

Green Catholics? Some Attitudes of Australian Catholics to the Natural Environment over 200 Years

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What attitudes to the natural world have Australian Catholics displayed over 200 years? This paper explores the question. It points to elements of their faith that have helped believers commit themselves to Earth care. It also aims to identify reasons that have held them back. Hopefully the paper will spark cooperative efforts of historical research to create a more complete picture.¹

Initial findings indicate that Catholics mainly followed the attitudes of other Australians of their time as they strove for a new life in this country. While Catholic faith built on a positive theology about the goodness of creation, with exceptions, believers were not in any public way at the forefront of conservation activity. The Catholic emphasis on human-focused social justice in Australia was in some ways a distraction from the natural world. But a belief in working for the common good and honing skills in cooperative action prepared Catholics for the time when they became aware that environmental issues were integral to that common good and their faith. From the 1960s, official Church agencies and Catholic schools organised programs to raise awareness and promote action for justice. This had taken on a green hue by the 1980s. Some sections of the Church, particularly women, explored the spiritual dimension of environmental awareness. Increasingly, spirituality underpinned the response of many Catholics and became a meeting-point with some people active in the environmental movement.

Although there are exceptions, probably the weakest response to ecological awareness has been in the parishes, which have largely been busy with traditional ministry. This may be one reason why many Catholics with a commitment to environmental issues have left parish life where they rarely received intellectual or spiritual nourishment to support their commitment. However, just as the Catholic Church has historically been a major player in the social shaping of Australia, it seems that it is now increasingly taking a role within the environmental movement. In 2002 the Conference of Catholic bishops set up a permanent body called *Catholic Earthcare Australia*. The Spirit seems to have led the Church into a new phase of mission where positive Catholic attitudes towards the environment are giving real meaning and substance to a renewal of evangelisation.

At the risk of seeming proud, I would like to share some of my own experience, a step by step affair leading me to make ecological awareness a part of my faith

¹ My thanks to Paul Lucas who invited me to first explore this topic at the 10th anniversary celebrations of Townsville's diocesan Environmental Centre. My thanks also go to people who contributed to a collection of stories about pathways Catholics took in making environmental commitment integral to their faith.

commitment as a Catholic, a priest and a missionary. I grew up on a farm at Canowindra central NSW. As a child I remember the fun of running around the shearing shed, being out with Dad in the paddocks or exploring the creek. I remember the curiosity aroused in me by my grandfather as we went around his rather large vegetable garden. He probably gave me my first clue about sex when he showed me how to put the male flowers of the pumpkins into the female flowers. As a youth I was often on the tractor ploughing at night. I can still smell the aroma of the soil as it was turned over, and see, hear really, the *chatter* of a literal myriad of stars - twinkle is too weak to describe the experience. But the hard realities of sheep dying in the drought and negotiations with the bank manager were also part of my experience of nature on the farm. I was a member of the Junior Farmers Club (4H). It was probably there that I had my first real taste of science as we learnt about documenting experiments, farm management and the manipulating or husbanding of nature to get the desired outcomes in breeding or economics.

These experiences as a youth stayed in the background until the writings of fellow Columban priest Sean McDonagh revived them in the 1980s. From the Philippines he wrote about the clear-fell logging of tropical forests and manipulative practices of the international agricultural-chemical companies. Along with many other Columbans I became convinced about the link between environmental problems and social injustice. On my return from South Korea to Australia with the job of giving feedback to the Australian Church from the churches overseas, and not wanting to be dismissed as a 'do-gooder priest' if I talked environment, I did a Masters in Environmental Planning at Macquarie University. I still remember the faces of other students as they tried to hide their surprise at having a priest in their class. I found out gradually that many were Catholics and really quite pleased to have a priest taking their line of work seriously. With some new found skills I asked for and gained a weekly column in Sydney's *Catholic Weekly* during 1990. I called it *Greening the Gospel*.

So, my environmental journey, which began as a social justice one, soon became a spiritual one. God looked different, God with skin on as a child once said, and I found God present in ever new ways. I reclaimed experiences of nature in my earlier life as spiritual ones. I now like to say I belong along Emu creek at Canowindra and believe I have some appreciation for what Aboriginal people feel about Country. Earth is now fixed in the dialogue of my missionary life.

The Search for a Catholic Environmental Story

What prompted me to ask questions about Australian Catholic attitudes to the environment was the book *Ecological Pioneers: A Social History of Australian Ecological Thought and Action* (Cambridge University Press 2001). Martin Mulligan and Stuart Hill collected the stories of people who relished the Australian landscape and battled for its conservation. They construct a historical narrative around the life and work of ecological thinkers, Arcadian dreamers, practical scientists and popularisers of environmental knowledge. These stories collectively make what they

call "the meta-narrative of ecological thinking" in Australia, the big story. We are familiar with many stories like those of the Battlers for Kelly's Bush in Hunters Hill when the "blue rinse set" joined forces with Labor politician Jack Mundey, and the Heidelberg School of painters who first captured the special quality of the light we experience on Australian beaches or in the bush.

One group of environmentalists are the practical-minded scientists, some of whom in 1916 founded the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (later CSIRO). Largely they believed that humans were to use reason to exercise control over nature. This imperial scientific tradition is at its worst in the world of agri-business. But Mulligan and Hill see this as only one aspect of environmentalism in Australia. They variously point to the Arcadians such as Sir Joseph Banks and the Jungian social commentator David Tacey. They trace advances in attitudes: the philosophers Charles Birch and Val Plumwood who promoted the value of nature for its own sake; the poet Judith Wright and writer Eleanor Dark who were sympathetic to the aboriginal perspective; bush lovers such as Milo Dunphy; the communicators of ecological insights like Philip Morrison with his popular *Voice of Nature* on radio; political activists at Lake Pedder in 1972 which led to Green Politics; and the emergence of a New Age ethic that valued spiritual refreshment bubbling up from being part of the web of life.

Ecological Pioneers celebrates well the insight of individual Australians who loved our land. However, the part played by religious belief in the lives of these ecological pioneers is overlooked.² The authors prepare the reader by stating that as they did not want to stray far from their own areas of expertise, "we have had to set aside significant areas of endeavour, such as religion, film making, architecture and music." (p.14) Was this just a rationalisation of anti-religious bias? Historian Edmund Campion warns us to be wary of the gaps. Religion as a formative factor in these pioneer stories is missing, for good or for bad. However, rather than lament a gap in the historical record, it is an opportunity for people of religion to do their own historical research to draw a more complete picture and help explain the expanding Catholic commitment to green issues in recent times.

How can we find out what attitudes Catholics had towards the natural world in Australia over 200 years? At a Conference on *The Second Millennium of Christianity* at Melbourne University in 2000, a history student presented a paper on some characteristics of the Irish church in the 11th century. She exemplified a masterly use of scant written sources to paint a picture by working from the text of wills held in monastic records, a piece of historical detective work.

I believe that a similar technique can be used to glean some Catholic attitudes to the natural world in Australia over 200 years - evidence surviving in the texts of sermons, priests' magazines, catechisms, school books and poems. Further, records on parish life, schools, novitiate and seminary training programs give clues. Just as the

² The Dunphy family were from Kilkenny. What part did a faith background play in the life of the bare foot walker Dot Butler, Morrison, Romeo Lahey in Qld. or William Lines' (1994) story of Georgina Molloy in WA who collected and cultivated native plants.

