



Consider the Lilies of the Field: Reading Luke's Gospel and Saving the Planet

Introduction

Consider the lilies: these flowers that look to us like anemones, are from the grounds of Tantur Ecumenical Institute, outside Jerusalem, near the Bethlehem checkpoint. What matters is not whether they are in truth the Biblical lilies (they are thought to be): they are flowers of beauty, springing up every year in the early awakening of spring with a vibrant splash of colour. Jesus in the Gospels of both Luke and Matthew singles them out, and other Scriptural writers are lyrical in wondering at lilies, roses of Sharon, olives, fruit trees and cedars of Lebanon. All are appreciated and valued as part of a diversity of myriad forms of life of Divine creation. Living forms of the life-giving sustenance and presence of God. But why "Consider the Lilies" in this time of crisis of climate change? Indeed, why consult Scripture at all? Surely science and effective legislation are what is needed?

And in any case, what possible clue could be gained from reflecting on a civilisation and period whose ecological footprint was far lighter than ours, a time when there may have been injustice and exploitation in terms of land usage, there may have been species hunted to extinction, but there was no threat from a rise in earth's temperature sufficient to threaten the planet's very survival. So, first, *Why scripture?* And then *Why Luke?* I will link with Palestine and the desert of Rajasthan¹.

1. Why Scripture?

We read Scriptural texts now with far greater awareness of their context and the gap between that and our own. We know that the authors of the texts as we have them thought needs and questions to their stories and memories, and wrote the texts as answers to their communities' needs. These communities may themselves have been experiencing, danger, tribulations or persecutions. Some texts tried to keep their hopes alive - for example the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel at the time of the Babylonian exile. We are now reading sacred texts at a time of an unprecedented ecological crisis threatening the planet's very survival. Every recent analysis points to the climate situation worsening. MIT's Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change has just quietly recently revised its projection, indicating that if we stick with business as usual, in terms of carbon emissions, average surface temperatures on earth by 2100 will hit levels far beyond anything humans have ever experienced.²

¹ See www.wellsforindia.org

² Thomas L. Friedman, "Mother Nature's Dow" in *The Global Edition of the New York Times*, March 31st 2009.

The ocean uptake of carbon is weaker, feedback from the land system as temperature rises are stronger, cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases over the century are higher, and offsetting cooling from aerosol emissions is lower.

Even if these factors, taken separately, might not be so threatening, as we know, *all things are connected*, so these factors are interacting in a multiplicative kind of way to lead to the chance of higher temperatures. But if we put this in the context of the current anxiety over the economic recession, bank collapse and unemployment, it is clear that climate change has been pushed into the background, and is now at a far lower level in the hierarchy of our concerns. (*A recent US poll put climate change as 20th in a list of hierarchy of concerns*).

We may have our own variation on this list and our own priorities, but the problem is actually the will to act, the will to put these policies into practice. *It is ourselves we are fighting*, as George Monbiot has written, taking a very pessimistic view as to the possibility of change of heart.³ But we should never allow the separation of public policy from personal transformation. And that is where Scripture comes in. Sacred texts will not give us direct answers, but they offer clues, and resources for change. These are texts we read all the time in our Churches and homes, year after year, yet, sadly, with scant awareness of their potential to change our hearts, minds and public policies to an ethic of living justly with the earth.

Above all, sacred texts recall us to the sacred God-given trust we have been given with regard to the earth and all its diversity of life-forms.

2. Why Luke?

So my second question, Why Luke? I wanted a text that Christians love and could regard as a journey companion on this quest for changed lifestyle and policies. The journey theme is central to Luke. From the beginning, where Joseph and Mary set off for Bethlehem, to the end where the disciples rush back from Emmaus to Jerusalem, there is a many-levelled quest going on. Secondly, Luke, though some question whether he was ever in Palestine, is writing *about* a poor peasant community, mostly landless, yet *for* rich landowners, (his patron, Theophilus, may have been one), as well as city dwellers, so his view of social harmony is closely linked with a just land ethic. Because of this social mix he appeals to us all, making it difficult to lay the blame **out there**, or on one sector of society.

