

Known knowns: A basket of summer fruit

Address to Christians for an Ethical Society

February 2011

The Lord said, “Amos what do you see?” And I said “A basket of summer fruit”.

Margaret and I are devotees of Araluen peaches which can be bought on the roadside as you travel through Braidwood to the coast. They are the splendid outcome of many years of tender loving care. They are delicious, but if not eaten or cooked within a reasonable period of time, they quickly go off in the long, hot, humid, summer weather. A basket of summer fruit is a ‘known known’, it speaks of the summer season, the outcomes of past labours, the shortness of time available for their enjoyment and the pending autumn and winter.

Amos found himself speaking into the late summer of Israel’s existence. The fall of the Northern Kingdom was only just around the corner, but even in the face of the obvious he could not persuade Israel to change its ways.

As a member of the Anglican Church I sometimes feel like Amos, it is pretty obvious that we are declining, our congregations are aging, our influence within the wider community has shrunk, but it seems we would rather continue a genteel decline than face the changes necessary for renewal and transformation.

The same situation seems to apply to some politicians, some Church leaders and some citizens of the affluent West (or North) in relation to the threat posed by a changing climate to life on the planet. We know that so much of what makes life possible is delicate balance. Change the balance and change the outcome. It has been the consensus of science for more than two decades that the human footprint is increasingly putting that balance at risk.¹

I despair at the continuous stream of popularist and ill-informed statements that come from the office of Cardinal George Pell: ill-informed scientifically and ill-informed theologically,

¹ The Dutch Government issued a press release on the 5 July 2010 confirming the core conclusions of the International Panel on Climate change (IPCC), conclusions that had come under very considerable criticism and which had emanated from the fourth assessment report of a potential 3000 scientists worldwide. On 23 June 2010 IPCC announced 831 scientists (from a 3000 pool of interrelated disciplines) will co-author the fifth assessment report.

as I hope this paper will illustrate. He appears to be casting himself in the mould of Church leaders of previous centuries who railed against the hypotheses of Copernicus, Galileo and Darwin. His statements would not matter, except that I assume he has some authority in his own Church even if such authority has sadly declined outside it.

The style and strength of the ‘climate sceptic’ voice has obvious similarities to the voices that opposed the connection between smoking and various health issues in the 1960’s and 70’s, or even the voices that opposed Wilberforce and his fellow campaigners: “abolition of slavery will destroy economic stability” – they railed.

We know there is very vocal, influential and wealthy opposition to the considered voice of science. When in correspondence with some of its key political figures I am usually told three things:

- Scientists who peddle these dire warnings have been corrupted. Conspiracy theories are notoriously easy to peddle without the need for verification. This extraordinary claim presumably refers to an anonymous, multi-disciplinary group of many thousands of scientists who contribute to the findings of the IPCC. But we should remind everyone that they are not all faceless to us: they include the CSIRO, Australia’s Chief Scientist, Britain’s Chief Scientist, the Royal Society, NASA, the Wentworth Group of Scientists, the Bureau of Meteorology etc. On the other hand it presumes that figures such as Professor Ian Plimer,² who are indebted to the mining industry, are not influenced by the desired outcomes of that industry.
- The world is not warming but cooling. We now know that 2010 was one of two hottest years ever recorded, on the basis of a mean average global temperature and that 8 of the hottest years have been since 2000.³
- Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant. From our creation narrative we know that all that God has made is good and that nothing in itself and in its right place is a pollutant. What makes a substance a pollutant is where it gathers, the volume in which it gathers and the speed with which it can be dispersed. What has made carbon dioxide in the atmosphere the chief focus of concern amongst all the green house gases is the

² Ian Plimer, business man, geologist, is professor of mining geology at the University of Adelaide. In 2009 his book *Heaven and earth – Global Warming: The missing science* was published amongst much controversy.

³ <http://www.data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs/> (accessed 4 February 2011)

volume in which it is gathering in relation to pre-industrial levels, combined with its life cycle, the length of time it will take to disperse.