Scriptures are being re-read with ecological eyes, Australian church history can be read and researched with ecological questions in mind.

Some Major Variables

Before directly exploring 200 years of Catholic environmental attitudes, it is well to frame the question within the changing social and economic agendas of Australia over that period. Attitudes would have varied under the influence of each historical period as newcomers to the country struggled to survive or enjoyed some prosperity - the first settlement time, the pioneering days of inland expansion, encounters with Aborigines, the gold rush, industrialisation and expanding cities, the 1960s boom and consumerism, chemical agriculture and the growing modern awareness of environmental problems. Each period had its dominant set of values and social objectives, and it would be the exceptional person, Catholic or otherwise, who could go against the trend. But, motivated by faith, maybe some Catholics did.

Another variable factor that would have modified Catholic attitudes to the natural world was the fluid agenda of the church in Rome, Ireland and elsewhere: the change from Benedictine to Irish leadership coupled with the Roman agenda set at the First Vatican Council 1870; the growth in neo-Thomistic training for priests from the end of the 19th century that moved away from a more liberal education; the centrality of the human social agenda in the local Catholic Church which took the natural world as a given; the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s leading to renewed Catholic engagement with the modern world; the voice of educated female church leaders; and theological insights arising in Third World churches. Looking at these variables as a time line, we see that what began as a sometimes forced Catholic engagement with 'the world' of Australian issues, often stormy and defensive, grew to be an inward focus on the Church itself and the welfare of its members. Re-engagement with the agendas of the world only emerged again after Vatican II for significant numbers of Catholics.

Another major factor in the way Catholics regarded Australia's natural inheritance was the dream of prosperity carried by Australian Catholics and the aggressive social justice agenda of the Church. Like other pioneers and ex-convicts, Catholics were led by the lure of owning one's own plot of land or a tract of the vast inland to viewing Australia as the lucky country. Many soon learnt that life in the land of droughts and flooding rains could be harsh, as could be the bosses many worked for, so they fled to the cities for work in services and industry. Wages and conditions, the security of having a job and being able to afford to buy a home emerged as major concerns; getting a share of the pie became the agenda. For most people, contact with the natural world was reduced to a day at the races, a trip to the beach, or maybe a veggie patch in the yard. Again we can ask, faced with the economic realities in fighting to earn a decent wage and social equity, coupled with a desire for a comfortable life and even riches, could Catholic attitudes to the natural world be different from those of the average Australian?

Life in Australian Catholic Parishes before Vatican II

Edmund Campion argues that the Green Penny Catechism has been the single most influential book in the life of Australian Catholics. The catechism taught that God made the world and it was good; that followers of Jesus were to be grateful, not waste things and even choose to curb their desires through penance; that they are to love and share with neighbours; that people make mistakes and have to repent of their sins. Such teaching embodies values immediately relevant to the natural world - the earth is a gift, beautiful but ultimately belonging to God, not to humans; earth's gifts are to be used sparingly and shared justly with others; whenever an action is considered a sin, sinners are called to restitution and changing their ways.

Although simple, these fundamental Catholic teachings have profound consequences in an age of growing ecological awareness. They provide a basis for respecting the integrity of the non-human natural world for its own sake, as part of God's family, so that nature is brother and sister and not merely a useful resource for humans. There is a basis in the catechism's teaching for a just and wise use of the world's resources for all peoples on earth and for future generations. There is a basis for simple living, to reduce our environmental footprint and not be caught up in the consumerist race. There is a basis for challenging the economic structures of environmental abuse at the social and personal level, and an impetus to change our ways.

This teaching was supported by sacramental practice in the parishes and sermons on the demands of being a good Catholic. Parishes were the abiding centre of influence that could have sensitised Australian Catholics to the natural environment. Further, parishes were supported by the Catholic school system which for much of their history worked in tandem with them. Logically, indications of the prevailing attitudes towards nature can be gleaned from the intellectual fare being fed to parish priests, and from the agenda of schools.

Australasian Catholic Record (ACR)

Many parish priests in 19th century Australia received a broad education under Benedictine, Continental and the early Maynooth traditions, all of which had secular scholastic elements. Some, like Tenison Woods, studied natural history.³ His story parallels the stories of Mulligan's and Hill's ecological pioneers, their love of nature and inner spirit. Woods and others, like the ecological pioneers, had personal experiences of the bush that led them to relish the Australian landscape and make that love known in writing.

In Australian Catholic history, the fame of Father Julian Tenison Woods arises from his part in founding the Josephite Sisters with Mother Mary MacKillop. A lesser known part of his story was as a writer on natural history, recognised by the scientific community of his day. As a youth Julian, born in the then leafy Sydenham area of London, developed a love for nature. His schooling was haphazard but by ten years

³ Margaret M. Press *Julian Tenison Woods* Sydney: Catholic Theological Faculty, 1979.

of age it had included collecting and preserving plants and insects. At fourteen, after a short lived time working on a newspaper in the dreary Docks area, he was taken by his sister to Jersey where he developed a taste for the outdoors and delighted in painting the island's forests and valleys. Later as a Passionist novice he enjoyed long walks in the English countryside, doing the same in rural France as a Marist novice. Four years later he embarked to Australia and in less than a year was attending the country based Seven Hills seminary in the Clare Valley.

Ordained in 1857 Tenison Woods was appointed first parish priest at Penola in South Australia. That year he published an article in a scientific journal on local fossils. As an itinerant priest travelling on horseback between churches, he would stop under a tree to give his horse a rest. He used the contemplative silence of the bush to write his articles. He published over 150 articles between 1857 and 1886, contributed to the Fr Scotatini Asian Collection after trips to Malaysia and elsewhere, and was commissioned to do surveys on reefs and mining in the Townsville area.

The broad classical type of education and thinking exemplified by Tenison Woods was reflected in the first decades of the *Australasian Catholic Record* (ACR). First published in 1895, it carried a significant number of articles on science related subjects showing that Woods' interest was not an isolated one among the clergy.⁴ An article from a lecture to the Catholic Young Men's Union stated that "there is and must be absolute harmony between Scripture, apostolic tradition and all the laws of natural science". It quotes a supporting poem by Father Stephen Perry, member of the Royal Astronomical Societies in England, linking faith and science.⁵

*Whate'er he learned from heaven's luminous chart
You flame-wreathed orb, you starred immensity
Made him more loyal and more dear to Me.
God was in his science, God's love, all his art.*

Related to science was the journal's interest in modern biblical research. It affirmed that scientific theories do "not contradict the Bible necessarily" since what happens over time is all connected.⁶ A lengthy article "Primitive History in Genesis" by T Hayden rejoices in the fact that "Today Biblical exegesis has regained her independence ... (we learn that) the material structure of the narrative, or the literary garb, is subjective."⁷ It is of note that one hundred years ago literalism had given way to seeking the message in the text. Yet, today, some Catholics call themselves creationists.

Another ongoing feature of ACR was articles on Australian Literature. Clare Spruson applauded the development of an Australian voice in the native Catholic poets Henry

⁴ C. O'Connell SJ "The Ascent of Man" *Australasian Catholic Record* (ACR) 1895 pp. 50-67; "Astronomy" ACR 1897 p 210; "The Darwinian Theory" ACR 1900 p. 173ff; Father Sheehan "Mary the Morning Star" links Creation and its completion in the Incarnation1 ACR 1902 p. 251.

⁵ ACR 1902 p. 449 ff.