Thirdly, Luke offers resources for a Liberation Theology in the context of Climate Change. Liberation Theology has from its inception put the poorest categories of people at its heart, seeing God's passion for justice at the centre of faith, not at its periphery. But in our present crisis, nature, the earth and her exploited resources have become the new category of poverty.⁴ Nature is the new poor. Earth creatures in their ruined habitats are now the focus of attention for Liberation Theology. This means that core theological categories acquire a different focus. The Cross of Christ is drawn to where nature is suffering, from rising temperatures, to the nearly –destroyed Amazonian

³ George Monbiot, *Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning*, (Toronto: Doubleday 2006) cited in Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress 2008) p. 25.

⁴ This was the suggestion of Sallie McFague, *The Body of God*, (London: SCM 1993).

forest, to the growing deserts of the world, to polluted air and seas. For too long has nature **not** been factored into the need for redemption.

And finally, Luke's Gospel is a Gospel of peace. From the angels' song at Christmas, "peace on earth to all people of goodwill," to the greeting of the Easter Jesus, "Peace be with you", this is Luke's intent: so now I suggest a re-reading of Luke with *reconciliation with the earth* as our hope, and action in the face of devastating climate change as our goal.

Let us now follow Luke's invitation to re-visit Nazareth, and be present at what has become known as the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4.18-30). Into the Synagogue of his home town of Nazareth enters the young Rabbi Jesus, and the level of expectancy of the local people, presumably including the neighbours, and family members themselves, is high. He is given the scroll and it falls open at the reading for the day, Isaiah 61.1-7.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

Because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor....

You know the text so well. Luke could never have envisaged the impact this text would continue to have as agenda for Liberation Theology. It was inspirational for the campaign of Jubilee 2000, *Cancel the Debt*, (since the reference to "Proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" invoked the Jubilee Laws of justice for the land), and there is a consistent thread of interpretation, invoking this passage as part of the struggle of all social justice movements across the continents. The late Michael Prior, (A Vincentian priest and activist for Palestine), for example, read it as a text inspiring a new revolutionary order:

The New Order inaugurated by Jesus of Nazareth, will not be brought in by the rhetoric of the most eloquent of liberation theologians alone. In contemporary society, the evangelisation of the poor will come about only through the combined efforts of competent people who share the vision of Jesus.⁵

A similar interpretation is opted for by James Massey, an Indian Dalit theologian, (Dalits are the former Untouchables of India), who, in his Dalit Bible commentary, sees "The Nazareth Manifesto" as Jesus reaching out to the most oppressed, outcastes and outsiders, in his case referring specifically to the Dalit communities.⁶ ***Can we read it now in our own crisis to inspire action for change and climate justice?***

2. Jesus as a landless prophet and the situation of Palestine today.

What were the issues for Jesus and the Lukan community around justice for the earth? Even though this was a community treading lightly on the earth compared with us, ecological justice was far from the case. Wellbeing has always included humans and non-humans alike in their environment. And this connection has always been vulnerable to exploitation. Luke portrays Jesus as inheriting the prophetic dreams, for example, of Isaiah, as the Nazareth Manifesto has shown us. Isaiah, Chapter 11 speaks of the great messianic vision of harmony with creation, to include all animals in the peaceable

⁵ Michael Prior, *Jesus, the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology*, (Sheffield Academic Press 1995), pp.173 –5.

