

Living on the Land

Ecotheology in Rural New Zealand

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Do the churches in Aotearoa New Zealand have any ecotheology? This question was raised by Dutch Theologian Mans Miskotte who assumed, because of our nuclear-policy and clean, green landscape, that the answer would be ‘yes, but was surprised by how little he found.¹ Do our churches speak and live a Christianity “with roots and wings”² or are ecological issues “regarded as peripheral to the *authentic* project of salvation”³? In our primarily urban-centred, *Pakeha*⁴-dominated denominations there is little theological reflection on earth issues. Rural⁵ life, however, is *life in eco-context*: discussing the weather is no ‘small talk’ and to be rural is to know your neighbours and know that you need them. To reflect upon life in this situation is to consider relatedness - with non-human creation and with one another. For ecotheology is about connections: the relationships between individual and creation, individual and community, community and creation; the delight of knowing one is a thread in the web, motivated to act for its well being; and the sobering experience of breaking the threads then turning back to reconnect.

But the rural church, potentially therefore at the cutting edge of ecotheology, has been captive to context-detached theology which seeks individual other-worldly salvation. Traditional teaching required real Christian faith to be spoken in orthodox believers’ language, leaving the ‘stuff of life’ outside the official religious sphere. Hopes and worries concerning work, family, land and community have not often featured in worship in a way that goes to the heart and makes a difference.

At issue also is a tension between theory and practice, thinkers and doers. Rural people value ideas and expertise if they are “stuff that works”, but if abstracted into theory and propounded by experts this appreciation fades into a suspicion of impracticality and irrelevance. What value have experts who take no account of home-grown wisdom and use meaningless technical language? If theology is promoted in a similar way it is sure to be rejected.

Theology by rights is not like this. Theology’s task is to crystallise the faith of everyday living, to articulate practice so as to affirm it and challenge it. ‘How we respond to crisis and change’, ‘what we celebrate and hope for’ are the locus for practical theology, both the way it is and what it could be. If one pursues this kind of theology in rural New Zealand, by and large it is ecotheology that one discovers.

Richard Bawden addresses this theory/practice tension with his proposition that “if we want to change the way we do things in this world, we need to be prepared to change the way we

¹ H.H. Miskotte, *God’s Own Green Paradise: New Zealand Churches and the Environment* (Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 1997).

² Jay B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

³ Mary Grey, Editorial in *Ecotheology*, Issue 4 January 1998, p.5.

⁴ Maori language meaning a non-Maori person, particularly northern Europeans.

⁵ My intention for the word ‘rural’ here is that it carry a sense of land relationship or inter-dependency, either for direct livelihood or indirect as part of the interconnected local community.

think about our relationship with that world.”⁶ In the face of economic change, ecological damage and societal pressures we persist with inadequate ways of thinking and doing. Bawden’s vision is for farming practices that are “as ethically defensible as they are technically effective, as aesthetically acceptable as they are financially viable, and as ecologically responsible as they are socially desirable”.⁷ It is venturing into ecotheology to argue that our relationship with the land cannot be viewed from one angle only, nor treated as something merely instrumental to other goals, but needs a “whole new systemic paradigm”⁸ that interconnects every dimension. My project is to identify this venturing as already a feature of rural faith, to uncover links between rural (particularly agricultural) eco-experience and Christian theology, and to raise some issues. These issues include inconsistencies and limitations in our thinking, which happen whenever a practical lived theology gets stuck in the immediate view and makes an ideology of God and an instrument or irrelevance of other people and the good earth. I conclude with an issue I consider to be rudimentary to addressing many other concerns, viz. the issue of work and sabbath.

THEMES IN RURAL THEOLOGY

What do rural church people say about their faith when they trust the listener enough to speak from the heart and in their own words? The most frequent themes are cyclical: life/death, the seasons, the round of farm work and the ongoing dynamic of new birth and growth. Dependence on the weather attunes people to seasonal changes and requires a careful reading of weather patterns. Human experience with the land carries a strong sense of recurrence, yet with the wonder of things ‘new every morning’ which makes affirmation of a Creator God heartfelt and commonplace. Some security comes with repetition, with every season following a similar pattern and repetitive tasks giving space for reflection to cope with the crunch issue – living with the variables of the weather. Ruth Page sums this up well in her phrase “the contrariness of nature”.⁹ ‘What nature dishes out’ by way of drought, flood, snow, wind, etc. can seem harsh and there is no possibility of a controlled environment when you make your living from the land. It is very much a case of ‘running on faith’, living with the weather’s variables and hoping they will average out with more blessings than curses. The faith of Abraham and Sarah, and many others, trusting even in barren times for the sake of a good future to come, is rural faith at its strongest.