⁶ ACR 1900 p.180; "Bible and Modern Criticism" ACR 1903 p. 530; "Galileo" ACR 1903 p. 221.

⁷ ACR 1906 p. 470 ff.

Kendall in NSW and Brunton Stephens in Queensland. They drew inspiration from the land.

*Regarding Australian literature, it may be stated that there is undoubtedly a note of freedom pervading the entire writings which form it ... It is a happy free independent spirit: a free spirit that may have partly risen from the vast dimensions of our island home.*⁸

Patrick Hartigan, of Boree Log fame argued that "If we honour the pioneers ... we should likewise honour those who have written, and written well, the first pages of our literature ... sung the first songs this land can call its own."

*The Australian bush, to those who know it, is not such a dismal place at all ... Give me the land that stretches out beneath the twinkling of the southern stars awaiting willing hands to sow the clean, untainted seed that will spring to a harvest on un-dreamt-of luxuriance.*⁹

Hartigan obviously has social issues in mind but he sees a great future for the people of Australia and does it by "pointing out the gems that are hidden in unlikely places, by making Australians love Australia" the land. Hartigan, like Tenison Woods, was deeply influenced by working as a priest in the bush in the NSW Riverina. His priestly training had opened him to this experience. He loved the land and promoted living in the bounteous land Australia.

While it is hard to gauge the influence of these poets and writers, that they received recognition in the leading magazine for priests in Australia at the time indicates that they were important to the Catholic community, even if it was only to say to secular Australia, we too have our representatives who love this land.

Many of the early priests at St Patrick's College, Manly, had an above average interest in Aboriginal Australians. This was reflected in ACR. Significant was a two part article on "The Aborigines in Australia" by the German Dr Klaatsch.¹⁰ He contrasts the style of missions in Beagle Bay and northern Queensland, praising the first for respecting culture and giving freedom of expression in corroborees and the like, but criticising the second that imposed restrictions.

T. Fitzgerald OFM writes on "Women's Suffrage from a Catholic Standpoint" praising it as "a sign of political development ... (shown in the) writer Miss Franklin and her book *My Brilliant Career*". Fitzgerald finishes with a long quotation. Importantly, the entire imagery and vocabulary he uses to laud the role of women is drawn from natural science, showing a knowledge and appreciation for it.

... the sun's light and warmth, in the order established by the Creator, are the sources of all vegetable and animal life on the surface of our globe. They regulate the succession of the seasons, the growth of all the wonderful variety of tree and shrub and grass that make of the surface of the earth an image of paradise. They give health and vigour to the myriads of animals of every kind

⁸ ACR 1902 pp. 203 and 209.

⁹ ACR 1906 pp. 517-562.

¹⁰ ACR 1907 p. 512 and 1908 p. 217.

*that live on the air and in the waters or on the dry land, and in which in turn, the vegetable world furnishes food and sustenance. The very motion given to the rain in falling, to the rivers in their course, to the oceans and their currents, comes from the sun-force ...*¹¹

Modernism and neo-Scholasticism

Sad to say, the liberal education of the clergy, including their appreciation of sciences and of the natural world, suffered two major setbacks in the early 1900s. First was the condemnation of Modernism in the encyclical *Pascendi Gregis* by Pope St. Pius X, and secondly, the rise of neo-Scholastic philosophical thinking throughout the Catholic Church worldwide. But the transition did not happen without debate.

On Modernism, writing on the encyclical in the 1908 ACR, Monsignor Moyes points to the crux of the problem as a modern desire to adopt a one-sided approach when applying science to religion. In another article John Gerard writes on five difficulties with Modernism, mainly dogmatic. Further, he points to a misunderstanding of the encyclical. Some interpreters saw it as a condemnation of Cardinal Newman's idea of the development of dogma but he defends Newman's idea, arguing that while dogma is God given, it develops.¹²

Neo-Scholasticism had been promoted in the church over two decades by Pope Leo XIII and Emile Mercier, later Cardinal in Belgium.¹³ In the same issue of ACR where neo-Scholasticism was discussed, E J Howley wrote on the philosophy of the Utilitarians. However, that free exchange of divergent opinions in 1913 marked the end of an era. It was the last issue of ACR for a decade.

When ACR started again, after a lapse of eleven years, its character had changed markedly. The format followed neo-Scholastic divisions. The emphasis was on explaining church regulations with hardly a mention of the ANZ social situation. ACR had become a-cultural. A forward by Bishop M Sheehan notes that the clergy had changed, wanting summaries rather than articles and a focus on internal church life. He stated that at ACR's inception, Cardinal Moran set a missionary task for the Record (carried through by Mons O'Haran and later Dr Creegan). From 1924 a new team worked under the motto *Pro Ecclesia Dei* (For the Church of God). The motto indicates that the focus of ACR had moved away from the mission of the Church in the world, even when it did battle with the world, to focus on the internal life of the Church itself. This neo-Scholastic style of the Record continued until after Vatican II in the early 1960s.

¹¹ ACR 1903 p.380.

¹² ACR 1908 p 279-299.

¹³ ACR 1913 p. 403.

Histories written on the training of priests at St Patrick's College Manly in that period tell a similar story.¹⁴ This scholastic influence may have been in part offset by student experiences of the natural world. Many seminaries, like Werribee near Melbourne, were in rural settings. In most seminaries students tended the grounds and some carried out farm related activity. Dr Michael Costigan speaks of student life in Rome.

When I went to Propaganda College, we had a Rector who was like a latter-day St Francis. He loved the world of nature, including animals, and opened our eyes to much of this, especially during the long summer months at the College Villa at Castel Gondolfo, in the beautiful Alban Hills.

However, with the rise of an intellectually inward looking church in the early 20th century, published Catholic inquiry about the natural world all but ceased. The highly regulated Roman-Irish style of church, promoted in Ireland by Cardinal Cullen following the 1870 First Vatican Council, had begun to bear fruit in Australia. The fruit may have been plentiful in parish numbers, but may have also been uniformly shriveled where priests followed the narrow Cullen line.

Australian Catholic Schools and Environmental Thinking

Until after Vatican II Catholic schools were the second major sector in the Australian Catholic Church that provides evidence about the fostering of positive attitudes towards the natural world. What influence was exerted by teachers and curriculum?

As a response to the secular agenda of Sir Henry Parkes, Catholic schools expanded from the 1860s, staffed in the main by Religious Sisters and Brothers, many dragooned into the task. Teachers would have followed the 3Rs formula (Reading, Writing and 'Rithmetic) plus the teaching of catechism. Commenting on the Josephites, historian Sister Margaret Press suggests that the Sisters followed Tenison Woods as Father Founder rather than as a lover of natural history. However, one wonders how his Sisters and those of many other Congregations thought about their almost subsistence lifestyle in the bush - mere burden or source of wonder. What were the attitudes of the Good Samaritan Sisters founded in Australia in 1854 but carrying a Benedictine tradition that cultivated Earth? In what way did the Christian Brothers, who came to Australia in 1843, bring their Celtic traditions of connection with nature - valued or suppressed? More historical research is needed into the training received by Sisters and Brothers in the 19th century about the presence of God expressed in the natural world and the value of natural science in their teaching. (The Office of *Catholic Earthcare Australia* has agreed to act as a collection point for data).