⁶ James Massey, *The Gospel according to Luke*, Dalit Bible commentary, New Testament Vol.3, (New Delhi: centre for Dalit studies 2007), pp. 69-75.

kingdom. The Jubilee laws of Leviticus (25) – already referred to - extend justice to liberating the land, as well as setting free slaves and cancelling debts:

The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for you yourself and your female slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you; for your cattle also and for the beasts that are in your land, all its yield shall be for food.(Levit.25,6-7)

This vision of flourishing of land, animals and people together, is the context of a culture of peace, that I am suggesting Luke is also working toward:- the ideal that swords be turned into ploughshares, that each shall sit under his/ her own olive tree. ⁷ In Edward Echlin's book, *Earth spirituality: Jesus at the Centre* we are given a vivid, imaginative picture of the ecology of Palestine in the time of Jesus: he evokes the creatures of the desert, the diversity of birds, dogs and foxes, goats, water creatures and snakes.⁸ All of these, the soil and animal communities, enter the connectedness of justice for the earth.

But the question is, how did the Lukan Jesus relate to this richness of creatures, tree, and landscape and how did they shape his faith in God, and the lifestyle of his followers? And how was this dependent on ecological justice? Jesus was mostly addressing poor farmers, hirelings of the Romans, landless people, dependent on having day's work in the vineyard, in the wheat fields, in the olive groves or labouring all night to catch a few fish in the sea of Galilee, or being swineherds for the pork destined for the tables of the Roman occupier. Here I am tracing connections between poverty and peoples' connections with the earth. There must have been small plots of land – where women and children also worked. (Children were expected to work from the age of six). Women worked also in the textile production as weavers, but in both cases they earned less than men. So the point of the Lukan story – The Lost Coin, Chapter 5 - is that the woman had lost the equivalent of a labourers' daily wage, for which she had worked harder and longer to get. Poverty is measured in terms of hunger, housing, poor clothing – and the misery of debt that forced people into slavery. The social stigma attached to many trades is also relevant.

There are parallels between 1st century Palestine and contemporary rural Rajasthan, (North West India). In the poor communities I know well, people are poor through a mixture of the harsh conditions of the desert, both experiencing both drought and floods –now exacerbated through climate change - caste-based poverty, the consequences of colonisation and unjust local rulers as well as the dangers of racial violence or bandits. The robbers on the road to Jericho come to mind. Failure of the harvest brings famine and over-reliance on the money lender: because debt spirals out of control, people are forced to sell themselves as bonded labourers for a lifetime, even passing on the debt to their children. For women it is prostitution or being trafficked. It is no accident that the Lukan Jesus has many stories about debt. In the first century dung-collectors and tanners were also despised, because of the foul smell connected with their activities. If a woman was married to any one of these, she had the right to claim divorce.⁹ This recalls the current despising of Dalits in India (former Untouchables) especially because they skin dead cows, and clean latrines. The parallel

⁷ For the relevance of Isaiah's vision today, see M.Grey, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope: Prophetic Dreams for the 21st Century*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2000).

⁸ Edward Echlin, *Earth Spirituality: Jesus at the Centre*, (New Alresford: Arthur James 1999), pp. 61-70.

⁹ As related by Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, (London: SCM 1969) p.308.

is important as it shows that the inability of poor people to move out of poverty is linked not just with failure to earn a regular wage, but also with entrenched notions of purity and pollution.

For poor people simply getting enough to eat was the main problem. Meat was rare – as we see in the parable of the fattened calf, (Luke 15), the elder brother complained that no calf had been killed for him. Poor people could not afford wheat or meat, and ate barley bread. They were often reduced to eating locusts for meat, and older domestic animals. In rural Rajasthan, diet is still a huge problem. Most women are under-nourished and in consequence are anaemic -90% in our project areas: many die in child-birth and the child mortality rate is very high because of poor diet, lack of clean water and no access to medical care.