There are other variables to live with too: changes within New Zealand agriculture since the mid-1980s economic restructuring and changes in social structure and technology since the beginning of the 20th century. Living with the variables of weather, markets and politics allows for little complacency about the future and leaves no room for certainty. The response of faith is to ‘do your bit’, to work with the Creator, and with other people and the earth. Security comes in sensing one is a valuable co-worker who *belongs* with the land and one’s community. To feel disconnected, to ‘go solo’, is a primary rural understanding of sin.

What kind of relationship with the land is envisaged in rural New Zealand? With market pressure to use short-vision, factory methods of farming, it was encouraging to discover during church-hosted farm discussion evenings the extent to which the husbandry ethic holds sway. Some comments were as follows:

- We are an *input* to the land, like a potential nutrient for it.

⁶ “The Farm, the Church and the Common Good” in *An Ecological Vision for the Rural Church*, ed. Julia Stuart, (Wellington: Anglican Media Services, 1996), p.19.

⁷ *op.cit.*, p.24.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Ruth Page, *God and the Web of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1996), p.128.

- We respect and care for it, because it is like a relative.
- “If you didn’t love the land, you wouldn’t be farming”, but there are times of resentment at its demands or its perceived inadequacies.
- “Leave the land better than you started with”: when asked what counts as ‘better’, individuals talked passionately about the living structure of the soil. The topsoil for farmers is as sacred¹⁰ as anything gets for *Pakeha* New Zealanders.

Developments in science and technology throughout the 20th century have changed the face of farming. Financial change has come in cycles of boom and depression and in a general shift with globalisation, greater mobility and communication and higher consumer expectations from some parts of the world alongside greater poverty in others. New Zealand farmers have shifted also, from primary production of commodities only, to secondary and tertiary processing and marketing, along with diversification and continual adaptation to market needs. It is not uncommon, however, to hear qualms expressed about unforeseeable consequences of current practice. “Who can we trust to give objective and reliable answers?” Financial pressures are perceived to bring them into conflict with their ethical convictions and environmental concerns.

Alongside these reflections from experience sits a theology expressed in hymns and texts. Perhaps the best loved hymn is *I to the hills*, the version of Psalm 121 found in the Scottish Psalter. It is eloquent for people who work under the shadow of mountains and whose every occasion of travel on rural roads has some hilly vista or other. This interpretation may be exegetically disturbing to scholars, but it is their own and conveys a recognisable paradox of human existence. Looking up to the mountains is an experience of awe – I feel insignificant in comparison and fearful of the danger of venturing onto them - but also a comfort and strength - here alongside, connecting me to something much bigger than I am. Another loved text is Ecclesiastes 3, affirming patterns and seasons, a right time for tasks and different events in life. Transitoriness in the midst of the unceasing change is linked to something solid and sure¹¹, a feet-on-the-ground assurance that faces up to the realities of human living and steps forward in confidence.

Psalm 23 vies with 121 in popularity as those who work with sheep relate this Psalm to their own understanding of what it means to care for stock, particularly during lambing. One knows what it is like to go to extremes to help: to be ‘in the hands of the Shepherd’ is therefore understood as being on the receiving end of this kind of care, to the nth degree. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leads the way, incarnating God with clarity of purpose, viz. saving lives and providing food. This is Christology which values what Dorothy Soelle calls “the dust factor”:¹² in Christ we know our earthed way of living is important to God, as is the *adamah*, the land, we live with.

Many of Jesus’ parables are esteemed for their encouragement, particularly the reminder that growth is a gift. Although there is no place in 21st century agriculture for sowing a paddock, closing the gate and returning only for harvest, growth rests ultimately with natural processes (and human beings need to sleep). The life-giver is the Holy Spirit: the one who blows

¹⁰ They love their soil in a way perhaps comparable to the Mesoamericans who treat “the layer of soil that supports all life on earth as living.” Sylvia Marcos, “Sacred Earth: Mesoamerican Perspectives” in *Ecology and Poverty*, ed. Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elzondo, (Concilium 1995/5, London: SCM, 1995), p.27.