Changes in the training of Sisters and Brothers developed gradually. For example, the Marist Brothers bought a farm at Mittagong in 1906 for novices of whom many were city-boys. They learnt to farm, work with animals and did a lot of bushwalking. There

¹⁴ K. Livingston *The Emergence of an Australian Catholic Priesthood 1883-1915* Manly, NSW: Catholic Theological Faculty of Sydney, 1977; K. Walsh *Yesterday's Seminary* St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1998.

was close experience of the natural world even if the question remains open about any reflection on this. Commenting on her training as a Singleton Mercy, Sister Marie O'Farrell remembers Sister Calasactus. In 1951 she was promoting biology studies among the novices. Her garden was thick with trees and there was a special place for plants mentioned in the Bible. Following the introduction of new State educational standards, such as the Wyndham Report in NSW, more Religious began to study at secular universities. This was part of a new style of formation and freedom "to look at the flowers". Geraldine Ryan was one of these and at the time of writing she is campaigning for a corridor of national parks in south western Victoria.

What curriculum was followed in the schools? Each State had a standard list of text books to be used. Catholic additions to the standard texts included Readers. When articles by Br Hanrahan on Catholic schools first appeared in the ACR in 1924 they focused largely on teaching method. Marist Brother Brian Eatherington suggests that when the teaching of science first expanded in Catholic schools, the focus was on the physical rather than the biological sciences. Astronomy was prominent in schools such as Riverview since the 1800s but was often used to "prove" the existence of a designer God.

The role of numerous agricultural schools in Catholic education warrants exploration. The site of St Gregory's College Campbelltown was bought in 1902, largely financed by a Catholic businessman. He wanted a place to educate orphans for work in the bush as he loved the Benedictine tradition. Bishops promoted agriculture schools, for example Abergowrie College in Townsville and Inverloch near Goulburn. Bishop Hayes in the 1930s promoted farmer groups in Rockhampton diocese. In a similar manner some Church run homes, including St Vincent's at Westmead (NSW) and Rupertswood in Sunshine (Vic), involved the boys in horticulture as part of the school regime.

In Victoria there were several rural-based Church initiatives in the 1930s and 1940s that a strong "love of nature" character – Whitlands near Mansfield and Father Pooley's Maryknoll. However, a social agenda more than an appreciation of nature seemed to motivate these ventures as it had Catholic agricultural schools. An indication of this thinking was Catholic Rural Movement.¹⁵ A project near Wagga Wagga NSW looked to the problems of rural life with the tools of social philosophy rather than the biological sciences. The focus of the movement was the moral, social and political perspective of issues such as family, markets, virtues, commercial farming and rural health. It was human-focused so that even dust storms were looked at as a human health issue. Even though Bob Santamaria wrote *The Earth Our Mother*, publications of his movement like *AD2000* and *News Weekly* have cultivated Catholic ecological skeptics.

A more balanced publication that widely influenced Catholic thinking, one that in many ways accurately summarised the attitudes of both priests and school staffs to the natural world before Vatican II, was Archbishop Michael Sheehan's *Apologetics and*

¹⁵ *Manifesto on Rural Life* Milwaukee: The Bruce Pub. Co 1939, 3rd edition 1950.

Catholic Doctrine (1922).¹⁶ It carried a positive theological view of the value of creation - the natural world primarily shows forth God's glory in every creature as each images God, and secondly, the natural world is a source of happiness for humanity, not an alien place. Creation is seen as an ongoing act and exercise of God's providential care.

Sheehan's book also carried a positive view about the relationship between the biblical and scientific accounts of the natural world, a major area of renewed mis-interpretation in modern times. Sheehan teaches that the two cannot be in conflict since the Bible is about the Creator, and Science is about explaining the process. Scripture, Faith, Philosophy, Reason, Science, Hypotheses are all ways of searching the truth. Notably, Sheehan wrote that the Bible account of creation is a popular expression suited to the understanding of primitive people, and mankind generally. Hypotheses on evolution are acceptable as long as Catholics acknowledge that God is the Author of life. But his book condemned materialistic and atheistic evolution because they deny the existence of a personal God and hold that life is just the outcome of blind forces. Overall, the widely accepted work of Sheehan was indicative of Catholic belief about the natural world in the first half of the 20th century - the material world images God, and scientific interpretations of it are not against Catholic faith unless they hold for pure materialism. He gave Catholics a more sophisticated text than the Catechism and it provided a strong basis for respect and love of the natural world.

Temperance and Lifestyle simple

Greed as a false God and temptation by the devil are sentiments often echoed in the Bible (Col 3:5 and Eph 5:5) and, along with intemperance, came up regularly in Australian church writings from the late 1800s.¹⁷ The Bishops condemned "inordinate desire for wealth ... a snare of the devil." In the Catholic view, it was not that money or the drink were evil in themselves but in their misuse. Peter Malone wrote that the other side of Australian Spirituality is what he terms *Australian Sinfulness*.¹⁸ One sin is not listening to Land. St Francis is often presented as the domesticated patron saint of garden shows, yet his spirit was that of deep respect before the great gifts of creation, courtesy to fraternal brother sun and sister moon. He embraced sister poverty as an act of humility, recognising the rightful place of the human within, but not above, the greater scheme of things.

After Australia's white colonisation, simple living was a necessity for most people who could not afford to be wasteful. However, in a further step many Catholics embraced simplicity of life as a matter of faith. It is not many decades since the Sunday suit or dress children wore to Mass was changed before they went out to play. Chipping or

¹⁶ Michael Sheehan's *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* Dublin: Gill 1922 4th edition 1960, "Creation" in Part II pp 20-46. Chapter IV is on "The Origin of Life" and the "Origin of Living Species" (plants and lower animals). Chapter V on the "Origin of Man" argues for God as the origin of the human soul but accepts the possibility of theistic evolution for the human body.

¹⁷ ACR 1895 p. 175 and 1896 p. 11.

¹⁸ Peter Malone *Compass* 1984 v. 20 p 21.

breaking a dish while washing up was more likely called carelessness than an accident. People kept 'chooks' in the backyard and grew 'vegies'. For more than one Catholic environmentalist the family backyard was where ecological awareness began. In recent times, the limits that some people judge to be a cross is being taken by others as an opportunity to grow in solidarity with people mired in abject poverty, and to grow in respect and connectedness with nature's rhythms.

After three decades in the environmental fight, activist Father Sean McDonagh now suggests that a return to a largely non-meat diet may be an appropriate Catholic discipline in an age of ecological awareness. The traditional Friday fast could be revamped with contemporary meaning. Water from the tap may become a drink of choice. Otherwise the affluent may well condemn their brothers and sisters in the developing world to continued hunger and malnutrition, hobbling future generations with paying our bills, becoming the 'future eaters' that Tim Flannery writes about.

Australian Catholic emphasis on Social Justice

The question then arises, if Catholics had such positive beliefs about the created world, why were individuals not more visible in the emerging nature conservation movement in Australia and vocal in their respect for the world of nature?

A major factor in this silence seems to have been the Australian Church's emphasis on social justice. Aiming to raise the status of Catholics in Australian society, church leaders emphasised creating just social justice conditions where Catholics could flourish, as well as society's poor. While many individuals from the 19th century onwards were prosperous, they still saw the Catholic community as battling for position in Australian society - and often rightly so as evidenced by the struggle for equitable educational opportunities. The writings of the bishops of the early 20th century in Australia focused on the social justice issues of education, housing, jobs and a family wage.¹⁹ In this human agenda Earth was taken as a given.