The non-existence of medical care for poor people in the time of Jesus is part of the reason that the sick flocked to Jesus in hope of healing. But the biggest contrast between rich and poor is in terms of security. The rich can afford to prepare for the lean years by storing grain in barns (Lk 12.16-21). Their houses are proof against storms and floods. They wear clothing both beautiful and warm – as we see from the parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16.19-21). Contrast the poor men I see on the streets of Delhi every year. (Admittedly this is a city, not a village - it is easier to find hospitality and shelter in a village). It is winter and they are huddled on the pavements around a small fire built from a few sticks. They pull their cloaks around them to shut out the wind and try to boil a small pan to make some warm tea (*chai*). Or take the villages, where the peoples' small huts are normally adequate to provide shelter. But not in a storm or when rivers burst their banks: then they are swept away as easily as a child's house of paper. Of course these parallels are not exact, and Luke was writing from Greece about conditions in the time of Jesus' Palestine about which, perhaps, he knew very little personally: but they certainly evoke the harsh realities of poverty.

The point to be stressed is: first, the basis of life was the organic connection between nature, wellbeing of people and all life-forms. This is **still** the basis of life but we, in our comfort zones, have concealed it through false expectations that supermarkets will deliver what we want to eat throughout the entire year, houses will continue to be warmed by fossil fuels, and environmental problems can be confined to the poor southern countries. **No more**. Of course, the problem of global warming did not exist then, but the inability to tackle it effectively **now** is paralleled by the divisions of rich and poor in New Testament times; and the unwillingness of the rich – be they Roman or Jewish - to change their lifestyles to allow poor people to have the barest level of dignified humanity, constituted the same kind of barrier as now.

But if we look at Palestine/Israel today, a worse picture of environmental woe, exacerbated by politics, exists. In the narrative of poverty of the first century, the focus was on food, clothing, housing and curing of serious illness and disability, the focus today is more strikingly on issues of water and land but also on food and housing. Lack of water and poor quality of water is now recognised globally as the most important cause of poor health, illness and child mortality. (3 million children die from dysentery

every year – 6,000 a day from water-borne diseases like gastro-enteritis. *80 % of diseases in the poor south are water-related*¹⁰.

We know how important land was for Jesus: Luke portrays him as always on the move, from the Jordan to the desert, to Nazareth, through Galilee's villages and eventually to Jerusalem. Palestinian environmentalist, Hwaa Irfan, writes of the same strong organic relationship today, between a land and its people generation after generation. The respect for and the understanding of their ecosystem shape their lives. When respected, the environment is the source of well-being, but when abused it becomes the source of ill health and discord.¹¹

Palestine, he continues, once covered 26,320 km of land and 704 km of inland water. Formerly there were rolling woodlands covered with thickets, forests and grasslands. When the 1948 war displaced between 7 and 800,000 Palestinians, this meant a massive influx of refugees into a fragile ecosystem and the beginning of the destruction of over 419 Palestinian villages. By the time of the 1967 Israeli occupation, Gaza was on the brink of a water crisis with frequent outbreaks of waterborne diseases and increased soil alkalinity and salinity. Because of the Israeli occupation, expansion, and increased construction projects, Palestine now suffers from a weakened agricultural system, wastewater, solid waste pollution problems and water security issues.

According to research of the Palestinian Hydrology Group, there are many cases in which water purchases amount to ten percent of the family's expenses – but this is where families can afford to buy water. For many it is too expensive. It is in Gaza where the issue is most critical- as we saw with the recent war. Thus many families are forced to reduce their consumption, making it harder for them to meet their basic needs such as personal hygiene, housecleaning, dishwashing, and clothes washing. Land is crucial to the Palestinian economy. During the Intifada, Israeli forces uprooted acres of olive trees, grapevines, palm trees, almonds, oranges, figs, strawberries, guava and bananas. The grief that this caused can scarcely be described. Documented cases of cleared land by the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture report that 271,797 trees have been uprooted. Palestinians now have no sovereignty and limited access to the region's natural resources. This is just a brief snapshot of what is happening to land in the West Bank that the Jesus knew well. What I have shown is that climate change can bring worse suffering where reconciliation and justice with the earth are blocked by the political situation.

