programme which is suitable for each society and nation that would end over-consumption and wasteful patterns of consumption of the minority rich, and which deprives the majority poor and the underprivileged resulting in further exploitation and exhaustion of the earth. Instead of blaming the poor who, in order to survive, plunder land and nature, the unjust structural forms that deprive the underprivileged should be dealt with effectively, and the misuse of science and technology be addressed. This necessarily means a new pattern of development and use of resources and technology, which challenge our present lifestyle. We must discourage any kind of technology that is a probable threat to environment and build up all measures to work out alternate forms of technology which are efficient and earth friendly. We can take the Gandhian concept of development seriously in promoting alternative sustainable development patterns. Gandhi proposed a need-based "*Ramarajya*"—a harmonious living of all. Christian theology needs to enter into dialogue with Gandhian thought in this regard.

At the same time, the church should seek active involvement and participation in movements for land protection and educate its members at various levels to reconsider the value and priority of human need in order to care for the land. A conscious and thoughtful rejection of extravagant and wasteful use of natural resources should be precedence for all. They should be challenged to relate themselves to existing issues in their surroundings. Life can exist without luxury, but not without land and its health. The responsible care for the land should not only be a matter of survival but rather, a matter of faith in God, the creator, the source of every creation, animate and inanimate, humanity and land.

Keeping in mind the health of the land, the downtrodden and the underprivileged should be given care and attention and be justly dealt with. Doing justice for the deprived poor and restoring their rightful life by loving, caring and sharing results indirectly in loving, caring and doing justice to the land itself. Accepting the reign of God and being committed to it means being committed to the struggle of the "wretched of the earth." This implies practising faith and prayer, a way of being in communion with Christ.¹⁷ Affirming the God of justice is to do justice in our dealing with other beings; denying justice is similar to denying the God of justice.¹⁸

It is imperative to have a holistic view of land. Land is not a mere "warehouse of resources" that has been made accessible for humanity. It has its own inherent worth. Not only humanity but the whole of land and nature, all parts in the created order, possess intrinsic value and worth by virtue of their being part of that order, irrespective of shape and form. The Bible emphasises repeatedly the goodness and beauty of creation and that it glorifies God. God delights in creation, values it, for its wholeness and well-being.

Nature or land is not an object for domination by humanity. Instead we are to keep and respect

¹⁷ See, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Revised version translated and edited by Sr. Caridad Inda and John Eagleso (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1973), xxx-xxxiv.

¹⁸ See, Robert McAfee Brown, "Preface," in *The Power of the Poor in History*, Gustavo Gutierrez. Trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), xiii.

it for its innate worth, which means to delight in its worth, for God's majesty is manifested in the core of the elemental forces. Land has its own value and integrity, along with its "function as a vehicle of blessing" for humanity.¹⁹ As human dignity is the basis of human right, land dignity is the basis of land right. It is preferable to have a true reclamation of the 'sacred' and to have a rightful pattern of approach toward land.

Albert Schweitzer has rightly said, "The ethics of reverence for life makes no distinctions between higher and lower, more precious and less precious lives."²⁰ All lives are equal in the eyes of God, the creator. Each life form, without distinction, whether animate or inanimate, each creation in its own forms and shapes, has its own value and worth. Therefore, the aesthetic value of land ought not to be disregarded, and one "sins against life without being under the compulsion of necessity." Without a genuine need, one ought not to go "beyond the truly unavoidable harm, not even in seemingly insignificant matters," though all forms of harming are evil.²¹

Mahatma Gandhi had reflected in the same line:

Strictly speaking no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible. Indeed the very word nonviolence, a negative word, means that it is an effort to abandon the violence that is inevitable in life. Therefore, whoever believes in Ahimsa will engage himself [sic] in occupations that involve the least possible violence.²²

Therefore, even though one cannot avoid total impairment of land, one need to thoughtfully work at the minimisation of assault, abuse and violence as far as possible.

Usually considered a mere means to an end, land has been over-utilised and exploited, without following the Sabbath rest and jubilee year. Modern agricultural practices have proved unsustainable, exhausting the soil that supports life systems. The use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides has caused soil deterioration, which depletes the soil of micro-organisms that normally maintain soil structure. Though not all land could rest at one time, given the reality of food shortage everywhere in the country,²³ a reliable rotation of land rest should be followed to allow land to recover itself in a natural order, instead of constant and intensive use of chemical fertilisers which harm the land. Thus, Sabbath year and jubilee year have been mandated for the sake of the land, for its health, and to restore its fertility. Allowing land to rest is liberating it from oppression and further peril, and a way of preventing over-exploitation. Allowing it to rejuvenate and to be restored to its original condition ensures its productivity, which would benefit land and its inhabitants. It also demonstrates reverence to land, ensures periodic redistribution, and prevents the hoarding by a few of the heritage of the people. In obeying God's mandate, humanity would be reflecting God's highest and

¹⁹ Santmire, *Brother Earth*, 88.