In this paper I do not want to spend any more time defending the reality of the dilemma we face: *a basket of summer fruit*; but speak from our faith tradition to principles that we should always prioritise but haven't. Principles that we have always known, but have sadly neglected: principles that are embedded in the creation narrative of peoples of the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths. I wish to do this from a theology of Sabbath.⁴

Genesis 2:1-4a climaxes the first account of creation, and as such underscores the principles that are inherent to it. While creation is the preface to the Bible and the prologue of history, Sabbath is the window through which creation is to be understood.⁵

If Genesis 2:1-4a is in fact creation's crown rather than simply the final 'day' in a sequence of seven, then its understanding and practice becomes more than a 'seventh day festival'. Rather, it is an insight into the way life is to be understood and lived every day. Sabbath's special insight and gift is 'rest'. How 'rest' is to be understood in its application to all of creation, including time, how it is informed by the concept of 'finished' and how it embraces the 'blessing' and 'hallowing' of creation are principles to be explored. This exploration addresses humanity as an integral part of creation as well as humanity in its vocation as a carer of creation.⁶

The principle of rest.

Sabbath speaks to rhythms and cycles which are integral to creation and which cannot be changed or abrogated by humanity without consequence. It is of some interest that the weekly cycle of seven is almost universally observed but its principles almost entirely ignored.

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann 1985 *God in Creation* (London SCM) xiii. *'The best creation wisdom is to be found in the Jewish theology and practice of Sabbath. In abandoning the Sabbath, the Gentile Christian Churches have lost this means of access, and we generally overlook it altogether'*

⁵ Lowery, *Sabbath and jubilee*, 79. *In the first (creation) story Sabbath is portrayed as a fundamental principle of the universe, the climax of the world's creation at the beginning of time'*

⁶ *'In every fragment of it (nature) a thousand million lesser fragments cohere and interact'*: WH Vanstone, *Love's endeavour, love's expense: the response of being to the love of God* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), 84.

The basic meaning of rest (*sabat*), is “to cease”, “come to an end”. It is never ‘rest’ from work;⁷ rather it infers that what was intended has been secured. However, its use is not ‘end’ in the chronological sense, but in the sense of completion or fulfilment. In this sense the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* suggests the word, when associated with *sabbat* (Sabbath), has a specialised meaning of “celebrate”. Creation has become what creation is intended to be. The interrelatedness of all things has been established, the place of humankind within creation has been determined. Finished’, *kala*, appears 200 times in the Old Testament.⁸ Here its meaning is directly related to *sabat*. While it is often used in the negative, in this case its meaning appears positive: ‘*The verdict is that good wins out: the first act of God is complete in the harmonious working together of all that God has created. When the word of God is complete, then it is fulfilled*’.⁹ In this sense, while creation is finished, it can also be understood as open to its future. It is an act that is complete and yet in its continuity it is without limit.¹⁰ There is paradox here. Each generation appreciates creation afresh, yet its essential integrity remains the same. Whatever God intended creation to be, it has now become. The first key point we can say about the Creation Sabbath therefore is that it is a celebration of integrity or completeness.

Carl Westerman argues Sabbath is: *a gift to humankind, a gift that regulates human existence inasmuch as the command to rule the remainder of one’s work is limited by what is implied in the sanctification and blessing of the seventh day*’.¹¹

Rest is therefore not a cessation from but a celebration of, a celebration of creation as God intended it to be, a celebration of God’s presence in creation, a celebration of all that God has made in its appropriate place. Embedded within this celebration, this ‘Rest’, is recognition of limits. To live as if there are no limits is to live without morality, to presume that all that exists is available if you have the means to access or conqueror it. Limits necessarily imply morality, moral choice. Sabbath is a proclamation of a moral universe

We human beings have no future on this planet if we behave as if life is to be lived in an amoral vacuum. The Nobel Peace Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu,¹² says that we

⁷ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. xiv (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2004), 385.

⁸ Van Gemeren, *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology and exegesis* vol. 2, 641.

⁹ Carl Westerman, 1984. *Genesis 1-11*(London SPCK)

¹⁰ Gerard Von Rad, 1972 *Genesis: a commentary*, (London: SCM Press) 60.

¹¹ Westerman, *Genesis 1-11: a commentary*, 169.

human beings must assume the undergirding morality of life. He argues that in difficult if not desperate situations the only appropriate response is not what gives me the best advantage, or what action might increase my share, but what is right? A lesser response might appear to provide short term gain, but it ultimately undermines the outcome that is sought, because beneficial outcomes are always outcomes that are morally right.

