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Beyond Eco-Mission

Toward a Zoological Imperative in Theological Discourse

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The contemporary ecological dilemma poses a global ethical challenge for humanity, inviting a comprehensive response that draws from various ethical perspectives, including Christian theology. Moreover, extinction and consequent nonhuman suffering prompt inquiries into the nature of the role and extent of Christian mission. Today, we are confronted with rapid shifts in atmospheric conditions, leading to temperatures exceeding typical interglacial levels due to escalating CO2 levels. This, coupled with a myriad of ecological stressors such as habitat fragmentation, pollution, overfishing, overhunting, invasive species, and pathogens, presents unprecedented challenges for countless species. Furthermore, the expansion of human biomass adds additional strain to our ecosystems. Without concerted efforts to address these pressing issues, they are poised to worsen over time, exacerbating the extinction crisis, particularly given the complex intersection between these stressors.[1] A staggering statistic reveals that more than 99.9 percent of all species that have ever existed on Earth are now extinct, underscoring a pattern of significant species

1. Anthony D. Barnosky, et al., "Has the Earth's Sixth Mass Extinction Already Arrived?," *Nature* 471, no. 7336 (March 3, 2011): 56. While recognizing anthropocentrism and human-induced violence beyond colonial and capitalist realms, we must address the specific nature of today's climate change and violence against non-human animals.

disappearance across Earth's history, often within relatively brief geological periods.[2] Current assessments of extinction rates, though varied, suggest a rate at least 100 times higher than the natural background extinction rate over the long term. Current data paints a concerning picture, revealing an average decline of 69 percent in species abundance between 1970 and 2018, with wild animals now constituting only a mere 4 percent of the total global biomass.[3] Consequently, the ongoing ecological crisis has been labelled as the sixth mass extinction event.

Practical theology operates at the intersection of crisis and opportunity, navigating the delicate balance between present realities and potential futures. In the Anthropocene era, where human actions significantly influence the planet's fate, crises manifest in various forms, from problematic circumstances to critical decision-making moments.[4] Practical theologians are tasked with delving deeper into these dynamics of change, addressing ingrained habits that contribute to ecological degradation alongside traditional human-focused crises. This expanded perspective calls for urgent reactive responses to immediate threats like the global climate crisis, while also emphasizing proactive and anticipatory actions to safeguard the planet's future.

From this premise, conservation transcends its practical dimensions to assume a theological significance, casting environmental stewardship as an integral facet of a mission known as eco-mission. Rooted in the ethos of eco-mission, a zoological focus amplifies the imperative to safeguard animal habitats, prevent species extinction, and foster biodiversity, thus championing the flourishing of non-human creatures. This approach aims to acknowledge the

2. Barnosky, et al., "Has the Earth's," 51.

3. Rosamunde Almond, M. Grooten, D. Juffe Bignoli, and T. Petersen, eds., *Living Planet Report 2022: Building a Nature-Positive Society* (Gland: WWF, 2022), 31.

4. The term "Anthropocene" combines anthropos (human) and kainos (new, recent), suggesting a geological epoch marked by humanity's significant influence on Earth's geological layers. It signifies the transition from the Holocene, characterized by agricultural and societal development, due to profound human impacts on planetary processes. In Craig Ritchie's dissertation, he makes note of indigenous and decolonial scholars who have critiqued the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene for its overarching "one world" framework and fatalistic undertones. Indigenous scholars argue that the notion of a singular future "end of the world" and the idea that "we are all in it together" amplify colonial narratives that portray extinction or eradication as inevitable for indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities. Additionally, they contend that this discourse obscures the underlying social conflicts of the Anthropocene, including the reality that the world currently facing its demise was only made possible by the destruction of numerous other worlds, the repercussions of which continue to be felt today. See Craig Ritchie, "Extinction in the Anthropocene: A Critical Analysis" (PhD diss., University of Kent, 2022), 137.

interdependence of all sentient creatures while underscoring humanity's sacred responsibility to nurture the earth.

By prioritizing the welfare of animals and their ecosystems, zoological mission embodies a holistic approach to stewardship that extends beyond anthropocentric concerns. It prompts a re-evaluation of existing missiological frameworks to embrace this expansive perspective and advocates for active involvement to safeguard sentient life on our planet.