From the point of view of many dedicated conservationists, the narrowly focused Catholic social justice agenda was a distraction. However, it is significant that the social involvement of the church schooled and trained many Catholics to take up environmental issues. Firstly, the ultimate goal of social justice was the common good. When environmental goods came to be seen as necessary parts of the common good, Catholics were primed to fight for them. Secondly, another part of the Catholic preparation to take up the environmental agenda was training in working cooperatively towards a goal. Believers were encouraged to be part of Catholic Action. Present day environmental and social forums at universities contain a high percentage of Catholics, even if not churchgoers. The environmental writer William Lines asked me for reasons why a disproportionately high percent of dedicated Greenies in Australia have a Catholic background. Several factors came to mind.

¹⁹ M. Hogan *Australian Catholics: The Social Justice Tradition* North Blackburn, VIC: Collins Dove, 1993.

Catholics see creation as good and integral to prayer life in the sacraments, and they have a tradition of organised action for the common good.

This leads on to two further questions, what actually happened that prompted some Catholics to become active on green issues, and why was it that many were lapsed-Catholics.

Catholic Attitudes to Nature after the Second Vatican Council 1962-65

As a part of up-dating the church, a Vatican II document *The Church in the Modern World* called for a new outward looking church mission, cooperation to help solve the major issues of our times (*Lumen Gentium* No. 10). The social justice agenda of the church in Australia and elsewhere received new impetus. Locally the Catholic Bishops Conference revamped the charter of church aid agencies and resourced them to promote justice, peace and a new dimension - development. Individual dioceses and Religious Congregations did the same. A National Lenten program in the parishes to collect funds for developing nations began. Increasingly its message carried a sophisticated education component for Australian Catholics on the causes of and just solutions to international injustice.

Social justice was the doorway through which environmental issues entered the public arena of the Catholic Church in Australia and the message of ecological justice came firstly from the Third World churches - "if you want to look after the poor, look after the earth".²⁰ What had begun in parishes by Columban Mission in 1972 as *Mission In Focus* by 1979 had developed into a formal *National Mission and Justice Program* for teachers and adult Catholics. Ecological issues were part of its analysis. Catholic Mission (Propagation of the Faith) was a sponsor of this program, a further indication that new mission thinking helped to form new Catholic attitudes.

When the Catholic Education system was being renewed in the later part of the 20th Century, the social justice agenda became integral to an expanded mission charter of Catholic schools. Social justice agencies forged links with education offices to raise teacher awareness. Environmental thinking was incorporated in Catholic Education Office publications such as the 1993 *A Sense of the Sacred* in NSW. Environmental factors became a part of aid assessments so that Australian Catholic Relief (now Caritas Australia) published an in-depth education kit for use in parishes and schools as part of an ecumenical program. Schools had a stimulus to go deeper into the interaction between religion and science, including the biological sciences.

Some dioceses later set up centres to educate for the environment. Prominent among them was Townsville where, through the vision and drive of Sister Mary McDonald, Mike Byrne and Paul Lucas, *Gumburu Centre* was opened in 1994. Sandhurst diocese did something similar. Respect for creation has now become a common theme in school prayer and major celebrations.

²⁰ D. Dorr, *The Social Justice Agenda: Justice, Ecology, Power and the Church* Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991.

What was first seen as the ethical-moral challenge arising from ecological awareness became a spiritual breakthrough from the 1980s. What was commonly called creation spirituality increasingly became an important underlying force in Catholic commitment to environmental issues. The insights in Bill Mollison's *Permaculture* influenced many Catholics. Some Religious Congregations formed eco-spiritual centres, such as in the Hunter and Brisbane valleys, and purposely brought environmental issues into their community living and justice commitment.

Brother Trevor Parton, Christian Brother, is one of a group in Victoria whose spirituality has led them to be publicly active: organising a Convention focused on the USA *Genesis Farm* experience; starting *Companions* for ongoing mutual support for Catholic environmentalists; arranging a grand launch of *Earth Charter* in Melbourne; setting up *Glenburn Eco-Centre* to provide retreats and experience-reflection programs. Trevor tells his story.

My science background prepared me for being gob-smacked by 'The Phenomenon of Man' in 1967. The notion of an evolving Universe being merged with traditional Christianity was very fascinating. So my initial contact with environmental stuff was more 'Universal.' I was also already an amateur astronomer. In the 80's 'Original Blessing' impressed me in that it allowed me to see more of the mystical tradition in Earth spirituality.

By the time John Paul II gave a loud endorsement to Catholic involvement on environmental issues as an essential part of faith his *1990 New Year Message*, at least some Catholics in Australia were primed to respond. The Pope named the ecological crisis as a deep spiritual issue, linking both the glory and the suffering of nature directly to God. He named Francis of Assisi as the Patron Saint of Ecology.

However, only a small percentage of Australian Catholics are aware that eco-justice or forms of creation spirituality even exist. Parishes rarely make them part of their Sunday celebration. But rather than condemning parishes for this, it highlights the need for each diocese to facilitate such incorporation. While eco-justice is regarded as orthodox, creation spirituality has received little encouragement from local church leaders, and even condemnation by equating it with New Age thinking. Some women, disappointed with slow renewal post Vatican II and the re-imposition of centralism and clericalism in the Australian Church in recent decades, at times seem to have adopted creation spirituality as a form of protest. However, a spirituality that takes the natural world seriously is here to stay. Archbishop Bathersby of Brisbane has shown leadership by linking environmental awareness and the deep mystery of Christ.

The entire life of Christians is an exploration into Christ. Each generation pushes back ever so slightly the envelope of his mystery ... One of the most significant developments in Catholic understanding of the Christian mission in more recent times is its embrace of creation in all its beauty and vitality.²¹

Liturgical Renewal post Vatican II

²¹ Archbishop Bathersby, *Launch of Catholic Earthcare Australia* 30 June 2002, Paddington, NSW.

One of the earliest and most influential documents to emerge from Vatican II reforms (1962-65) was the *Constitution on the Liturgy*. As Catholics believe that spiritual realities are proclaimed and reinforced through the ritual use of material things, the Constitution called each local church community to renew its spiritual signs, to ground them in a particular place and culture. John Paul II in Canberra (24.11.86) gave this invitation:

*Look, dear people of Australia,
And behold this vast continent of yours!
It is your home!
The place of your joys and pains,
Your endeavours and hopes!
And for all you Australians,
The Way to the Father's house passes through this land.*

New Australian hymns were written in the 1960s. A powerful one by Connolly and McAuley echoed the notes of the Last Post, "On the Cross, On the Cross". It reflected a new found freedom to explore Australian spiritual expression in music, art, architecture and local language. Liturgical meetings and magazines multiplied in an outbreak of local and pluralistic Australian Catholic prayer.²²

What was significant for the purposes of this paper was the ways in which Australian colour, literally and figuratively, entered Catholic churches - dusty browns, eucalyptus greens and wave breaking blues and white. The history of this liturgical renewal in Australia needs to be recorded, the people involved and the new earth based spirituality it introduced to many. The process of creating a renewed liturgy freed the imaginations of many Catholics to look for new ways of finding God, including its Earth based epiphany. This is the incarnation inspired work of church inculturation.

