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—Carol J. Dempsey, OP
University of Portland
Oregon

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—Dianne Bergant, CSA
Professor of Old Testament Studies
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois

Creation Is Groaning

Biblical and Theological Perspectives

Edited by
Mary L. Coloe, PBVM



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Preface

In recent years, as biblical scholars have engaged with current ecological challenges, two major hermeneutical projects have emerged. The Earth Bible project, under the leadership of Norman Habel from Adelaide, Australia, has proposed a way of reading the biblical texts according to six principles of eco-justice: the principle of intrinsic worth, the principle of interconnectedness, the principle of voice, the principle of purpose, the principle of mutual custodianship, the principle of resistance.¹ As is clear from this list, this project reads the Bible from the perspective of Earth. The second hermeneutical approach is led by David Horrell from the University of Exeter. The Exeter project takes a more explicitly theological approach to biblical interpretation and suggests a critical engagement with the text through particular doctrinal lenses such as the goodness of all creation; humanity as part of the community of creation; interconnectedness in failure and flourishing; the covenant with all creation; creation's calling to praise God; liberation and reconciliation for all things.² These two approaches are not necessarily conflicting,

1. These principles are elaborated on in Earth Bible Team, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," chap. 2 in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel, *The Earth Bible 1* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

2. These hermeneutical lenses are elaborated on in David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology; Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World* (London: Equinox, 2010), 129-36. David Horrell acknowledges the significance of the interpretive work of Ernst Conradie whose approach can be found in Ernst M. Conradie, "What on Earth Is an Ecological Hermeneutics [sic]?: Some Broad Parameters," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell, et al. (London: T & T Clark, 2010).

and together they can provide a critical Christian hermeneutic that is both theological and ecological.

In commenting on the Earth Bible principles, Dianne Jacobson suggested two additional theological principles: the principles of incarnation and promise.³ These two principles offer what the Exeter project considers to be doctrinal lenses that recognize the significance of the biblical text as Scripture that has shaped and guided the Christian tradition. The essays in this volume address these principles of incarnation and promise. They begin from a premise that the *Logos* of God, who called creation into being, became human in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and through his rising reveals the promise of creation's fulfillment.

The volume begins and ends with essays by two foremost Australian theologians, Denis Edwards and Anthony Kelly. Both address the centrality of the Christ event and its meaning for developing a Christian ecological theology, spirituality, and ethic.

Denis Edwards takes as his starting point the resurrection before moving to propose a unified understanding of creation and incarnation as one act of love, then outlines four characteristics of creation in the light of Christ—as enabling creaturely autonomy, empowering evolutionary emergence, accepting the limits of creaturely processes, and suffering with suffering creation. Tony Kelly begins his essay with a theological reflection based on the prologue of John's gospel, which holds together *Logos* and *Cosmos*. He then addresses the possible rhetoric that may assist theological reflection today in its task of speaking about God, creation, and Jesus against a backdrop of our current understanding of an evolving universe. He explores the rhetoric of fulfillment, participation, and cosmic extension.

Between these two essays by systematic theologians, four biblical scholars and theologians address particular scriptural texts that are significant in ecological conversations.

Antoinette Collins examines the highly problematic text of Genesis 1:28 with its language of “subdue and conquer.” Her work traces the developing interpretive tradition of the original Hebrew

3. Earth Bible Team, “Conversations with Gene Tucker and Other Writers,” in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, *The Earth Bible 2* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 32.

words as they are rendered in the later Greek, Aramaic, and Latin translations. She then offers three contextual interpretative approaches to this text: in the context of humanity made in God's image; in the context of an Earth-centered narrative; and in the context of Australian Aboriginal praxis.

During the experience of Exile, the prophet Isaiah held out the promise of a return to Jerusalem. An aspect of his prophetic imagination is his use of creation symbolism to speak not only of a New Exodus but also of the re-creating of a new people. Dermot Nestor examines this creation symbolism, considering if it may offer a source for ecological reflection in our own time. He examines how Isaiah's eschatological vision looks to the transformation of both the human and nonhuman creation joined in praise of God.

Eschatological promise comes to the fore in the following essay by Marie Turner who examines the liberating potential of Romans 8:11-19. Drawing on both the Pauline text and its resonances in the Wisdom of Solomon, Turner describes a vision of all creation, human and nonhuman, caught up together in the triumph of the risen Christ over death. All creation groans in the labor of bringing to birth the new potentialities of the resurrection.

The final biblical essay is by Mary Coloe who proposes that a theology of creation pervades the entire Gospel of John. She examines the beginning of the gospel and its relationship to Genesis 1, and the passion narrative and its echoes of Genesis 2. Her exegetical examination of the beginning and ending of the gospel leads to a consideration of some theological implications such as the cosmic dimensions of the incarnation and the Johannine presentation of salvation as re-creation.