4. Reading Luke and Saving the Planet

After this brief snapshot of Palestine then and now, I return to the central issue: how does reading Luke affect the agenda of global warming? We have looked at the context for Jesus' ministry, but what of its content? If, as ecofeminist theologian Sallie McFague suggests, we see the ***world, the earth*** metaphorically as *the Body of God* - then

¹⁰ The statistics are from the UNEP Report - Global Environmental Outlook, prepared for the Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg 2002.

¹¹ Hwaa Irfan, "The Environmental Impact on the Palestinian Territories," www.islamonline.net. This paragraph has paraphrased much of the valuable information of this article which is a summary of mainly the research of the Arab Research Institute, Jerusalem (or ARIJ) of Jad Isaac and Belgian researchers.

Jesus is this body in which we dwell, this dream enfleshed. Jesus is the pattern, the embodiment of the Body of God: the incarnate body has a Christic pattern. Looking closely at this Christic pattern, the pattern of Jesus' ministry, we see a focus on bodies - they matter, their health, well-being and flourishing matter. Jesus wants the bodies of all creatures to be fed, nourished and healed. What is more, the Christic body focuses on the most poor, underfed, vulnerable and rejected bodies. The Christic body through the ages has sought out new situations where the Body is rejected and suffering. Hence, now, the threatened earth herself, the cosmic Body, threatened, exploited, with growing areas of desertification is the concern of ministry.

The first point about Luke, then, is the focus on peace between heaven and earth. Not only did the angels sing of peace on the earth, suggesting that a peace that could once only be thought of as in heaven, can now be sought through reconciliation with the earth,¹² but there is a hint of this in Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem, (Luke 19.38), immediately followed by his weeping over Jerusalem – "Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!" Luke's is a Gospel of non-violence: the Lukan Jesus will not conquer with the sword. (Remember that when Peter cuts off Malchus's ear, Jesus heals it immediately, saying "No more of this!" Luke 22.50-52)

Secondly, Luke's is a message of urgency. Action has to be now. Zaccheus (Luke 19) is told "Today salvation has come to your house". But only when he has given back what he has taken unjustly, fourfold! Yet there is no easy way for us to pay back or retrieve instantaneously the damage we have inflicted on air and sea through overconsumption of greenhouse gases: we can only begin the payback process, but **today!**

Thirdly, in case we are on the verge of despair, Luke's Gospel is one of perseverance and prayer. The story of the unjust judge and the widow comes to mind. (Luke 18.1-8) But also Jesus' injunctions to keep praying. Palestinians today are developing a spirituality, that of *sumud*, or steadfastness. Even if there seems no solution, not even any hope, keep doing what you know is right. Your course of action is one for the long haul. Take a deep breath and a long breath. Fourthly, Luke's Gospel spells out the spirituality of sacrificial lifestyle needed for climate change. Radical simplicity is the key:

Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics (Luke 9.3).

Mostly tradition weakens these commands. They are not for us, goes the dismissive thinking, only for the radical ascetics, who, through the ages, have come back to this text and followed its inspiration – St Francis, for example. But now, we do not have a choice. Lifestyle movements for three decades now, (like Canon Horace Dammers' Movement with its slogan, "Eat simply that others may simply live") have been urging this message upon us. Slowly we begin to heed it. We do care about food miles. (And air miles). We *are* in process of educating ourselves not to need strawberries in January, and are committed to Fair Trade. But there is a very long way to go. In our country we can still make choices –but boatloads of refugees sinking in the seas between Somalia and Sicily tell us that for many countries there are no choices for poor people and life is

¹² Michael Trainor, "And on Earth Peace, Luke 2.14: Lucan Perspectives on the Earth," in N.Habel, ed., *Readings from the Perspectives of the Earth*, Earth Bible 1, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2000) pp.174-192, cited in Celia Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2008), p.215.

unsustainable. This Lukan text stands as a challenge - what more will we let go of, to make life on earth sustainable for the most vulnerable people?

