

WONDER AND THE WILL TO CARE

Presentation by Barry Leal, Uniting Church of Australia

Today, in addressing “Wonder and the will to care”, I wish to focus on three areas: Ecotheology, Earth Ministry and The Good Samaritan

1. Ecotheology

- I have had an active interest in ecological theology (ecotheology) for some 4½ years. This has involved extensive research (thesis on “wilderness in the Bible”) and, more recently, lecturing at United
- Ecotheology Theological College at North Parramatta.
 - is situated at the intersection of ecology and theology (people are surprised that ecology and theology intersect!)
 - searches the Christian Scriptures “with ecological eyes” (often with surprising results)
 - evaluates Christian tradition from an ecological perspective (and finds “ambiguous promise”)
 - examines Christian images and concepts, including the concept of God and the nature of humankind, from an ecological perspective
 - provides an evaluation of the theological underpinning for Christian environmental activity

2. Earth Ministry

- was set up by Uniting Church in mid 2002, based on the congregations of Northbridge & Castlecrag in Sydney
 - is an attempt to give practical expression to ecotheology’s insights
 - seeks to heighten awareness of God’s creation
 - seeks practical ways of expressing commitment to the environment
- Written statement on “Why Earth Ministry?” (from Earth Ministry pamphlet):
- *The Earth Ministry is a response to the need felt by many Christians to recognise the riches of God’s creation and to address from a Christian perspective the environmental problems of our society.*
 - *The Earth Ministry springs from a belief that only a fundamental change of attitude to the Earth – a deeply spiritual change – will be sufficient to address the problems we have created and to enhance our enjoyment of creation.*
 - *The Earth Ministry comes from a conviction that the Christian faith has a significant part to play in environmental debate and action in our society.*
 - *The Earth Ministry results from the knowledge that, at least in recent times, Christian teaching has not sufficiently stressed the role of the Earth and the environment in God’s plans for humankind.*

3. The Good Samaritan

- In the context of today’s forum and its aims and to illustrate the environmental possibilities of ecotheology, I thought I should tell you – or rather retell you – a story that was once told by Jesus. It provides a context for Christian environmental action.
- Story of Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37)

- The point of the story is that it challenges narrow concepts of the term “neighbour”
 - The lawyer asked “who is my neighbour?”
 - Jesus turned the question round: at the end of the story he asked the lawyer: “who was neighbour to the one who fell among thieves?” i.e. my neighbour is anyone whom I encounter in need.
 - Over the past century or two, greater contact with other peoples has widened our concept of who my neighbour is. No longer just the person next door but all people.
 - We now have greater consciousness of the fact that we belong not just to the human race but to a web of life that has interdependent parts. It has become necessary to regard the environment as our neighbour, since it is in need of our respect and care. If we do this we shall show a profound understanding of the spirit of Jesus’ parable.

Barry Leal, 21 June 2003.