This research and the resulting publication would not have been possible except for the generous grant from the Australian Catholic University. On behalf of all contributors, I thank the research committees within the university and the faculty of theology and philosophy for supporting this project.

Hans Christoffersen from Liturgical Press has also been most supportive and understanding of the aims of the project and the challenges to be addressed in order to bring ideas into essays and into a published volume. Thanks to all at Liturgical Press for their expertise and show of faith.

In the final tasks of editing this volume, I was fortunate to take some sabbatical time at “The Archer,” a creation spirituality center near Brisbane. Here, I was nourished by the beauty of the Australian bush and by a community whose way of living embodied respectful, nurturing relationships with Earth and all her creatures: walking, hopping, climbing, sliding, crawling, swimming, and flying. Thank you, Elaine, Tony, Ian, and Tilde.

Journal Abbreviations

ABR	Australian Biblical Review
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
NTS	New Testament Studies
SCE	Studies in Christian Ethics
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
TLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung

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Chapter 1

Creation Seen in the Light of Christ: A Theological Sketch

Denis Edwards

Is there anything specific to the Christian understanding of creation? Christianity certainly shares with Judaism, and with Islam, a great deal. From the ancient faith of Israel, it learns that there is only one transcendent God who is Creator of absolutely everything; that this transcendent God is immanently present to all creatures; that this God not only creates things in the beginning but is their constant source of existence, life, and fruitfulness; that this Creator delights in the goodness of creation; that the fruitfulness of creation is a result of divine blessing; that humans are uniquely made in the image of God (Gen 1:1-31).

The common biblical tradition teaches that human beings are called to till and to take care of creation (Gen 2:15), that human sin damages creation, but that God, nevertheless, commits God's self to creation by an everlasting covenant (Gen 9:8-17). It sees humans as standing before a Creator, and a creation, far greater than anything humans can grasp, as called to cosmic humility and to the recognition that other creatures have their own proper relationship to their Creator not mediated by human beings (Job 38:39-42). This same ancient biblical tradition locates human beings within an interrelated

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community of creation, a community of praise and thanksgiving (Pss 104, 148; Dan 3:51-90).¹

All this and much more belong to the common biblical tradition. What then is specific to the Christian view of creation? In what follows I will attempt a partial response to this question: first, by proposing that the Christian theology of creation begins from the resurrection of the crucified one; second, by arguing that creation and incarnation can be understood as united in one divine act of self-giving love; third, by outlining four characteristics of creation understood in the light of Christ—as enabling creaturely autonomy, empowering evolutionary emergence, accepting the limits of creaturely processes, and suffering with suffering creation; fourth, by suggesting that in spite of all ambiguity in our experience of the natural world, the revelation of God in Christ enables us to claim that creation is an act of divine love.

1. Beginning from the Resurrection of the Crucified Jesus

A specifically Christian theology of creation begins only with the resurrection of Jesus. Those who had loved Jesus in his lifetime, investing all their religious hopes in him and leaving all to follow him, caught up in his vision and in his person, had lost everything in his condemnation and death on a Roman cross. For Peter, Mary Magdalene, and the other disciples to meet Jesus risen from the dead and transformed in the glory of God was a radically new experience of forgiveness, peace, and hope. In the Risen One, they knew God. In the transfigured Jesus, the fullness of God was revealed. In Jesus, they experienced the boundless love of God and were caught up in a joy that echoes through the centuries in the life of the church.

In some way they knew then that all sin, all the violence of the world, and death itself were transformed by God's saving act. They experienced themselves as brought from death to wonderful new life, participating in the life of the risen Christ by the Spirit of God. For them God would forever be God revealed in Jesus and in the

1. This biblical line of thought has been explored by Richard Bauckham in his *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 37–102.

Holy Spirit given in his name. The crucified and risen Jesus would be forever the human face of God.

Jesus, in his life and even in his death, above all in his death, is revealed as “God is with us” (Matt 1:23). Jesus’ cruel, ugly death now becomes the radical sign of hope, the unthinkable expression of divine forgiveness and love without limits. And it becomes the expression of God-with-us and the promise of life in all our experiences of suffering, no matter how devastating. The disciples saw the light of God in the Risen One, and they knew his divinity in a way not possible during his lifetime.

The disciples of Jesus had to find words to speak of what was beyond words. They needed ways to express what they knew in the risen Christ, that he is from God the Creator, that he is this God-with-us. They found a fruitful insight in the biblical concept of Wisdom—a deeply traditional way of speaking of God’s presence and action. In the biblical tradition, Wisdom (Gk. *Sophia*) is personified as God’s companion in the creating and sustaining of all things (Prov 8:22-31; Sir 24:3-7; Wis 8:1-4). This ever-creative Wisdom of God comes to live with human beings. She makes her home among them and invites them to come to her table to share the food and drink she provides (Prov 9:1-6; Sir 24:8-22; Wis 8:16-21).