¹¹ Cf. Psalm 103:15-17a: As for mortals, their days are like grass... But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

¹² *To Work and to Love: A Theology of Creation*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp.28-29.

where she will. *Therefore, do not worry about your life*, says Jesus¹³: living with the variables and sleeping soundly at night are only possible if there is a basic trust that the future will be okay. Do your bit and let God be God.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR THIS THEOLOGY

The theology presented here is anecdotal and does not claim to be anything more. My point in one respect is a modest one: to counter claims that New Zealand agriculture, as an example of profitable, capitalist-based land use, is devoid of ecotheological foundation. Silence about our rural lifestyle and motivation lets negative assumptions become uncontested givens in contemporary theological discourse. For in another respect my point is to *identify this ecotheology* among the rural faithful, albeit budding at this stage, so that, with the confidence that comes from affirmation, the buds might produce fruit. For I am clear that it is only a beginning, as there are major gaps in our understanding and appreciation of the web of creation. Until these gaps are recognised and addressed we will continue to experience the disconnection of sin, that is, we and the web will suffer the consequences. I move now from description and affirmation to critique and challenge, by considering four areas of current debate and concern and then identifying what I hold to be the underlying issue.

1. *Belonging in the Land: but who belongs?*

The exporting sector of rural New Zealand has supported the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, because as a very small fish in the world market sea New Zealand agriculture gains from its policy directions in the marketing of its products. As a result, it can be hard for us to hear the cry of the poor who oppose GATT. There involves a strange separation of rural contexts - between the overseas Two Thirds World 'them' and the local 'us'. Subsistence is not our issue, although we experience a struggle to survive; although dispossession is sometimes a threat, starvation is not. 'We' - 'us' and 'them' - share the experience of life on the land, yet we, in New Zealand, make 'others' of those on the land in the wider Pacific, in Asia, in South and Central America, in Africa.

This inconsistency is also experienced closer to home: only 15% of the New Zealand population live in rural areas and an even smaller percentage have title to the land. What about land connectedness for the rest of the population? What about reconnection for *tangata whenua*,¹⁴ the first-comers who were dispossessed by later comers from Europe? Justification for current ownership is often accompanied by a misconception that good land use began with the *Pakeha* and by an attitude that others (Maori, "townies", "greenies") have nothing to teach us. Connectedness to the land in our place co-exists with disconnectedness from people in other places, at which point our ecotheology fails and our relationship with God is put under a shadow. If we do not develop a deeper understanding of God and ecology in relation to our own pursuit of livelihood, there is danger ahead for life on earth:

How can we obtain a socio-economic system that will produce a decent sufficiency for all, within a development model worked out with nature and not against it, and in which the idea of the common good will also involve the common environmental good, that of the air, seas and rivers, living beings, the whole environmental landscape? This is the greatest challenge raised by the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth.¹⁵

¹³ Luke 12:22.

¹⁴ Maori language meaning *people of the land*.

¹⁵ Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, Introduction in *Ecology and Poverty*, p.xi.

2. Sustainable Logging: 'us' versus 'them'

Clear felling of indigenous beech forest is a regrettable part of our history but on the West Coast of the South Island the price of ending the beech harvest has been a massive drop in regional employment. It is easy to disparage logging as stripping the earth's resources when one's own life and means of income are located elsewhere. The issue is not use, but attitude, not that people get involved with the bush, but how they relate to it. Criticism is appropriate when non-human nature is treated as the enemy in a "war which humanity must win,"¹⁶ but it is different when the attitude is co-operation. Is the West Coast logging issue a matter of conquest of nature or is it possible to establish a sustainable co-operative relationship? Our rural theology is inclined to claim the latter. Do outsiders who see *conquest*-attitudes misread the situation, or is their view a needed antidote to making an ideological fossil of our theology of living with and from the land?