Extinction as a Theological Problem

Anthropocentric perspectives prioritize the benefits nature provides to humans, often framed as ecosystem services or within planetary boundaries conducive to human flourishing. While this approach may inspire efforts to protect ecosystems, it can also lead to a bias towards human interests. From a theological standpoint, this perspective may be considered incomplete, as it fails to fully embrace the biblical depiction of God's concern for animals, exemplified in God's covenant with Noah and the animals (Gen 9:9–10) and passages like Psalm 104:17–22, which highlight God's care for all living creatures, irrespective of human involvement. The biblical text portrays animals as capable of expressions like praise and lament, suggesting that they live in relationship with God and respond to divine love according to their nature. While lacking apparent reflective consciousness like humans, animals still bear witness to the Creator's power, challenging the notion that divine relationship is exclusive to humans.[5] This expanded understanding of spirituality challenges anthropocentric perspectives and highlights animals' unique relationship with God as co-creatures enlivened by the life-giving Spirit. In this context, an eco-mission perspective deepens Christian concern for animals and our shared environments, recognizing the interdependence of all creation in the pursuit of flourishing lives. A zoological focus within our theology underscores the importance of stewardship practices that extend beyond human-centric concerns to encompass the wellbeing of all creatures. The scriptural expressions of creation as the fitting abode for creaturely existence is a fundamental feature of Abrahamic faiths, however, Christian theology has historically overlooked the significance of individual species' lives and deaths. While Christian environmental ethics often addresses extinctions as indicative of larger issues such

5. For a detailed theological discourse on animal sentience, see my article: D. Rizzo, "Animal Glossolalia: A Pneumatological Framework for Animal Theology," *Pneuma: Journal for the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 46, no. 1 (2024), 64.

as industrialism, modernity, or colonialism, specific attention to nonhuman lives and deaths remains minimal within Christian discourse.[6] Andrew Linzey echoes this sentiment and affirms that, "Christians entrusted with a ministry of reconciliation to the whole of creation need to be credible signs of the Gospel for which all creatures long."[7]

For Sigurd Bergmann, extinction (in the context of anthropogenic climatic change) can be regarded as human sin due to its connection to the broader human failing of fetishizing power. This mindset leads to the disenchantment of the sacredness inherent in earth and life, reducing them to mere instruments for dominance.[8] From a Christian ecological perspective, recognizing this distortion of power allows us to discern the Holy Spirit's presence in the struggles of all living creatures, including those facing extinction.

Pentecostal scholar Anita Davis offers a feminist perspective on sin concerning non-human creation. She suggests a relational interpretation of sin, viewing it as actions or attitudes that disrupt the intended harmony between creator and creation. Sin, according to Davis, opposes the transformative vision of Pentecost, which seeks to unite all of creation in divine communion. This understanding of sin goes beyond mere ethical wrongdoing; it encompasses a deeper alienation of creation from its source of life. From an eco-feminist standpoint, sin manifests as unjust oppression of both women and nonhuman creatures, stemming from a denial of their interconnectedness with God. Ultimately, sin against one another and against nonhuman creation is fundamentally a sin against God. The Pentecostal perspective highlights the relational dynamics between Creator and creation, underlining the disordered state of creation. That is, "the relational relativity of Creator and creation in Christ by the Spirit and the vocational call to humanity through Pentecost provides the basis for understanding the current state of creation."[9] Understanding extinction as a consequence of unjust fragmentation and exploitation of creaturely life underscores the need to view our neighbours, both human and nonhuman, as equals rather than commodities.

6. Willis Jenkins, "Loving Swarms: Religious Ethics amid Mass Extinction," in *Extinction and Religion*, Religion and the Human Series. eds. Jeremy H. Kidwell and Stefan Skrimshire (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2024), 20.

7. Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 15.

8. Sigurd Bergmann, "Where on Earth Does the Spirit 'Take Place' Today? Considerations on Pneumatology in the Light of the Global Environmental Crisis," in *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 62.

9. Anita Davis, "Pentecostal Theological Perspective: Reviewing the Literature," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 1 (2021): 62–63.