Catholic Stories of Ecological Conversion

Individual Catholics entered into Earthcare as a faith issue through a number of doorways linked with several forms of eco-justice and creation spirituality. They have been led to this by various personal loves – science, animals, feminism, art, poetry, bushwalking and more. To use modern Catholic terminology, in diverse ways each person had a *conversion experience*, possibly an *ecological vocation*. What began with a personal experience of nature and appreciation of the natural world led them to claim love of Creation as a part of their faith. Even Catholics who are no longer active members of a Church community often retain a love of the Bigger God present, revealed and experienced in nature. It was Pope John Paul II who coined the phrase *ecological conversion* in 2002.

Ecological conversion may be a slow process. One person writes,

I have not ever felt 'blown away' by any particular experience. Rather there is a continuing invitation and lure to move more deeply into a consciousness of

²² *Manna* magazine was prominent.

interconnectedness, wonder and celebration. My earliest memories of attentiveness to the natural world are embedded in a deep emotional connection with my maternal grandfather and his backyard veggie garden.

By way of contrast to this slowly evolving transformation, another person said, *[my ecological conversion] was like St. Paul when he was knocked off his horse ... I fell in love, in love with beauty, with mystery, with Earth. I suddenly experienced a relationship with the earth under me, and the stars in the sky. This connection transformed my whole being and my life was thrown into chaos. It was exciting, it was powerful, it was as though my life journey had been heading for this moment. And yet, while this was so, it was also a very painful time. In beginning to understand the Story of The Universe, I also was learning that this knowing would change my way of living and my values. My relationship with Earth and my story in the evolution of the universe has led me into a wonder and a passion for being that at time scares me.*

Another contrasts the revealing power of nature with that of the Scriptures, *The elements always revealed the Creator to me, not the Bible ... Nature is the primary and most formative revelation because all senses share in the revelation. ... [In the Scriptures] we know the ending to the story. But with nature in an ever expanding universe we do not know the ending ... we cannot even intelligently explain the beginning ... It is difficult for the 'written word' to compete with lightning and thunder storms, southerly busters, full moons, a rolling surf, the smell of the jasmin vine and summer showers. I think that one of the reasons for the Incarnation [maybe the most important one] was simply that God wanted above all, to have his Son in human form with human senses, to experience briefly this astonishing elemental wonderland that had evolved on planet earth ... to experience first hand as a human the trinitarian genius of creation. What ensued was a cosmic bonus for humanity ...*

Respect for Science grounds stories from Catholics

Respect for science and an understanding of ecological concepts give a solid grounding for environmental wonder and commitment. Ecology is a new science that combines exact data gathering, theories of evolution and systems analysis. The phrase *ecological systems* only came into common scientific use in the mid 20th century. Concepts such as inter-connection, mutualism and community as explained in ecology capture imaginations and foster wonder. Species' populations interact in multiple cycles, draw and distribute energy from the sun. They forge a mutually benefiting world with multi functions and roles that maintain the whole through time and space. Diverse life forms evolve, beautiful and almost unknowable – sources of wonder. The method and concepts of science are understood and respected as part of the spiritual journey of genuine followers of creation-spirituality. If not it can be romanticism.

Sr Marie O'Farrell remembers mapping the stars as a child. This childhood interest in nature was fostered as a novice and as a science teacher. She promoted 'hands on stuff' as she took her students to examine rainforests and sand-dunes in the Hunter Region and was in the first class offering Ecology as a subject at Armidale University in the late 1970s. She worked with biology teachers at Macquarie University and members of the Catholic Science Association. This background in science prepared Marie to welcome books by Thomas Berry on the Cosmic Lord and reclaim Celtic nature traditions. Ecology informed her faith and her teaching of theology.

The scientific tradition as pursued in universities and research bodies had Catholics in their ranks. Many might not have made science-faith connections, faced with a paucity of Church leadership at that time. Condemnation of writers like Father Teilhard de Chardin SJ did not help. However, Catholics like Brendan Mackey have made the connection.

My interest in the environment was influenced by holidays as a child to the Snowies, and seeing the creek where I played as a child bulldozed and turned into a concrete channel. My interest concretised as the result of a high school based environmental education program where we had to go out into the community and research an environmental issue. My team researched waste and recycling at supermarkets. The results were published in a small book called 'Bad Luck Dead Duck'. The third key experience was visiting an ancient gondwanic cool temperate rainforest and learning first hand about its long evolutionary history.

His faith took on a new dimension after the public stance of the Church in Australia on care for Earth and he accepted appointment to the Advisory Committee to *Catholic Earthcare Australia*. He had previously taken his commitment into the public forum as the organiser in Australia of *Earth Charter*.

Catholic Bush Walkers

Like many ecological pioneers, large numbers of Catholics were active in bushwalking clubs. Father Richard Coughlan inspired many in setting up bush-camps at Wooglemai and the Shack in the Blue Mountains outside Sydney. Likewise, Marysville in the Victorian mountains hosted Catholic bushwalking clubs.

Marist Brother Frank Richardson says, "My ecological life, it could well have turned out in the opposite direction. I could have easily become a carpenter and probably a demolition contractor if I followed an earlier aspiration." He remembers the hoop pine that his Dad brought from Dorrigo and planted in their backyard, but especially bush hikes as a scout and a novice, an experience he later introduced to his school students. A lasting impression for him was the many State Schools teachers who showed great dedication to nature, and people such as Thistle Harris who founded Wirrimbirra Nature. Brother Frank introduced Professor Steve Van Matre's *Earth Education Programs* into Catholic Schools and in 2000 started the annual weekend of *Spirituality of Ecology* at Wooglemai.

He concludes, "It has come together bit by bit or rather hit and miss - my habit of walking alone in the wildest places; meeting the right people; reading Sean McDonagh. He believes that "you have to have a hands on and feet on the earth approach to learning about Earth to know, love and serve the Creator and respect creation."

Aboriginal Experience and Australian Church Renewal

The first spiritual experience of this land Australia was Aboriginal. In an address to Aboriginal people at Alice Springs 29 November 1986 Pope John Paul II said:

*The Church herself will never be fully the Church
that Jesus wants her to be,
until you have made your contribution to her life, and
until that contribution
has been joyfully received by others.*

Pat Dodson, Aborigine and former Catholic priest, has often said and written that the Pope's vision has not been the usual experience of his people in a Church slow to respect their way of life, religion or belonging to Land.²³ Letters from the Mission to the Aborigines on Stradbroke Island from 1843 onward, speak of the strangeness of the land.²⁴ But during research on Caroline Chisholm, Eleanor Dark was surprised by how much Aboriginal-White contact there had been in the 1800's.

In Catholic circles, maybe the most consistent and sympathetic view of Aboriginal spirituality derived from Land has been presented by Father Eugene Stockton. This land based spirituality is radically different from the European farming tradition or even one of moral stewardship of Land. Stockton argued that Aboriginal insights and experience of sacred land is a God given gift to Australians that can be integrated into wider spirituality.²⁵ This theme of an Aboriginal contribution to spirituality and celebration was taken by Miriam-Rose Ungummerr at the 1988 Hobart Liturgy Conference when she spoke of Dadirri, describing it as "Inner deep listening and quiet still awareness"²⁶

In *Landmarks* (1990) Stockton develops ideas related to this inner deep listening and quiet still awareness to suggest some qualities of a contemporary asceticism. His ideas are not unrelated to scientific and economic assessments made in *The Limits of*

²³ Pat Dodson "Reflections on the Aborigines and the Church" *Compass* 1972 p. 34, and, "The Land our Mother: The Church our Mother" *Compass* 1988 p. 1.