Theological reflection gives no quick and easy answers, but then the key to theology is not answers but formulating good questions, viz. ones that open dialogue. What are the best questions to ask about logging on the West Coast to avoid short-sighted pragmatism and express the shared concerns of Coasters and others? 'Who is in charge?' 'Who calls the economic shots?' These questions reflect the vulnerability of people utterly dependent upon nature for their livelihood, in a marketplace beyond their control, who fear being told what to do by outsiders. Ecotheology is not a matter of a correct theology with which to argue and answer all questions that arise. It involves following the questions through towards the goal of a perspective that links together God, humans (rural and urban) and earth (and the fullness therein). And it involves living with the provisional answers adopted on the way.

'Sustainable logging' of beech forest was introduced to maintain a level of employment in the timber industry until areas recently planted in exotics (e.g. *pinus radiata*) came on stream. It entails felling single mature to ageing trees, one per hectare, removing each by helicopter. An agreement had been made to allow sustainable logging until 2005, but the Labour-Alliance Coalition Government elected in late 1999 moved quickly to end all indigenous logging. Early in 1999 when our school Year 11 geography trip to the West Coast visited a sawmill at Ikamatua we heard the owner speak passionately about Labour's election policy and his concerns. "Tree-hugging greenies in Auckland and Wellington do not understand," he said. "They don't come and ask us. They're not losing their jobs and their towns." He claimed no loss to the beech forest in logging old trees, but, on the contrary, when left to fall and rot they are a new locus for growth and a source of nutrients for the soil. Beech forest has its own natural cycles for healthy life. But there are human beings in the West Coast too, with their needs for life and livelihood also. Can humans be part of an integrated, sustainable cycle or are they irredeemable "Future Eaters"¹⁷?

3. A Mega-Company for the Dairy Industry?

When the proposal was made to form "Mergo-Co", a co-operative including virtually all of the New Zealand dairy industry, a major question for farmers was whether they would retain enough influence over their means of livelihood. Experience suggests that human beings show less anxiety about their future and more interest in staying for 'the long haul' when the power base is closer to home, regional rather than national. Would "Merge-Co" be too big to permit genuine consultation of all who have a stake in the production of dairy foods? Co-operation seems to be dependent upon people knowing enough about one another to trust one

¹⁶ Ruth Page, *op.cit.*, p.129.

¹⁷ Cf. Tim Flannery's thesis in *The Future Eaters* (Reed New Holland, 1994).

another. The theological issue here is again one of relationship, and finding a perspective of ‘we’, as opposed to ‘us versus them’. It is also a situation where our rural sense of participation, of being co-workers with the Creator, is relevant.

The dairy industry in New Zealand has been characterised by a high level of primary producer involvement in the secondary activities of processing and marketing, achieved through the establishment of farmer-based co-operative companies. Dairy farmers across the range, from well-established landowners to stepping-stone sharemilkers,¹⁸ have been shareholders in dairy companies and therefore active decision-makers in the industry. The contribution from New Zealand dairy exports is a small drop in the world bucket so it has been argued that, to compete on the world market, New Zealand dairy farmers need to be linked together into a mega-company. On world terms it would not be a mega-company, which underlines the reason it is being sought, but within New Zealand it could prove a purchasing monopoly. But the main concern appears to be the potential loss of individual participation and provincial commitment. Can a centralised body make the best decisions for local communities? Will immediate financial gains overshadow the longer-term interests of farmers, of their communities and of the dairy industry as an ongoing, viable enterprise?

Our rural theology instills a confidence to stand up for ourselves and our communities and for the viability of land-based livelihoods: we believe these things matter to God. An ecotheological commitment however draws us out further, to widen our circle of interest. We accept the validity of challenging parochialism, but if changes are imposed from outside, and decisions made by outsiders, they will be resisted. In such situations the ‘us versus them’ rubric rules and opportunities for ecotheology, for a deepening relationship with God and the whole web, are lost.

4. Genetic Modification

Proponents of this technology speak of the need for leadership in the debate, to overcome the ignorance they claim results in emotive public response. Farmers, like consumers, are confused listeners who do not want to be told what to believe, but to be given the tools to judge for themselves. Our rural theology once again has instinctive responses to this issue: help us care for the earth and its people; don’t attack us; let us decide. But again an ‘us versus them’ mentality can convert sound theological convictions into self-protecting ideology.