The incarnate presence of Christ in the world signifies redemption and transformation, serving as the locus of God's definitive self-disclosure and the apex from which God's engagement with the created order is most fully realized. This pivotal moment embodies God's relationship with humanity and the material realm, marking a divine entry into the deepest dimensions of spatial and temporal existence. Historical accounts of Jesus depict him as intimately attuned to the natural world, finding communion with God not solely in conventional settings like temples or households, but also amidst the open expanse of hillsides, gardens, and wilderness. His seamless interaction with both urban and natural environments, coupled with his frequent use of natural imagery and metaphors, underscores a kinship with the created order.

While the historical Jesus offers a contextualized human expression of divine wisdom, it is imperative to transcend this limited framework and embrace the broader Christological significance inherent in his identity. The concept of the Word becoming flesh extends beyond the confines of Jesus of Nazareth, encompassing God's presence within all matter and the natural world itself. Within this expanded theological paradigm, the proximity of God to humanity becomes palpable, with divine presence permeating every aspect of existence. For Moltmann, the encounter with God, catalysed by the advent of the Spirit, transcends the limitations of particular individuals, groups, or even species. It extends its embrace to encompass the boundless breadth of creation, embracing "all flesh" in its expansive, creaturely entirety.[10] This expansive vision resonates with his understanding of the Spirit's work that extends beyond the human realm, resonating with every form of life. Pneumatology further enriches this perspective by revealing the Spirit's creative and sustaining presence within the fabric of creation, underscoring the inseparable bond between the Creator and his creatures.

Matthew Eaton rightly perceives extinction as a profound expression of eschatological tragedy and loss. For Eaton, extinction not only extinguishes specific forms of divine revelation but also reverberates within the divine essence indefinitely.[11] He suggests that extinction can be seen as a form of divine annihilation resulting from violence, proposing the term "ecocide" as a parallel to "deicide." He clarifies that ecocide does not imply the complete obliteration

10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margeret Kohl (London: SCM, 1999), 57.

11. Matthew Eaton, "Ecocide as Deicide: Eschatological Lamentation and the Possibility of Hope," in *Integral Ecology for a More Sustainable World: Dialogues with Laudato Si'*, eds. Dennis O'Hara, Matthew Eaton, and Michael T. Ross (London: Lexington, 2019), 363.

of earth but rather the temporary disruption of its creative harmony, where human actions subjugate planetary creativity to one species' dominance over others. This disruption, imbued with ecological cruciformity, will be lamented eschatologically. In Eaton's view, Christ's embodiment emphasizes the sanctity of physical existence, elevating creaturely concerns and experiences to the realm of the divine. A crucial aspect of this is the understanding of suffering, which plays a significant role in defining divine identity and experience. The pivotal event in shaping this understanding within Christian tradition is the crucifixion, where Jesus's death is interpreted as a rejection of the oppressive power and violence wielded by the Roman Empire. Jesus stands in opposition to the brutality used by the elite to maintain control over diverse communities, particularly the marginalized. Therefore, the cross is not seen as a passive acceptance of the fate of vulnerable bodies but rather as a divine protest against the sovereignty of the powerful at the expense of the weak. Jesus, embodying human vulnerability, becomes a champion for the oppressed, and his life and death follow a pattern of advocating for justice, especially when bodily integrity is violated. This concept, termed "cruciformity," suggests that God incorporates experiences of injustice, violence, and the subsequent ethical imperative for liberation into divine being. Cruciformity embodies a divine stance against violence, carrying forward into the divine essence in an eschatological sense. Eaton concludes with an ecological interpretation of Matthew 25, emphasizing that human actions toward earth and its creatures are inseparable from their actions toward God.[12]

Extinction, viewed through the lens of theology, is not merely a biological phenomenon but also a spiritual and ethical one. It represents a rupture in relationship beyond the human community into the creaturely. From a theological standpoint, extinction can be seen as a consequence of human sin and a distortion of power dynamics that prioritize human interests over the wellbeing of other creatures.[13] This perspective challenges us to confront