1. Climate change is a moral issue because while the potentially detrimental outcomes of climate change most severely impact the poor, it is the prosperous who most significantly contribute to the cause through a more significant carbon footprint. The selfish prosperous may want to argue that that no responsibility needs to be taken for accidents of birth and geography, or for unequal access to opportunity. We argue that such a position is not only immoral, but foolish. It is our argument that because this is essentially a moral universe, gross inequity will not continue indefinitely without significant, even violent correction. There has been ample evidence of such correction in regional politics on many continents over recent decades. It is the responsibility of the world's prosperous to do two things:
 - Meet the legitimate environmental life style costs imposed through carbon emissions. (The prosperous with a per capita footprint of 25 tons must meet the cost. The most obvious way of achieving this is to be more efficient and so reduce the drawdown of energy. Secondly we must universalise a mechanism that prices carbon).
 - Through commitment to the millennium development goals and other similar initiatives, peoples of the developed world must work to reduce the disparity between rich and poor, which on a global scale continues to grow.
2. It is a moral issue because outcomes that arise from current excess reduce the options of future generations. We, Christians, have always understood the intergenerational commitment and responsibility of human beings. We are all inheritors of the contribution that others have made before us and we all increase or decrease the options available to those who follow us. It is quite unsatisfactory to expect further technological invention to solve the problems of future generations. We must assume that over exploited resources and a climate that has been irrevocably changed because of the known life cycle of carbon, places an unreasonable burden upon those who

¹² Desmond Tutu 2007 *Believe: the words and inspiration of Desmond Tutu* (Sydney, Hachett).

could have inherited a world without such a burden. We urge society to have a grandchild mentality, that is to say a way of thinking that weighs choices in the present against their potential cost to future generations. We also urge politicians to provide leadership and not be swayed by members of society who appear not to hold such view, but wish every choice to be made on the basis of its short term advantage.

3. It is a moral issue because morality is not restricted to activity between human beings alone. Albert Schweitzer noted:

*A man is ethical only when life, as such is sacred to him, that of plants and animals as that of his fellow men, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all of life that needs help ... The ethic of relation man to man is not something apart by itself: it is only a particular relation that results from the universal one.*¹³

How human beings relate to the rest of the created order bears testimony to the inner integrity of humanity itself. If humanity can easily watch the disappearance of other species without feeling the cost, if diversity is diminished without grief, then humanity as a moral species has already been severely diminished.¹⁴ We in the faith communities do not argue for the care of the natural order at the expense of humanity's needs, but rather for an appropriate balance. We accept that non human species and ecological systems have value in themselves, but we are not sympathetic to an ideology which puts the needs of creation over against the needs of humanity. We argue that a way forward must be found in which humanity flourishes because the non-human creation retains its healthy equilibrium and that the non-human creation flourishes because reasonable human need has been met.

The Principle of Blessing

Few words appear more frequently in Christian conversation than 'blessing'. We call down God's blessing on one another. We seek God's blessing for ourselves and the Christian way of life. We do this understanding that Blessing is synonymous with life.

¹³ Albert Schweitzer, *Out of my life and thought: an autobiography* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1933) 185.

¹⁴ 'Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man, and to accord other organisms such recognition, man must be guided by a moral code of practice': *World Charter for Nature* (United Nations, 1982), <http://www.unep.org/law/PDF/UNEPEnv-LawGuide&PrincN05.pdf> (accessed 3 September 2010).

The creation narrative has already recorded two blessings, on the fifth and sixth days.¹⁵

While these blessings were for specific species within creation, (including humanity) the blessing of the seventh day, the Sabbath day is a blessing upon creation in its entirety: ‘*Special attention is given to the seventh day, it is holy and blessed precisely as the conclusion to the work of the previous six days and can only be understood in relation to them*’.¹⁶

The Hebrew root *b-r-k* (bless) occurs 88 times in Genesis. ‘*Nothing I was more important than securing the blessing of God in one’s life and nation*’.¹⁷

It is hard to over emphasise the intended meaning: **the blessing of individual parts of creation, including humanity, rests upon the blessing that resides within the whole.** I can hear you wanting to respond, yes but! Sure we are part of creation, but has not God made us in his image, are we not also ‘apart’ from creation? The answer is both yes and no, herein lies the dilemma. We are first and foremost part of creation. Our name, the name of all humanity, is *adam* we are all, male and female, the *adam* from the *adamah*, the earth. One of the most astonishing revelations of DNA science is not the differences that exist between us, but the level of commonality that exists between all living things. We are to understand we are from and of the earth; the destiny of creation is our destiny. However, it is also true that we humans are commissioned with a role of care for the creation. Genesis 1.26-28, the verses that describe human vocation, contains some of the most difficult words in the whole of scripture. None more so than *kabas*, which is translated ‘subdue’. There is no way of disguising the hostility of the word. It conveys unequal power, the absolute control of one over another. Clearly this cannot be the primary vocation of humanity, for the rest of scripture uses words like carer, shepherd and servant to describe the nature of God which we humans are to mimic, for we are made in God’s likeness to steward and partner.