Next, almost a counterbalance to the previous urging, Luke's Gospel is one of hospitality and welcome. Jesus' birth is announced to poor shepherds – shepherds were a despised trade in New Testament times. They are welcomed in a poor home. Jesus and his followers depend on hospitality wherever they go. The same text cited above continues:

Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace be to this house!" and if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not it shall return to you. (Luke **10.5**)

But this is not just an ethic for the missionary journeys, or a reference to Middle-eastern hospitality, vital though this is. Haunting the Lukan Jesus is the vision of Isaiah, and Isaiah 11 with the Messianic vision of peace is not far away. Peace is reconciliation with the earth. Peace means reverencing the earth's hospitality that we have abused. Peace means paying back our debts to the earth before it is too late. Scripture is redolent with texts and poetry extolling the hospitality of the earth, which is of course the hospitality of God. The "God saw that it was good" of the Creation stories. Can we ever imagine the grief of God at what we done with Divine hospitality?

The next point is a vital one. Jesus is incarnate as the wisdom of God and still present in Spirit today. Luke presents him full of organic wisdom. For Jesus, rooted in the soil, animal and agricultural community of the Galilean hills, the project of the coming Kingdom was described in natural images. The Kingdom of God is like....We miss the point if we think that he chose the mustard seed, the ravens, the lilies or the vineyards only because he lived in a rural idyll, far from our present setting. Yes, the images he evoked were part of the life-world of his hearers and followers. But they also form an organic part of the body of the whole. The health of the body is directly related to the health of the parts. The Wisdom literature is clear that the fish of the sea, like the birds of the air are our teachers. (See Job 12). Wisdom, says Jeffrey Schloss, "is living in a way that corresponds to how things are."¹³ The organic worldview of the Bible does not have to be seen as naive, pre-industrial romanticism. I have tried to show that some of the same tensions between rich and poor, a rapacious greed that has no compassion for victims, are no different today. The parables and healings of Jesus are more than charming stories: like the Magnificat, they de-stabilise the mighty, remove false authority from the powerful and offer liberation from oppressive hierarchies. A woman with a grain of wheat and a mustard seed become symbols of the Kingdom of Heaven. (Lk 13). Women, Samaritans, lepers are ministered to in a universalist vision of a world where all are can share the messianic feast. And animals may be present not only as food to be consumed! Recalled to the wisdom-inspired, organic, interconnected world view we cannot go back to the market-dominated one, if we are committed to transforming the current predicament. *It can never be business as usual*. This is why we need a faith-based view, a biblically- based economics of care, strong enough for example, to oppose the Air Companies who tell us that although flight numbers have dropped slightly, corporate jets are not so frequent, when the economy picks up, (maybe next year?) things will return to normal.

¹³ Cited in Celia Deane Drummond, *op cit.*, p.13.

There are two final lessons from Luke. The journeying Jesus sets his face for Jerusalem and a violent death. The Gospels cite many passages of coming tribulations that have a very contemporary feel:

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs. (21.10-11).

Jesus puts this into the context of the persecution his followers would undergo, but how they would be comforted and strengthened in their resistance. The spirituality of *sumud*, endurance and steadfastness again. I see this as an invitation to us, to stand firm in our chosen path of resistance to ecocidal policies. Jesus did go forward to the Garden of Gethsemane and he was comforted by an angel. The angels of peace are never far away in Luke and his Gospel is redolent with encouragement that God's providence is with those who carry the cross with Jesus. I have suggested that the Cross of Christ is planted today in those places of greatest suffering in these days of global warming, standing in the path of a tsunami, a hurricane, or in a flimsy boat on the ocean.