²⁴ Cardinal P Moran *History of the Catholic Church in Australia* Oceanic Pub pp. 2-3 and 407.

²⁵ E Stockton "Sacred Story - Sacred Land" *Compass* 1988; E. Stockton 1988 "Coming Home to our Land" in *Tjurunga: An Australian Benedictine Review*; E. Stockton, "Voice in the Desert: Aboriginal Influence on Australian Spirituality", *Australasian Catholic Review*, lxxviii, (January 1991), p. 56.

²⁶ Miriam-Rose Ungummerr "Dadirri" *Compass* 1988 v. 25 p. 9.

Growth and appropriate human responses that need to be made.²⁷ This modern asceticism would cultivate the qualities of gentleness, patience, simplicity and compassion which are learnt from Land. This new asceticism goes beyond subjective choices or seeking human security in an age of environmental problems to rediscover older traditions in spirituality. Eugene sees patient and caring asceticism as a new way to evangelise society and enter into common cause with others.

Animals

Reflecting back on the book *Ecological Pioneers* I find there was scant reference to a love for animals. One of the major credentials of Francis of Assisi as the Patron of Ecology was his love for animals. Columban of Bobbio, as well as befriending animals, built his monasteries over the hot springs of old Roman ruins, thus showing appreciation for the comforting gifts in nature.

A young Catholic environmentalist, Tony Stuart, former chaplain at Macquarie University, reflects that he did not come to eco-theology through a social justice perspective which he believes possibly betrays a human centred approach as its key.

I guess for me, ever since I was a little kid I was obsessed with animals. I had lots of pets and always wanted to be a zoologist. I couldn't get enough of wildlife books or TV shows ... I wanted to do forestry while at school, which is what I did when I left. I spent a bit of time working in nurseries but was turned off working in horticulture by the excessive use of insecticides and fungicides. Love of the bush became incorporated into my faith as a matter of course, and also as a matter of experience because some of my most intense experiences of God have been in and through the bush.

Richard Wade lectures in theology at the Ballarat campus of the Australian Catholic University and has written extensively on the link between animals and humans.

I develop a Christian ethic of animals as an extension of the Roman Catholic ethical tradition, which has its origins in Aquinas' incorporation of insight from the Roman jurist, Ulpian. I am proposing this as a more appropriate ethic than Peter Singer's animal ethic ... [to be God like in our treatment of animals] is embodied in the virtues of justice, wisdom and compassion (Wis 9:2-4).²⁸

Australian Environmental Theology

Theology is usually seen as a systematic intellectual presentation that reflects people's experiences of God. While it is small, the quality of Australian environmental theology is impressive. Overseas writers were often the initial trigger - Diarmud O'Murchu, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Fritjof Capra and others. The 1990 Peace Day Message of John Paul II added a major stimulus. The Catholic bishops in

²⁷ A. King and B. Schneider *The First Global Revolution: A Report by the Council of the Club of Rome* London: Simon and Schuster, 1991; USA Government Department *Global 2000 Report to the President* Harmondsworth: *Our Common Future* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

²⁸ Richard Wade "Towards a Christian Ethic of Animals" *Pacifica* 13 (June 2000) p.202

Australia followed with a Statement. A whole issue of *Compass* ran on the environment in 1990 followed by a dedicated issue of *ACR* the following year. While most articles used traditional categories, an exception was a short piece by a layman, Stephen Luby called "The Vanishing Garden" that focused on the Land Australia itself.

Many of the major spiritual traditions in the Catholic Church – Celtic, Benedictine, Franciscan, Jesuit, Marist, Josephite - have attempted connections with Australian environment issues, some directly, others as an adjunct to social issues. For example, the Jesuits are committed to Aboriginal reconciliation, but it was sad that they did not publicly mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Teilhard de Chardin in 1955. Teilhard wrote:

*I think that the world will not be converted to the heavenly hope of Christianity if first Christianity does not convert itself to the hope of the world.*²⁹

Local historical commemorations in 1978 and 1988 occasioned Christian reflection on this Land Australia: the ecumenical ANZ Association of Theological Schools' conference was on "Towards Theology in an Australian Context"; both *Compass* and *ACR* published special issues and multiple articles in 1984 and 1987. While most articles had a historical or social perspective, an exception was Tony Kelly's looking to land as limitation to be respected.³⁰ It was in the vein of Stockton's work and the Pope's 1990 Message.

Father Denis Edwards of Adelaide has helped reclaim and develop positive attitudes towards the natural world within the Catholic theological tradition. His publications have gained worldwide recognition. He has explored in depth the relationship of the Trinity and each of the Divine Persons to the material universe. Importantly, he is one of the few theologians who explore the dark side of the natural world, its *tooth and claw*. A 'nice theology' which looked only to the beauty of creation would be unfaithful to revelation. Denis is a member of the *Earth Bible* project, involving collaboration between the ecumenical Adelaide College of Divinity and Flinders University. His method of interrogating the text with "suspicion" is similar to that used by feminist theologians. Just as the voice of women in the Scriptures has been ignored, the voice of Earth has likewise been overlooked in much Scriptural interpretation.³¹

However, Denis' commitment has a background.

As I look back on my involvement in ecological theology, two things come to mind as particularly important. I was born in Port Pirie, near to the lower Flinders Ranges. The Flinders Ranges and the Adelaide Hills have always been places that have brought me life. From my teenage year I have gone for short trips to the Flinders Ranges and found peace and renewal there. In the

²⁹ www.mnhn.fr/teilhard/indexE.html

³⁰ Tony Kelly "Theology in an Australian Context" *Compass* 1978 p. 1.

³¹ R. Ruether *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); I. Diamond and G. Orenstein, eds, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990).

sixties and seventies I was involved with groups involved with social justice, and read Latin American Liberation Theologians. Eventually this led me to the need for ecological theology, and this led me also to see the need for a real encounter between science and theology.

Paul Collins is probably the best known Australian Catholic writer and TV presenter on the environment. In his 2004 book *Between the Rock and a Hard Place* he has a chapter on "Catholicism and Ecology" (Sydney: ABC Books, 2004). Although raised in the city, in his forties he increasingly found true the words of Tasmanian photographer Peter Dombrovskis, "When you go out there you don't get away from it all, you actually go back to it all." Later experiences in the Tasmanian forests helped him reclaim Catholic mystical traditions about the presence of God in the natural world and resonate with the words of St Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), "the whole of this world is pregnant with God". Collins believes that "The role that faith and spirituality play in all of this is to re-endow the natural world with sacramental and iconographic significance."

Catholic Earthcare Australia

The role of individual diocese and official agencies of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference was significant in raising environmental awareness as a moral and spiritual issue. The Adelaide Archdiocese, under the leadership of Brother Peter Faulkner, established an *Ecological Commission*. Broome followed with a similar diocesan structure. *Caritas Australia* began to include environmental considerations in assessing applications for aid, and some exclusively environmental projects overseas were funded, such as ones among tribal people in the southern Philippines. A sister agency called the *Australian Catholic Social Justice Council* (ACSJC) expanded its notion of justice to include the environment. In 1991 and 2002 it published statements on Catholic environmental issues as well as position papers.