12. Eaton, "Ecocide as Deicide," 363.

13. Christopher Southgate's evolutionary-theodicy framework recognizes pre-human extinctions as integral components of the earth's evolutionary history, contributing to the diversity of life. He views them as part of the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of evolution, shaping the trajectory of life on earth. Similarly, human-induced extinctions represent a continuation of this process, albeit with a significant difference: they are driven by human activity rather than natural forces. While pre-human extinctions occur as a result of environmental change and competition, human-induced extinctions stem from factors such as habitat destruction, pollution, and overexploitation of resources. Southgate contends that these activities disrupt ecosystems and accelerate extinction rates beyond what would occur naturally. Unlike pre-human extinctions, which are part of the inherent dynamics of evolution, human-induced extinctions

the ways in which our actions, driven by greed, exploitation, and indifference, contribute to mass extinction. Extinction is not only a tragedy in itself but also a symptom of larger systemic injustices that perpetuate environmental degradation and social inequities.

Moreover, extinction raises theological questions about the nature of God's relationship with creation and the role of humanity as stewards of the earth. The biblical narrative of God's covenant with Noah and the animals highlights God's concern for all living creatures and underscores humanity's responsibility to care for and protect the diversity of life on earth.[14] Extinction, therefore, represents a failure of humanity to fulfill its sacred vocation as caretakers of creation.

In the face of extinction, eco-mission takes on renewed urgency, calling Christians to engage in acts of restoration, reconciliation, and redemption that seek to heal the wounds inflicted upon God's creation. Conservation efforts, grounded in theological principles of justice, compassion, and solidarity, become essential expressions of faith in action. Through eco-mission, Christians are called to work towards the restoration of ecosystems, the protection of endangered species, and the promotion of sustainable practices that honour the inherent value of all life forms.

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reflect a deviation from ecological balance and pose a threat to the stability of ecosystems worldwide. In comparing pre-human and human-induced extinctions, Southgate underscores the ethical dimension of the latter. While both types of extinctions shape the evolutionary process, human-induced extinctions raise moral questions about humanity's stewardship of the earth and its responsibility to preserve biodiversity. From Southgate's perspective, addressing human-induced extinctions requires not only scientific understanding but also ethical reflection and concerted efforts to mitigate the impacts of human activity on the natural world. See Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 124–33. See also Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 248–53. Yong advances this perspective by contextualizing Romans 5 within the paradigm of evolutionary geology to account for animal death before the emergence of humans. See Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 275–76.

14. I consider that amid destructive forces a remnant of animal life is saved alongside the human. The value of animal life is emphasized not just through preservation, but also through promise (covenant). For David Clough, the Noahic covenant demonstrates how "it is not only human animals that are addressed by God and called to live lives in response to God." See David L. Clough, *On Animals, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 41.

Eco-Mission: Rethinking Mission in the Context of Creation and Animal Care

A holistic response to mission involves adopting an eco-mission approach rooted in a comprehensive understanding of salvation across creation.[15] This approach transcends a narrow focus on human conversion, accenting the church's role in proclaiming God's reign and striving for inclusivity, service, and wholeness instead of dominance. Recognizing and responding to the yearnings of fellow creatures, be they animal or human, holds theological significance. It acknowledges that creation is not self-sustaining and that both animals and humans share in the burden of bondage and decay. Understanding this common struggle unites us in shared suffering and highlights the ongoing need for liberation and restoration.[16]

Eco-mission challenges us to expand our understanding of mission beyond human salvation to encompass the restoration of the entire created order. In contemplating the essence of creation, a divergence emerges from traditional perspectives that often elevate humanity to the pinnacle, whereas scholars like Woodley and Moltmann assert the Sabbath as the true crown of creation. The Sabbath, according to indigenous theologian Randy Woodley, is intertwined with the notion of rest on the seventh day and serves as a vital link to the entirety of creation. In a state where all aspects of creation are in harmony, God refrains from "labour" to delight in its perfection, as humanity, when rightly aligned with all creation, mirrors the Creator's original intentions for the world. Within the Sabbath lies the directive for all humans, as well as their working animals, to abstain from toil and instead embrace the day by acknowledging the holiness of God and the sacredness of creation. "Shalom," lived in its intended form, entails an acknowledgement that every element of

15. The thesis of the article is based on the notion that "mission" (as derived from Darrell L. Guder's definition) is the outcome of God's initiative, stemming from his intention to restore and heal creation. Brunner, Butler, and Swoboda draw from Guder's definition for an ecotheological context, noting that mission, meaning "sending," is a central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action, which embraces all of creation where salvation, healing, and shalom are all part of God's mission, calling us to responsible partnership in that endeavour. See Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A. J. Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Praxis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 33.

16. Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 84. In an ecological interpretation of Romans 8, creation's narrative unfolds as a journey from crisis to liberation. While the origins of this crisis remain unexplored, the spotlight is on God's intervention, guiding humanity and all creation towards freedom. David G. Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 83.

existence is recognized as sacred.[17] This perspective naturally fosters creation spirituality and care, making ecojustice, stewardship, and spirituality not just options but essential aspects. Soteriologically, it implies a theme of renewing creation, including both humanity and the environment, constituting human and eco-salvation.

In alignment with this indigenous vision, Moltmann underscores the Sabbath as the quintessential hallmark of biblical, Jewish, and Christian doctrines of creation, marking the culmination of creation through the peace it bestows. In contrast to nature's continual productivity, devoid of rest, the Sabbath bestows blessings and sacredness and unveils the world as God's creation. For humanity, recognizing the resting, celebrating, and rejoicing God on the Sabbath signifies that only through this divine rest does creation find its completion and fulfillment. It is in the Sabbath rest that the creative essence of God attains its ultimate purpose and glory. When humankind observes the Sabbath, we perceive the world as God's creation, as the Sabbath's peace allows the world to be as it was intended.[18]

The broader term of eco-missiology encompasses a vision of mission centred on reconciliation across all levels. In his considerations of eco-missiology, Mick Pope recognizes that the gospel extends beyond the individual relationship between oneself and Jesus, as God's involvement spans the entirety of creation, not solely human beings. Eco-missiology prioritizes the care for creation not only as an issue of ecojustice, considering that the most vulnerable, particularly the global poor, bear the brunt of environmental degradation, but

17. Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 28. For Woodley, Native American spirituality and shalom spirituality are both primarily concerned with maintaining harmony in cooperation with creation, the Creator and others.

18. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1985), 6. Moltmann emphasizes that the Sabbath carries an eschatological element, symbolizing the future.

Yong reflects on the pneumatological vision of the prophet Isaiah which illustrates messianic healing and reconciliation set in the backdrop of a peaceable kingdom, where "the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh, including the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid." See Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of a Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 300. And, again, in another work, Yong emphasizes how "humans are pneumatologically interrelated not only with one another but also with nonhuman animals since all of life throbs with and through the breath given by the *ruach* of God." See Amos Yong, "Missio Spiritus: Towards a Pneumatological Missiology of Creation," in *Creation Care in Christian Mission*, ed. Kapya J. Kaoma, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 29 (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), 127. Here, Yong suggests that the *ruach Elohim* creates, sustains, and therefore links all life together while maintaining levels of subordination dictated by relative sentience. The themes presented by Yong resonate with Moltmann's theology which underscores a pneumatologically based existence for all flesh.

also as an expression of eco-spirituality and a new perspective on stewardship. Viewing the nurturing of creation as a form of mission underscores the importance of eco-praxis, which is inherently communal rather than individualistic, thus challenging traditional notions of salvation.[19] An expanded perspective on mission emerges when we acknowledge that the church's role extends beyond human-centric conversion to proclaiming the reign of God. This vision seeks wholeness, inclusion, and service, prioritizing these over domination. As Linzey puts it, "human beings are to be stewards of God's right in creation, that is, they are to cooperate with the Spirit in actualising his right reign of peace and justice."[20]