GM has developed as a natural consequence of a long history of scientific endeavour: selective breeding by observing phenotypes, then marker-aided breeding, identifying the genotype variations, and now recombinant DNA technology, modifying genetic structure. But without phenotypes to observe, evaluate and test, consequences are not always predictable. Resistance to herbicide may be seen as a desirable trait for certain crops and has therefore been encoded into soy species so that herbicides can be used effectively to kill off weeds that would otherwise limit growth and introduce impurities into harvest material. What if this resistance to herbicide were picked up by other plant species through interbreeding, these cross-species then becoming difficult to control weeds? The main issue seems to be our ability, or lack of it, to envisage the ramifications of each genetic change, within complex interrelationships of organisms and potentially widespread flow-on effects. Is it possible to set up enough regulatory systems and business protocols to cover every contingency? As a reference point, Page’s expression “the web of creation” is surely apt.

¹⁸ A sharemilker supplies the labour, and in 50/50 arrangements owns the cows, and shares the appropriate percentage of the proceeds of the milk with the owner of the land on which the cows are grazed and milked.

Rural people need encouragement to carry over into the GM debate their own questions about profit and ethics in plant, animal and soil husbandry. The current agricultural climate is dominated by pressing and multiple demands on people from the global marketplace and politicised economics. For viable agriculture and healthy communities we need a perspective that draws us out towards the whole, where we can see these pressing and persuasive demands for what they are. Such an understanding would be both a source of hope that we can live in this world and do it well and an indictment on how we get it wrong and must own up to our responsibility for damaging the web of life. As biologist Stephen Jay Gould expresses it, human beings are “stewards of life’s continuity on earth”¹⁹ and life’s continuity calls for a *dynamic guardianship* – to do our best to keep the earth and to feed all that lives on it. For perhaps the earth might have functioned quite well without human beings. But, given the kind of beings we are with our technology, imagination, understanding and ability to make purposeful changes, once we were here it became our responsibility to keep our endeavours in balance within the whole. Our rural theology reveals glimpses of this truth, pondered in southerly storms or after an exhausting day fighting fires.

Richard Bawden’s “new systemic paradigm”²⁰ aims to keep human endeavours in balance by imbuing normal thinking with an automatic connection between financial considerations and all the rest – ethical, technical, aesthetic, ecological and social. But many do not believe it is possible to hold an integrated view (“too idealistic”, “that’s perfection, not farming”), so the task for theology is to make known the possibility and offer it as a valid goal to aspire to.²¹ Ecotheologians and rural churches have a clear gospel task in relation to this: to spread the good news of an ecotheological vision, offer keys to an alive and growing theology that enhances practice, and foster open debate about being good guardians. Where do human beings fit in the dynamic of life on earth? Who are we in relation to God the Creator, in relation to Christ the “dust factor” present in everything and everyone with whom we work, and in relation to the windy, fiery Spirit who disturbs and renews?

This is the underlying question. To resolve conflicts and address injustice over land ownership, relationships with other people, other species and the earth – to get ourselves in balance within the web of life, and contribute therein – we must address the matter of how we rate ourselves and consequently what we understand our role to be. Sabbath is one biblical response to this question; workload is a major concern in contemporary agriculture. I therefore conclude with some suggestions about *work and sabbath*. And I invite churches and scholars to take it up as a priority subject in which to engage, and thereby offer truly good news to rural people and the land they serve.

SABBATH: A NEED FOR CHANGE, A GLIMPSE OF HOPE

Jurgen Moltmann criticises the traditional emphasis on the first six days of creation (the work days) with just passing comment given to the seventh. If creation is for the glory of God, a six day understanding of creation effectively glorifies work and treats sabbath rest as an optional extra. The biblical sabbath is not an add-on nor a temporary break in the process, but is the whole point and purpose:

¹⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Flamingo’s Smile: Reflections in Natural History*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985), p.431.

²⁰ See footnote 6, above.

²¹ Bawden speaks of the church taking a lead in revealing the new paradigm in its ontology, epistemology, ethics and praxis. Ed. Stuart, 1996, pp.25-28.

...the whole work of creation was performed *for the sake of the sabbath*... It was for the sake of this feast-day of the eternal God that heaven and earth were created, with everything that exists in them and lives.²²

Without this resting and enjoying, the work is not completed. Without sabbath, the labour that goes into our striving for life and livelihood misses a vital element.