The setting up of *Catholic Earthcare Australia* (CEA) in 2002 was a major step.³² The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, as a body, endorsed and financed this new agency. A change in the title of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace to include the word *ecology* symbolised a new era (BCJDEP). Michael Costigan, Executive Secretary to BCJDEP, was instrumental in the appointment of Colin Brown, an environmental lawyer, as CEA's first Executive Director. Colin worked with a group of advisors from all States, among them Christine Milne who combined her faith with eco-political action as a member of the *Greens Party*, a commitment about which she shared publicly in the initial Cyril Hally CEA Lecture in 2002. CEA produced a video on the need for ecological conversion, "The Garden Planet", and copies were distributed throughout Australian Catholic parishes, justice groups, schools, and secular green groups. Environmental statements, endorsed by local bishops, were published on the regional areas of the Great Barrier Reef and the Murray-Darling Basin. Other CEA initiatives included producing DVDs on Rice and on Water, and a program to promote ecological audits on church buildings. Bishop

³² www.catholicearthcareoz.net

Michael Putney of Townsville diocese has taken up this challenge by starting an energy audit of diocesan buildings.

A major Statement on Climate Change by the bishops of CEA launched a three day Conference for 300 participants in Canberra in November 2005. Bishop Chris Toohey, head of the CEA Commission, Archbishop Adrian Doyle, and Bishops Pat Power, Eugene Hurley, and Chris Saunders participated in the full three days. International and local speakers on cosmology, science, Scripture, mission and theology addressed what many speakers called the most pervasive environmental problem the world faces, and its implication for Australia. Human induced climate means that Earth as the home of humankind is in grave danger. It may even be precipitously pushed by human action into a new evolutionary stage, a gross perversion of the plan of the Creator. The Planet will survive but maybe its conscious part will not, failing to fulfill its role in the evolutionary process of the *Story of the Universe*.

Many Religious Orders throughout Australia organised formal efforts to educate their members about environmental issues, encouraging them to adopt a more environmentally friendly lifestyle, and to lobby for the nation's ecologically sustainable future. Websites, such as that of the Queensland Conference of Religious Leaders, have been consistent in awareness raising and advocacy. Particular Orders made large financial commitments to set up retreat and environmental centres in most States. Accredited tertiary studies in environmental theology have been launched. The Franciscans have been major financial backers of CEA work. The Columbans used their mission magazine *The Far East* to report ecological abuse in developing countries and solutions being tried, 167 appearing between 1986 and 2004. As a lecturer and writer, Sean McDonagh drew on his work among the T'boli tribal people of southern Philippines and synthesised streams of environmental thought.³³ Initiatives in Australia include *Faith and Ecology Networks* in Melbourne and Sydney initiated by the author of this paper. Inter-faith liturgies, often in forests, and conferences have taken place.

In other areas, the art and literature world has been influenced in small ways by Catholics through the school system.³⁴ The music and songs of Dermot Dorgan have added social comment and humour to the environmental debates. Members of the Wollongong CEO have published several CDs. The Edmund Rice Centre under the influence of Jill Finnane led an inter-faith group of young people to have a painting display at Parramatta in 2006.

The Environmental Movement and a Catholic Future

³³ Sean McDonagh *Care for the Earth* London: Geoffrey Chapman 1990; *The Greening of the Church*, Quezon City RP: Claretian Publications 1990; *Passion for the Earth*, Quezon City, RP: Claretian Publications 1994; *Greening the Christian Millennium*, Dublin: Dominican Publications 1999; *Patenting Life? Stop* Dublin: Dominican Publication 2003. He prepared the Philippine bishops statement on the environment in 1988.

³⁴ *The Columban Calendar* art competition in schools 2003; Rosemary Crumlin "Blake Prize" *Compass* 1984 v. 19 p. 18; Gerard Windsor "Australian Literature and Catholicism" *Australasian Catholic Review* 1981 p. 115; *Compass* 1992 issue focused on communication - poets, books, painting, cartoons.

Patricia Wittberg writing on the *Rise and Decline of Catholic Religious Orders* likened their sociological functions to movements (New York 1994). Church groups were at their best when they took a role in social movements – education, health, de-colonisation, human rights, liberation, pluralism and the like. Catholic involvement in these movements was theologically expressed as building up local, culturally relevant churches. The future of the Catholic Church in Australia and its agencies will depend on their relevance to modern society and their ecological home.

Along with Climate Change, how Australia handles the application of Genetic Technologies (GT) will determine much of the nation's future. The negative effects of international patenting laws and GT have become obvious in developing countries and are now appearing in Australia. In the unfettered hands of unscrupulous agriculture-chemical companies, GT has the potential to compromise national food security and food safety, as well as the UN Biodiversity Agreement. Catholics such as Sandra Menteith and Alison Healy are bringing their professional backgrounds to these issues through education and political lobby groups. This is part of Alison's story.

I was born in Trangie beyond Dubbo on that vast plain and only moved into the city (Sydney) after I had finished secondary school. We spent all our growing-up years in a country environment that was not 'spectacular' in any way - and this seems to me an important point. It was nature in its smallness and apparent insignificance that we 'communed' with during those years: ... 'this is my place' ... the other major factor in my ecological awareness is ageing and seeing now pollution and damage in places which I recall in my youth to have been pristine.

Targeting the proper labelling of Genetically Engineered (GE) ingredients in foods has been the focus of Kim Healy from the Bentsleigh parish in Melbourne.³⁵ She gathered neighbours to campaign for *Safe-Food* in the local supermarkets. It was a practical hands-on commitment at the local level and the group's chosen way of combatting the push by agriculture-chemical food companies to influence government licensing of both the growing and sale of GE crops. The group cooperated with the Greenpeace campaign for True Food. *Safe-Food* started a newsletter and developed alliances with groups such as organic growers in Australia and lawyers working on food labelling. The group was not intimidated as it took on Monsanto or Ingham Chicken. A campaign success was to force Inghams to stop labelling a product GE free when the grain fed to the chickens could not be guaranteed as GE free. Kim combated the PR push that hoodwinks consumers. "These companies are either incredibly stupid or liars." She is one who sees campaigning for truth in the sale of food as integral to living her faith. She believes in giving safe food to her children and grandchildren and in building a sustainable future for all. To pursue a just future is a powerful motivation.

The ecological movement fosters an organic view of life while recognising the limits and diversity of Earth. This resonates with Catholic thinking. One has only to listen to

³⁵ *Bentsleigh Bayside Gene Alert: Campaign for Safe Food* PO BOX 2336 MORRABBIB VIC 3189.
bbga_safefoodcampaign@hotmail.com

the language of ecological science to recognize an affinity - community, interdependence, mutualism and the like. The recent writings of Pope John Paul II and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference confirmed this. What the Pope named as *ecological conversion* has brought into focus the fact that both authentic human fulfilment and a spirituality which upholds it take Earth seriously. Respect for the integrity of the natural world is integral to showing respect for humanity. Promoting life to the full is a seamless garment.

Another phrase of John Paul II taken up by the Australian bishops is *ecological vocation*. Just as Catholic work for social justice was a faith filled commitment to the common good, now that environmental issues are seen as integral to that common good. A new vocation called ecological has emerged. Catholic attitudes to the environment have continually changed over two centuries, not always for the better, but in recent times have taken a positive turn. What Julian Tenison Woods wrote of the unity in love for God and love for Earth in the obituary of his friend John Hinteroecker now seems to be a more common attitude in Catholic circles.

*... each new species of flower and insect was to him a new source of joy and thanksgiving to God.*³⁶

³⁶ Anne Player "Julian Tenison Woods - Priest and Scientist" *Australasian Catholic Record* 1989 p. 279.