Drawing upon Pentecostal earth-keeping practices, Paul Ede articulates that the Spirit is dynamically engaged in confronting and denouncing behaviours that run counter to the wellbeing of creation. This intervention is particularly significant in urban environments where self-centred attitudes often predominate. Ede highlights the Spirit's role in prompting us toward endeavours that foster the nurturing and responsible stewardship of the land. Reinterpreting scriptural passages traditionally embraced by the Pentecostal tradition (such as 2 Chr 7:14 and Ezek 16:47–48) challenges the anthropocentric interpretations they have often been subjected to, liberating them from alignment with anti-creational views of the end times. For Ede, the significant potential of a more expansive Pentecostal pneumatology to guide an eco-mission focused on caring for creation and fostering sustainable urban environments. Given that the most severe environmental impacts are expected to disproportionately affect urban areas, particularly the slums of the global South where Pentecostalism has a strong presence, it is imperative for Christian theology, and Pentecostal theology in particular, to actively engage with urban ecology.[21]

South African theologian, Ernst Conradie, challenges the view that Christian mission is primarily about caring for the earth, arguing that it is cosmologi-

19. Mick Pope, "Eco-Missiology and Narrative: A Study in Romans and Eco-Missiological Method," *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* 6, no. 2 (2012): 40–41.

20. Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 88.

21. Paul Ede, "River from Temple: The Spirit, City Earthkeeping and Healing Urban Land," in *Blood Cries Out: Pentecostals, Ecology and the Groans of Creation*, eds. A. J. Swoboda and Steven Bouma-Prediger, 205–24 (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014), 224. The feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, furthers that for the church to effectively engage in ecojustice ministry within its broader community, it must embody the vision of ecojustice in its teachings, worship, and actions. Ecojustice must be at the core of the church's mission as anything less would compromise its credibility. It can be argued that some communities would be unaccepting of missionaries who shared the gospel yet could not practically steward land and animals. See Evelyn Hibbert, Lance Williamson and Barbara Williamson, "Developing a Missiology for Ministry to Nomads," *Missiology: An International Review* 51, no. 2 (2023): 134.

cally illogical given humanity's recent emergence in the universe. He questions the dynamics of who is sending whom and for what purpose in this scenario, suggesting that reducing God's call to mission to the church's responsibility diminishes the richness of Christian theology. Instead of this reductionist view, Conradie proposes a deeper theological understanding by distinguishing between creation as an act (*creatio*) and as an outcome (*creatura*). He emphasizes that speaking of the world as God's creation requires a confessional kind of knowledge rooted in the historic Christian creeds, particularly in understanding the role of the Holy Spirit as the giver of life, where "Pneumatology is thus the deepest theological connection between God's creation and God's mission."[22] For Conradie, God's mission is for the flourishing of creation, with creation at its heart. Humans are not saved merely for the sake of salvation but to enable creation to flourish once again. He asserts that the church exists for the sake of the world, and humans should participate in communion with the rest of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator. Contemplating the world as God's cherished creation should ignite an ecological ethos, praxis, and spirituality. This Christian acknowledgement of the world as God's handiwork serves as the foundation for inspiring Christian mission, fostering a revitalized vision and moral impetus to confront environmental obstacles.

Linzey would be aligned with Conradie's call for a more inclusive and holistic approach to mission that embraces all creatures. When observing Christians portraying humanity as the favoured and privileged species, Linzey posits that our designation as "chosen" entails a role of service rather than mastery.[23] He argues that human "calling" is to employ our influence for the benefit of the weak, defenceless, vulnerable, unprotected, and innocent – those unable to advocate for themselves. This, he argues, embodies Christian ministry: a Christ-like service to all suffering creatures treating the other as an equal subject worthy of love, thereby fostering a more harmonious and respectful relationship with all creatures. He furthers that human distinctiveness can be characterized by the ability to serve and sacrifice for others, a standpoint

22. Ernst M. Conradie, "Creation and Mission," *International Review of Mission* 101, no. 2 (2012): 341. A response to Conradie's challenge in this instance is "How can the Pentecostal movement, characterized by its pragmatism, mobilize eco-mission?"

23. Linzey, *Creatures*, 104. In the Christian tradition, the ordering of human beings above other creatures has often been substantiated on the understanding that humans are uniquely created as the *imago Dei* (Gen 1:26–27). From at least Augustine onwards (particularly in the Western world), the location of human beings at the top of such hierarchy has been tied to the understanding that the divine likeness is found chiefly in human rationality. Creatures without such rationality were thus relegated to the category of "dumb beasts" (or creatures without sentience).

where humans are uniquely tasked with embodying a sacrificial priesthood, "not just for members of their same species, but for all sentient creatures."[24] These self-sacrificing actions claim that the Spirit longs for human creatures to transcend themselves, to find new ways of relating to their co-creatures.