²⁰ Albert Schweitzer, "Man and Creature," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Rogers S. Gottlieb (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 408.

²¹ Schweitzer, "Man and Creature," 408-409.

²² M.K. Gandhi, *My Socialism* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), 35.

²³ It should be noted that the want of food grains is not the main reason for the hunger of many people in India. It is largely due to lack of just distribution of it.

best intention for the land and the created order.

As stewards who bear the image of God, our responsibility toward land is to care for it as our partner, rather than treat it as an object to meet our ends. It is necessary to work for the restoration of right relationship between humanity and land as well as with the whole of creation, and between humanity and God. It is humanity's responsibility to work with God as stewards in restoring the groaning, desolated land. Humanity must contribute toward restoration of justice and peace in the land. Hence, the church needs to re-educate her members on responsible living as future inhabitants in the reign of God, respecting every neighbour, and committed to the covenant of kinship, justice and solidarity with every other creature of God.

2. The Reign of God—A New Heaven and A New Earth

The motif of the reign of God, which characterises a new heaven and a new earth, emphasises the "divine rule" in which both humanity and the whole of creation live in peace and harmony, abiding by the law of justice given by God, the creator, who is transcendent and immanent in creation. In love and mercy God brings reconciliation and restoration, and reveals justice to the created order through Jesus Christ. The gospel is all about the coming reign of God, a new land, a *place* to yearn, where God's justice and righteousness will flourish. In his teachings and through his life and death, Christ manifests God's righteousness. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaim the promise of the gospel and of the new reign of God, and invite everyone to be members, to be liberated as well as act as liberators. The gospel entails a call to conversion, a turning back from transgression to righteousness, from violence to justice, from oppression to liberty, from hopelessness to hopefulness, from death to life, and from *landlessness to landedness—a new land, a new community*.

To be members of this new community requires nothing except to follow the ethics of liberation of the new community, which is explicit in the Sermon on the Mount - the golden rule, the ways of the higher righteousness. One needs to take care of the relationship with the other, the neighbor, to comply with this golden rule, and do away with self-centredness.

Depriving other co-creatures their dues and breaking the bonds with God and fellow-beings in creation is injustice. James A. Nash contends that self-centred human inclination defies God's covenant of justice by grasping more than is due as individuals, corporate bodies, nations, and species.²⁴ He says:

It is acting like the owner of creation with absolute property rights. ... [It is] the arrogant denial of the creaturely limitations imposed on human ingenuity and technology, a defiant disrespect or a deficient respect for the interdependent relationships of all creatures and their environments established in the covenant of creation, and an anthropocentric abuse of what God has made for frugal use.²⁵

Any sort of exploitation, oppression or coveting of creation must be condemned. Possession

²⁴ James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 119.

²⁵ Nash, *Loving Nature*, 119.

or use of material goods in itself is not sin but excessive desire for and selfish use of them is reproachful. It is very necessary to consider and respond to the command of Jesus, "Love your neighbor as yourself." As Larry Rasmussen expresses, 'neighbor' is a universalized term, which includes everyone and everything. In his opinion:

Contemporaries, whether near or far, friend or foe, are not our only neighbors. Unborn generations are neighbors as well. And so are past generations. Responsibility for the land is a moral legacy we inherit, and it is one we are to pass on. Responsibility for the neighbor stretches through time and arches across space. 'Sustainability' thus becomes the first law here—we ought not to leave the land any worse than we find it, and, if at all possible, better.²⁶

It is necessary to treat one another as oneself and to love and care for one another without greed and exploitation. Love and generosity are important for a healthy community. Caring and sharing are necessary for the well-being of both human and non-human beings. The call to be honest and righteous is to fulfil the law of Christ. Fulfilling the law of Christ is to bear one another's burdens, and to love, care and share with each other. In other words it is fulfilling the law of justice.

It has been said that "Justice... is the right and harmonious ordering of life in all its dimensions under the sovereignty of God, wherein the creative harmony, which continues to exist in essence under the conditions of sinful existence, is reflected."²⁷ Brueggemann contends, "The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature."²⁸ He adds, "The vision of the biblical way affirms that communal well-being comes by living God's dream and not by idolatrous self-aggrandizement."²⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr comments on justice:

Community is an individual as well as social necessity; for the individual can realize himself (sic) only in intimate and organic relation with his (sic) fellow men (sic). Love is therefore the primary law of his (sic) nature; and brotherhood (sic) the fundamental requirement of social existence.³⁰

According to Niebuhr, love is experienced or realised by individuals directly in their intimate relationships with one another, and that is "the ideal of brotherhood" (sic).³¹ However, we

²⁶ Larry Rasmussen, "Unethical Land Use: Biblical Reflections," in *Lutheran World Federation Documentation* (March, 1990):17.