This is not to glorify suffering but to assert the deliberately chosen path of suffering cannot be ignored – for the sake of the preservation of the delicately interwoven ecosystems and the survival of the planet. It is not to impale any group of vulnerable people on the cross of the world. ***But it is to say that the path of protest and resistance in the name of the passionate love of all creation's survival will make suffering inevitable, if we are to break the cycle of violence and the values of global capitalism and market consumerism that keep this in place.***¹⁴

And, finally the Spirit. Luke has a special drama for the Spirit. Jesus is conceived, baptised in the Spirit and then, full of the power of the Spirit returns to Nazareth, where we began the story today. And then silence. Until, after the Resurrection, the Spirit is poured out to all the faithful followers (Acts 2). And in today's crisis the Spirit is our guide and inspirer. First of all, as Spirit of truth, that we speak with truth and not denial about global warming. (We have suffered enough setbacks from this). The Spirit encourages imagination, that we think and imagine another way of being. (The spirituality of *sumud* also evokes this). I think of the creativity of many groups: my friends in Christians Ecology Link, of Operation Noah launching the Ark on the River Thames- so many efforts to demonstrate that there is another way to coexist within the earth's limits.

The Spirit need not today be imaged as gentle dove, (the Scriptural image), but as "***The Wild Bird who heals.***"¹⁵ She can be goose, swan, even eagle or bird of prey, arising in many spiritualities today in an interreligious perspective. This is the Spirit calling us to protect the wetness and wildernesses, the diversity of creatures that live there, the pure air and unpolluted water that they need. This is a new revelation of the Spirit as the green face of God: the "Wild Bird who heals" emerging, calling for the end

¹⁴ See James Alison's powerful discussion of society's complicity in these violence cycles: *Faith beyond Resentment*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd 2001).

¹⁵ See Mark Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit*, (New York: Continuum, 1996).

of short-sighted theologies of stewardships of creation, and for the ignition of full-blown ethics and economics that replaces the destructive policies of the present. The Spirit as kindling the renewal of the face of the earth – more literally than the psalmist meant it! As Mark Wallace says:

If we allow the Spirits biophilic insurgency to redefine us as pilgrims and sojourners rather than wardens and stewards, our legacy to posterity might well be healing and life-giving, and not destructive of the hopes of future generations.¹⁶

With the Wild Bird of the Spirit set free for prophetic action today we have left the pages of Luke. But the gentle Doctor has one more message in conclusion. Luke's Gospel is often called the Gospel of the heart, so redolent is it of compassion and love. The Lukan Jesus wants to cast fire on the earth (12.49), but it is a fire for justice for the vulnerable. His compassion for widows, lepers, despised ethnic groups, can fuel both the fire of our compassion for the victims of global warming, and an anger that demands change and transformation. If we recall the emotions of the two disciples who met the risen Jesus at Emmaus, and knew him in the breaking of the bread: "Did not our hearts burn within us?" Is it not those same burning hearts we need to commit ourselves to working for a stable earth temperature with an increase of no more than 2 degrees, and the same energy that sent them racing back to Jerusalem to proclaim a message of hope?

Conclusion: *Consider the Lilies...*

And so, we come full circle: consider the lilies: as I said, the anemone (*A. coronaria*) is traditionally identified as the 'lily of the field'. Widespread in the Mediterranean region, its flowers can be found in several colours. Recent research in Israel has shown that there is a genetic basis for this variation which accounts for the dominance of a certain colour in a particular region. Around Jerusalem, for instance, the scarlet form is more frequent than the blue, while on the slopes near Capernaum the hillside is flecked with the blue and white flowers. Here I'm using them as a symbol of natural beauty, of the providential care of God for the entirety of creation as well as a symbol of the wisdom of nature. Matthew writes of the lilies of the field in the context of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6.25-33). Luke's context is no less radical: Luke's community will face persecution. Some of his hearers are wealthy – the temptation of accumulation of riches is pervasive. For all, the priority is commitment to the Kingdom – this is how Luke's section ends. But within that, the wisdom of creation – forgotten and despised through the centuries – is to inspire and guide us through this crisis into God's redeemed future for *all* created life.

By Professor Mary Grey, Lent 2011

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.170.