Hence, in resonance with Linzey's perspective, I expand the concept of eco-mission to encompass a mission inclusive of all species. This expanded vision, which I refer to as "zoological mission," calls upon us to follow Christ's example by coexisting with and serving as representatives of the *imago Christi* among other creatures. Amidst the contemporary imperative for justice and peace, this mission becomes all the more crucial. To live in harmony with the Holy Spirit, the ultimate origin and sustainer of life, entails not only advocating for life, justice, and solidarity, but also extending these principles specifically to our non-human cohabitants.[25]

Zoological Mission and Animal Conservation

The convergence of conservation and eco-mission intertwines current eco- and animal theologies with tangible actions to preserve biodiversity and safeguard ecosystems. It underscores humanity's role as custodians of the earth, responsible for nurturing its flourishing. By integrating eco-mission with a specific emphasis on the wellbeing of animals, we pave the way for zoological mission. This approach extends the traditional notion of mission beyond human realms, embracing a holistic, yet specific vision that prioritizes the flourishing and protection of sentient animals.

It is important to acknowledge the distinction between ecotheology, which encompasses concerns for the entirety of creation, and animal theology, which focuses specifically on non-human creatures.[26] While both fields are significant

24. Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 45.

25. For Moltmann, God's profound love and care for his creation is affirmed in the existence of every creature with the Spirit actively engaging in bringing forth and sustaining life. A consequence is that God's presence is not distant but deeply embedded within every created being, immersing himself in their experiences and essence. God's love for his creatures is so powerful that it draws him out of his divine essence and into the lives of the creatures he adores, making him intimately connected to all aspects of creation. This portrayal of God as the "lover of life" and the innermost mystery of all living things underscores the active and involved role he plays in the ongoing existence and well-being of creation. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 50.

26. Linzey delineates these distinctions by offering three specific points. First, animal theologians perceive vegetarianism as the initial stride towards forging a world devoid of violence, presenting a contrasting vision of humanity's role within creation. Second, Linzey emphasizes the issue of suffering, particularly in the context of hunting (a practice that some ecotheologians do not oppose). Lastly, he examines human intervention in animal species management in

within theological discourse, recognizing this distinction becomes particularly relevant within a missiological context. When considering our obligations to animals, Linzey explains that it becomes evident that mere attempts to minimize suffering or prevent wanton destruction fall short of fulfilling our responsibilities. Instead, what is demanded is a more profound commitment – a generosity paradigm that entails generous, costly actions aimed at promoting the wellbeing of animals.[27] In examining human superiority, Linzey argues that we must move beyond a narrow conception of lordship to encompass the idea of Christ-like service. This entails understanding that true lordship inherently involves service, and genuine service implies a form of lordship.[28] Thus, recognizing our inherent value as human beings and our capacity to contribute to creation becomes integral within the framework of God's kingdom. Linzey augments this argument by underscoring that our interaction with animals highlights a unique moral obligation, reminiscent of the responsibilities parents have towards their children. Just as special relationships entail unique responsibilities, so too do our relationships with animals necessitate sacrificial, generous love as a daily moral imperative. Therefore, when advocating for animals, our actions should prioritize their individual interests rather than serving solely to advance our own agendas.[29]

While my intention here has not been to fully develop this theology, I have instead sought to propose that there exists a plausible alternative to conventional approaches to mission, which is often centred on human sinfulness and God's response to it. The essence of God's love is not merely a proclamation of

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which conservationists may prioritize the preservation of endangered species by sacrificing or exterminating others. See Linzey's chapter on the conflict of ecotheology and animal theology. Linzey, *Creatures*, 29–44.