The dilemma to which I refer is that hostility exists between the ambition of humanity, our need for resources; and creation’s requirement for health, harmony and integrity. While the creation narrative identifies hostility as a likely outcome of the human role, Charles Birch, the

¹⁵ The fifth day: ‘*God blessed them saying “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas and let birds multiply on earth”*’ (Gen 1:22).

The sixth day: ‘*God blessed them and God said to them be fruitful and multiply*’ (Gen 1:28).

¹⁶ Terrence Fretheim 1994 *Genesis in New Interpreters Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press) 170.

¹⁷ *New international dictionary of Old Testament theology and exegesis, vol. 1, 758.*

scientist, says we can monitor its impact for millennia, in fact since our ancestors, the hunter gatherers, developed an agrarian way of life.¹⁸ Since the beginning of the industrial revolution the potential for this hostility has exploded and has been commented on by writers such as the Bronte sisters and Charles Dickens in the 18th and 19th centuries¹⁹, Rachel Carson²⁰ in the 20th century; and Tim Jackson²¹, Jeffrey Sachs²² and Ross Garnaut²³ in the current era.

Because human activity can have unintended hostile consequences we are therefore to understand that blessing is also choice. The famous passage from Deuteronomy puts it succinctly:

I set before you this day blessing and cursing, life and death; choose life. (Deut 30.19)

Whether we live under the canopy of blessing, or live outside it, is choice. Logic tells us that we would always choose to live under ‘*b-r-k*’, blessing, but human history tells a very different story. We are at a pivotal moment. Will we choose well? I am afraid to say there is no guarantee that we will. As Jared Diamond asks in his monumental work *Collapse*,²⁴ “what was in the mind of the person who chopped the last tree down on Easter Island”?

While the sceptic orchestra continues to entertain us, we cannot claim we do not know in which direction we are heading, or what we need to do to change course. It is true that some damage has been done which cannot be undone in the short term. Whatever happens, greenhouse gases will continue to expand, given their life cycle, however there is every reason to believe we can be good stewards. Do we want to, or is the burden of mortgage debt on our very large houses too high?

The principle of hallowing

¹⁸ Birch, Charles. 1990 *On Purpose* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press).155

¹⁹ Charles Dickens, *Hard times* (London: Bradbury & Evans 1854) quoted in Stephen Green 2009, *Good Value: reflections on money, morality and an uncertain world* (London: Allen Lane) 72

²⁰ Rachel Carson 1962 *Silent Spring*

²¹ Tim Jackson is economics commissioner on the Sustainable Development Commission, UK’s independent on sustainable development and Professor of Sustainable development at the University of Surrey *Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a crowded Planet* 2009

²² Jeffrey Sachs is Director of the Earth Institute at the University of Columbia and special advisor to the United Nations Secretary General on the Millennium Development Goals *Common Wealth: Economics for a crowded planet* 2008

²³ The Garnaut Climate Change review will present its final analysis mid 2011. Professor Garnaut is a respected economist and academic with significant roles in the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University

²⁴ Jared Diamond 2005 *Collapse; How societies choose to fail or survive* (London. Penguin Books)

God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it. Hallowing issues from association with God; putting oneself about in the presence of God. This text, the first reference to hallowing in scripture, proclaims that through Sabbath the whole creation is hallowed. This truth lies at the heart of Jesus' struggle with the Pharisees over Sabbath practice. They wanted Sabbath to be used as a way of delineating sacred from secular, a tool for carving out religious identity and belonging. Sabbath was being used to exclude rather than include. It was for the Pharisees a platform of power rather than a celebration of empowerment.