Jewish thinkers could see Wisdom come to us as Torah (Sir 24:23). The early Christians, in the light of the resurrection, saw Jesus as the Wisdom of God come to us in the flesh. *Sophia*, the one through whom everything in the universe is created, has now come to be with us in Jesus. The fullness of God’s Wisdom is revealed in the human face of Jesus, in his life and ministry, in his death and resurrection. Paul, a Pharisee learned in the ways of Judaism, tells us that it is Christ crucified who is the power and Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24), and he can say that everything is created in Christ (1 Cor 4:6). In John we find that, like Wisdom who comes from God to feed us at her table, Jesus-Wisdom feeds the five thousand on the mountainside; he himself is the very bread of life, that living bread that comes down from heaven to give life to the world (John 6:5).²

2. On the Wisdom theme in John 6, see André Feuillet, *Johannine Studies* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1964), 76–102.

A Jewish writer, like Philo of Alexandria, could use both Wisdom (*Sophia*) and Word (*Logos*) language to speak of God's creating and revealing presence. So in New Testament hymns, such as the prologue of John's gospel and the opening of Hebrews, we find Christ as the Word of God, in texts with a Wisdom structure of thought and in language that echoes biblical Wisdom hymns (John 1:1-14; Heb 1:1-3). For John, Jesus is clearly and unambiguously the creative Wisdom/Word of God—"all things came into being through him" (John 1:3)—now made flesh in our midst. In the late Pauline corpus, Christ is understood, like Wisdom, as the one in whom all things are created, the one in whom all things hold together, and, as "the firstborn from the dead," the one in whom all will be reconciled (Col 1:15-20) and recapitulated (Eph 1:20-22).

In this New Testament theology, there is an inner relationship between creation and incarnation. Everything in the universe is created by God through the eternal Wisdom/Word of God. This Wisdom/Word of God is made flesh in Jesus in order that the whole creation might participate with human beings in the salvation and fulfillment of all things promised in the resurrection of Jesus. Early theologians, like Athanasius, see Christ as the one true Word, Wisdom, and Radiance of God made flesh.³ He writes of John 1:3 as the "all-inclusive" text: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."⁴ He sees the Word of creation as becoming flesh in order that humanity might be deified, transformed by grace so that it might partake in the divine life of the Trinity. In his anti-Arian writings, he uses frequently both the verb *theopoiēō* and the noun he coins, *theopoiēsis*, to defend the eternal divinity and divine condescension of the Word, who is made flesh to bring about our deification: "So he was not a human being and later became God. But, being God, he later became a human being in order that we may be deified."⁵

3. Athanasius, *Orations against the Arians* 1:46, translated in Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 103.

4. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 2, translated in R. W. Thompson, *Athanasius, Contra Gentes and de Incarnatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 139.

5. *Orations against the Arians* 63, translated in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 96.

The Word/Wisdom of God is made flesh for the deifying transformation of human creatures and with them of the whole universe of creatures. So Athanasius writes of the Father's love for humanity, "on account of which he not only gave consistence to all things in his Word but brought it about that the creation itself, of which the apostle says that it 'awaits the revelation of the children of God,' will at a certain point be delivered 'from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rom 8:19-21)."⁶

2. Creation and Incarnation: God's Self-Bestowal

Is there a way of summing up in a few words what is most central to the specifically Christian view of God? With Karl Rahner, I see the concept of divine self-communication, or divine self-bestowal, as an encapsulation of what God does for us in Christ and the Spirit.⁷ The Christian experience is fundamentally of a God who gives God's self to us in two ways:

1. God gives God's very self explicitly and irrevocably to creatures in the humanity of Jesus, in all that makes up his life, death, and resurrection.
2. This same God gives God's self to creatures in the Holy Spirit in the free and abundant gift of grace and, in the Pentecostal experience, constitutes the community of disciples into the church of Jesus Christ.

God gives God's self to us in the Word made flesh and in the Spirit poured out in grace. Paul speaks of two divine "sendings": "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God" (Gal 4:4-5). The concept

6. *Ibid.*, 157.

7. See, for example, Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 136.

of divine self-bestowal in Word and Spirit can be seen as a brief summary of the central doctrines of Christian faith: of Christology, pneumatology, and trinitarian theology. It expresses what we experience of God in the economy of salvation and, because God is faithful, we rightly hold that the God we experience in our history, as giving God's self to us in the Word made flesh and the Spirit poured out, represents the true nature of God as Trinity.