²⁷ Paul Wee, "What's the Word? Systemic Injustice and the Biblical Witness" in *Mirror or Model? The Church in an Unjust World* (New York: Lutheran World Ministries, 1984), 8-9.

²⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976), 15.

²⁹ Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 20.

³⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I-II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), II: 244.

³¹ Niebuhr says: "Systems and principles of justice are the servants and instruments of the spirit of brotherhood in so far as they extend the sense of obligation towards one another, (a) from an immediately felt obligation, prompted by obvious need, to a continued obligation expressed in fixed principles of mutual support; (b) from a simple relation between a self and one 'other' to the complex relations of the self and the 'others;' and (c) finally from the obligations, discerned by the individual self, to the wider obligations which the community defines from its more impartial perspective. These communal definitions evolve slowly in custom and law. They all contain some higher elements of

have not limited 'brotherhood' or 'sisterhood' to humanity alone, but have extended these terms to include the whole of creation—the larger community of the land. For Niebuhr, "love is both the fulfillment and the negation of all achievements of justice in history." Or from the point of view of justice, "the achievements of justice in history may rise in indeterminate degrees to find their fulfillment in a more perfect love and brotherhood; but each new level of fulfillment also contains elements which stands in contradiction of perfect love."³²

We can say then that love is and should be the very law of humanity and the moral norm of justice. However, as Emil Brunner has said, "justice is always the pre-condition of love," "the real gift of love begins where justice has been done" and "love always presupposes justice."³³ "Peace," says Walsh, "cannot be understood apart from justice" and "there is no peace worth having that is not built on justice."³⁴ This is to say that peace, love and justice are interconnected. If justice is denied, peace, love and harmony are also denied. Therefore, one ought not to ignore peace or love, the moral norms of justice to the other, the neighbour—the land and every other creature in that larger community.

Land is God's gift, so we understand, and it is not for exploitation. Land is given to humanity to take care of, for land provides life for all inhabitants on it. The law of justice is given in order to protect creation from destruction and devastation. The call is to do justice to the whole of creation and to be faithful to the covenant relationship with God. Consequently our response to God's love in Jesus Christ is to make God's concern for the oppressed, the weak and the poor our own, and to work for the total liberation and wholeness of creation from oppression and injustice, thereby making the new creation which Jesus brought through the Christ event a reality of our own time, and not a mere illusion.

The responsibility of humanity is to work and shape the present world order based on a model of God's New Heaven and Earth, in order to make God's new reign a reality on earth.³⁵ Human inability to fully actualise this should be recognized due to its deep-seated self-centredness. Nevertheless, in the light of God's new creation brought with the Christ event, the church should become God's instrument in making it a reality. The Holy Spirit is the guiding principle which is given as a guide and helper to the church to carry out this task. The Lord's Prayer is also an example toward this new vision. It is the responsibility of the Christian community to approximate the harmony of the new creation to the fullest extent and to see this vision become a reality on earth by being just and doing justice in its covenant relationship with God, the land and the land community.

For this reason, our approach to a new earth should be based on a new harmonious reign brought about by a new awareness and repentance of our transgressions against God and

disinterestedness, which would not be possible to the individual self. In these three ways rules and laws of justice stand in a positive relation to the law of love." For him love is a moral value of justice realised in two dimensions. The first dimension includes rules and laws of justice and the second one includes the structures of justice, of social and political organisations in their relation to brotherhood. See *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II: 247-48.

³² Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II: 246.

³³ Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2003), 117-118.

³⁴ Thomas G. Walsh, "Virtue, Justice and Peace," in *Dialogue and Alliance* 8/1 (1994): 43.

³⁵ 2 Cor. 5:16-21.

God's creation, in acceptance of and obedience to the law of justice, and in keeping the covenantal relationship that was given to us in Christ. The life *in* Christ gives us the aspiration and assurance to follow our vocation, guided by the Holy Spirit, which is at work at all times in nature and history. Having God's grace, the vision of justice, peace and harmony should persuade us to reinforce our efforts, fill us with courage and hope to *work* for it.

Thus, the land ethic based on this new paradigm of land theology must always watch over the social structures of supremacy and exploitation that are behind the domination of land community and which averts the interests of the whole community for the instant benefit of a few authoritarian people. The land ethic must convert humanity's attitude toward the harmony of the land in which all of God's creation become acquaintances in the making of a liveable and sustainable cosmos. Applying this ethic of land-justice in strategy and practice is a tangible way of showing care and love for land that has been distorted by human extravagance and domination. The church should become God's instrument in bringing this new paradigm in its life and mission.