While I advocate for the conservation of endangered species, it is imperative to explore alternative management practices that mitigate the need for culling predatory species. Mobilizing compassionate conservation can replace killing *for* conservation. Compassionate conservation proposes an interdisciplinary approach that integrates conservation and animal protection ethics, aiming to achieve conservation outcomes while minimizing harm to the welfare of individual animals. See Ngaio J. Beausoleil, "I Am a Compassionate Conservation Welfare Scientist: Considering the Theoretical and Practical Differences Between Compassionate Conservation and Conservation Welfare," *Animals* 10, no. 2 (2020): 257. See also Arian D. Wallach, Marc Bekoff, Michael Paul Nelson, and Daniel Ramp, "Promoting Predators and Compassionate Conservation," *Conservation Biology* 29, no. 5 (2015): 1481–84.

27. Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 32. Yong concurs with Linzey on this point, noting in his reflection on Romans 5 that the redemption of the world is intricately linked to the renewal of our minds. This creaturely renewal will inspire loving behaviour, carry political significance, and advocate for the protection of the vulnerable. Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 279.

28. Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 33.

29. Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 36–37.

future salvation from the earth's destructive forces but an invitation to engage in the healing process, both for ourselves and for non-human creatures, by participating in the Spirit's transforming and transformative work. This perspective necessitates a reorientation of our understanding, bridging the realms of mission, theology, and creation. A creaturely-conscious mission entails inviting fellow humans into authentic relationships with God, each other, and our co-creatures. Moreover, as the future kingdom envisions the eradication of grief and suffering, zoological mission entails alleviating such afflictions on sentient creatures in the here and now. Therefore, zoological mission serves as an act of worship, affirming the value of every creature and endorsing its flourishing as praise to God.

Zoological mission recognizes animals' vital roles in ecosystems and strives to protect their habitats, prevent species extinction, and foster biodiversity through conservation efforts. This approach emphasizes understanding and respecting the diverse needs and behaviours of different animal species, including habitat requirements, migration patterns, and social dynamics, all of which are essential for effective conservation strategies.[30] By prioritizing the flourishing of animals and their habitats, zoological mission embodies a holistic approach to stewardship that embraces the flourishing of all God's creatures while recognizing their sentience and creaturely value. Christians who actively engage in conservation both foster a connection with non-human creatures and their environments and have opportunities to encounter God's presence in the beauty and vitality of creation. These experiences, though perhaps not explicitly articulated in theological terms, cultivate a deep sense of connection, meaning, and fulfillment rooted in relationship with God. In God's garden, we discover glimpses of divine presence and purpose amidst the rhythms of nature.

30. According to ecologist Michael Rosenzweig, conservation efforts must be grounded in the recognition that the future of biodiversity hinges on self-sustaining ecosystems. Evidence suggests that the extent of habitat available directly correlates with species diversity. Therefore, if we desire to preserve more than a fraction of Earth's biodiversity, we must redesign our habitats to accommodate wildlife. While Rosenzweig acknowledges that this endeavour will require significant research and innovation, he suggests that reconciliation ecology offers a promising framework for achieving conservation success. Michael L. Rosenzweig, "Avoiding Mass Extinction: Basic and Applied Challenges," *The American Midland Naturalist* 153, no. 2 (2005): 200. Reconciliation ecology entails the science of devising, establishing, and maintaining new habitats to preserve species diversity in areas where humans live, work, or engage in leisure activities. This does not imply creating new habitats in reserves or restoration sites. Instead, it acknowledges that humans occupy the majority of the world's land surface and advocates for utilizing it more thoughtfully to accommodate both human needs and those of native wildlife. Michael L. Rosenzweig, *Win–Win Ecology: How the Earth's Species Can Survive in the Midst of Human Enterprise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shaped the parameters of a zoological mission within an eco-missiological paradigm. Despite the absence of a specific missional approach to animals within existing Pentecostal and animal theologies, there exists considerable potential to further develop a creaturely missiology. By incorporating theological considerations of non-human creatures, tangible actions can be facilitated for environmental protection and the enhancement of biodiversity, specifically concerning animals, within the context of zoological mission.

This stress on the ontological worth of animals instigates a reassessment of anthropocentric beliefs, prompting a more conscientious approach to animal stewardship. Pentecostals can embrace and expand upon these ideals through the development of robust animal theologies, active advocacy, and collaborative efforts with like-minded individuals, scientists, communities, and organizations, thus paving the way for a more harmonious and inclusive relationship with all creatures.

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