There are signs of the six day creation model in our contemporary rural situation: work-addiction for some, a general difficulty ‘finding time’ to stop, and the assumption that busyness is a virtue. The economic imperative is a reality – life outside the garden, post-Genesis 3, is hard toil to survive - but consumerism also drives us and we fear the system will collapse if there is a pause in the production-consumption cycle.

A six-day creation model could also describe agricultural practices that result in soil depletion, where each episode of land use (cropping, grazing, etc.) must be followed immediately by another and increased extraction is matched by increased purchased inputs (e.g. fertilizer). But again I find an inconsistency in my context, this time with a more positive tenor. The arguable norm of good farming relates better to a seven-day model, with routines for restoration and building up of soil health based on the premise that without good soil good farming is impossible. Even the most reticent farmer will speak confidently when asked about the nature and needs of healthy soil. Soil needs give and take: it is in better condition after a bumper crop than after a poor crop; tried and tested crop rotations restore nutrients through a cycle of grain, grasses and legumes; grazing animals work it with their feet and deposit nitrogen-rich effluent; and maintaining plant cover protects it, especially from wind and winter frosts (bare fallow is harmful). In all, this echoes Genesis 2:15 and the Hebrew word *ebed* – to till or, literally, to serve. That is the intention, although a question mark hangs over intensive agricultural practices insofar as they limit species diversity.²³ New Zealand practice is not monocultural, but markedly less diverse than what the landscape sustained for millions of years prior to human habitation.

If this intended care and attention for the soil could be transferred to humans, then our rural theology would more fully grasp the meaning of sabbath, and call quits to the treadmill of one-day-at-a-time, making it through each day to catch exhausted sleep before the alarm announces the next round of toil. Jesus tells the story of a farmer whose crops are so good he rebuilds his barns to store them all. At the end-point of his life God reveals to him the futility of unceasing labour and hoarding for this man alone with no family to inherit his gains and no friends with whom to celebrate. Then comes the line that really hits the spot for contemporary rural listeners: *can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?*²⁴

In other words, sabbath is about letting go the immediate for the ‘seven-day’ overview. It entails having enough trust, based on past experience, that the future will turn out reasonably well. This needs a strong sense of belonging, of connectedness to where one is now and to the people and world around, so that one does not feel powerless in the face of the unknown future. Sabbath is not about restrictions: you should take a day off to rest, you should come to church, which does not offer rest and celebration but adds to the pressure. Sabbath depends upon, and brings a sense of assurance in, where one stands and how one sees the future. Indeed, it is the point and purpose of the work days such that, while working, we

²² Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An ecological doctrine of creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p.277.

²³ Cf. “Environmental Concerns” in ed. Julia Stuart, *op.cit.*, pp.99ff.

²⁴ Luke 12:25.

catch a glimpse of what is to be enjoyed and start enjoying it. But we lose the glimpse if there is no sabbath in view and work is just unabated toil.

Moltmann notes a new direction for Sabbath in the early church when Sunday became “the feast of the beginning”. This day looks to the future and draws from that prospect energy and hope for the days that follow. Christian Worship can indeed be vital time-out for reflection in rural New Zealand, valued by those present as a time for reconnecting to the web of creation and to God, the web’s source and sustainer – when time is taken for it! Without this time-out, the entangling continues unabated, sin unforgiven and suffering unremedied. Worship is a pause for rest and renewal.

The rural eco-gospel is the news that Christian faith enhances the whole life of people on the land and that relating our lives to God can make a difference. This is the practical lived theology that our rural people are discovering as ecological problems become more urgent. The issue of sabbath is a particularly important focus for nurturing this rural ecotheology, and both Church and University are needed to help. For it is a sensitive issue for those who work the land and feel harassed by the unholy trinity of weather, markets and politics. Our rural people need churches where they can gather and receive theological balm and insight to address their dilemmas and fears. And they need ecotheologians who will give them the tools: heuristic and systematic; biblical narratives, earth exegesis, together with concepts and imagery, models and schemata that make sense and open new eyes. The call to work for sustainability is already an established feature of the Aotearoa New Zealand farming scene, for it is a word that sums up endeavours to counter both natural entropy and land mis-use. Sabbath takes sustainability one more step: for sabbath means not just keeping things going, but being drawn towards a vision of all that is worked for being completed. In each sabbath-glimpse of this vision, God’s future becomes a little more our future. Therefore, we need not worry about tomorrow, but get very excited about it!

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