It is an irony that modern political life, together with pressure from some media outlets tries to restrict 'hallowing' to private religion and personal morality, after the manner of the Pharisees. Over more than a quarter of a century as a Bishop, I have frequently been chastised by the media and politicians for venturing into areas they consider not to be my business. The most astonishing political example of this followed an address I gave in the Great Hall of Parliament in Canberra in relation to refugees, (which received a standing ovation), but which displeased the Prime Minister of the day. I was called up to the Prime Ministerial office and dressed down by the Minister assisting the Prime Minister who told me the Prime Minister was not pleased. I struggled to understand then and have not understood since why this should be considered of any relevance to me, let alone a matter about which I should be concerned. Another example was the drubbing I received in the Murdoch press following my address in Westminster Abbey at a memorial service for Victoria's bushfire victims. The address did not suit News Limited's worldview, which apparently justified blatant misrepresentation of fact on their part in relation to the address.

It is absolutely essential that people of faith are immersed in the Climate Change debate and are in the forefront of advocacy and practice that will bring about the adaptive changes necessary in human behaviour. Hallowing of the whole of creation is core business to Christian people. This is not a side issue or a matter of less importance than evangelism: caring for the creation and advocating its health is central to us.

I am a fan of the Jesuit theologian, philosopher, scientist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin whose most well known book is the *Phenomenon of Man*.²⁵ Chardin declares that creation needs the evolution of human thinking and knowledge. He posits that three disciplines need the support

²⁵ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin 1955 *The Phenomenon of Man* (London Fontana Books)

of each other, namely science, philosophy and religion. He argues that the weakness of one weakens the others. The last few years have shown that science on its own does not convince. Scientists have been given a hard time by some politicians and media. The reason for this is that we humans do not change our behaviour as a result of data and information alone. We need a compelling narrative, a meta-story to accompany the bare facts. Science has been sadly let down by religion generally, and Christianity in particular. While it is not our business to support every scientific enterprise, scientific insights about climate change touch matters that are at the core of our identity. In this matter we should be singing from the same song sheet. Sadly there are still many Christians who either, do not think this is a primary matter, or who have chosen to disregard scientific consensus, or who have been seduced by the primacy of consumerism. Whatever the reason, we need to be drawn back to our core belief.

Finally, Christianity is a life of faith, lived in love, and rooted in hope. One of our primary responsibilities is to build hope.

John Chrysostom²⁶ is accredited with having said: '*It is not sin that plunges us into disaster, as rather despair*'.²⁷

It is therefore crucial that a contribution to the climate change debate which might energise proactive commitment carry with it a basis for hope: '*Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving and therefore revolutionising and transforming the present*'.²⁸ Critics of Christianity would stereotype its basis for hope on the grounds that it is all about the future and not about the present. Jürgen Moltmann deals very persuasively with this criticism when he argues that hope in a future identity energises transformational behaviour in the present, because the future is not disconnected from the present, it is its fulfilment.²⁹

One of the main contributions Christianity can make is to offer hope that galvanises transformational action. The argument must be made both within the Church and in the wider

²⁶ Archbishop of Constantinople c347 - 407.

²⁷ '*That which leads people to sin, seems not only to be a sin itself but a source of sins. Now such is despair*': Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae 2.20, quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, *A theology of hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 8.

²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *A theology of hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967), 16.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 32.

world. It must be made inside the Church because of two prevailing beliefs which are really heresies, half truths. The first is that God is in control therefore any attempt to intervene is presumptuous. The second is that because the physical world is doomed, action to try to safeguard its life is futile. The wider argument has also to be made because economic growth theory generally prevails over ecological priorities, thus rendering sustainable action a low priority, even an undesirable outcome.³⁰

The Lord said to Amos: “*what do you see*”. He said: “*a basket of summer fruit*”. We live in a most privileged era. Medicine almost guarantees us a pain free, long life. Technology has freed us from the drudgery that most previous generations took for granted. The digital revolution has transformed communication and access: but what if all of this has come at a price that we are refusing to recognise let alone pay? If this is the case the basket of summer fruit has already begun to rot. On the other hand if we dare to enter the imagination of God, glimpse a view of the world as God intends it, then the principles inherent in Sabbath will prove redeeming and transformational. Our future and that of our children is not dependent upon ‘conquering nature’ but serving it, as it serves us.

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³⁰ Pearse, *High and dry: John Howard, climate change and the selling of Australia's future*, 271ff.