What is revealed in the Christ-event is a God who gives God's self to creatures. Based on this revelation in Christ, Karl Rahner sees divine self-bestowal as defining every aspect of God's action, in creation, redemption in Christ, and final fulfillment.⁸ He sees creation itself as an act of self-giving love that reaches its goal only in the self-giving of the incarnation and in the final transformation of all things in the risen Christ. The creation of the universe of creatures is the first element in the free and radical decision of God to give God's self in love to that which is not divine; when God freely chose to bestow God's self in love, creation came to be as the addressee of this self-bestowal.

This means that God's self-giving in Christ is the real foundation of the history of the natural world. The mystery of God's will, we are told in Ephesians, has been revealed to us "according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10). It is not simply that the event of Jesus Christ unfolds against the background of nature. The story of the natural world, and everything that science can tell us about its evolution, is part of a larger vision of divine self-bestowal.⁹ The big bang and the expansion of our universe from a small, dense, hot state 13.7 billion years ago, and the evolution of life since its beginning on Earth 3.7 billion years ago—this whole story exists *within* the vision of the divine purpose.

Harvey Egan has said that the briefest possible summary of Rahner's theological enterprise in found is "his creative appropriation of

8. Karl Rahner, "Christology in the Setting of Modern Man's Understanding of Himself and of His World," in *Theological Investigations* 11 (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 219.

9. Karl Rahner, "Resurrection: Section D. Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (London: Burns and Oates, 1975), 1442.

Scotus's view that God creates in order to communicate *self* and that creation exists in order to be the recipient of God's free gift of self."¹⁰ While one line of Christian theology has held that the incarnation comes about simply as a remedy for sin, another, associated in Eastern Christianity, particularly with Maximus the Confessor (580–662), and in Western theology with Franciscan theology, exemplified in Duns Scotus (1266–1308), sees the incarnation as always the divine intention in the creation of a universe of creatures.

The incarnation, then, is not simply a remedy for sin or a corrective for a creation that has gone wrong. Once sin exists, of course, the incarnation expresses divine forgiveness in a most beautiful and radical way, but the incarnation is not something added on to creation; it is not a kind of backup plan. The incarnation is the meaning of creation. God freely chooses, from the beginning, to create a world in which the Word would be made flesh and the Spirit poured out.¹¹ The incarnation expresses the divine purpose in creating, which is the divine self-bestowal. Creation and incarnation are united in the one act of God: they are "two moments and two phases of the *one* process of God's self-giving and self-expression, although it is an intrinsically differentiated process."¹² The creation of the universe and all of its creatures and the incarnation are to be seen as distinct dimensions of the one act of divine self-bestowal in love. In the next three sections, I will explore briefly three characteristics of God's creative act understood as divine self-giving.

3. Enabling Creaturely Autonomy

How should we think of the Creator's interrelationship with the world of creatures? Are we to think of God as constantly intervening in the laws and conditions of the natural world (sometimes called "occasionalism") or as intervening at certain points in the process

10. Harvey D. Egan, "Theology and Spirituality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 16.

11. Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 184–87.

12. Rahner, *Foundations*, 197.

of evolution (as proponents of “intelligent design” seem to think)? Or are we to think of God as setting the processes of the natural world in place and then allowing things to run their course (the position of “deism”)? Thomas Aquinas offers a far richer theology of creation than either interventionism or deism; I see Aquinas’s response as a fundamental basis for contemporary dialogue between science and theology, with his metaphysical understanding of the relationship between primary and secondary causality.

Primary causality for Aquinas is simply God’s creative act that enables all creatures to exist and to act. God is unlike all creatures, in that it is God’s very nature to exist. The One whose nature is to exist causes existence (*esse*) in all other things. Creation is the interior relationship between the Creator and each creature by which the creature is held in being. If God were not interiorly present to each creature enabling it to be, it would be nothing. Aquinas sees all things in the universe existing in the community of creation only as created by God *ex nihilo* at each moment and as dependent on God entirely for their existence and action at every point. He sees God’s providence as governing all creation to its final end, which is participation in the goodness of God. To speak of God’s creative act as primary cause is to use the word *cause* in an analogical fashion. God’s creative act is radically unlike creaturely causality, radically beyond empirical observation, and radically beyond human comprehension.

In Aquinas’s thought, all the interacting agents at work in the empirical world are seen as secondary causes. This includes literally everything that can be studied by the natural and social sciences. God as primary cause is always and everywhere creatively and providentially at work in all creaturely interactions, in all the conditions, constants, contingencies, and laws of the natural world. God is not a cause like creaturely causes in the world and is never to be thought of as one amongst such causes. God acts creatively in and through creatures that are themselves truly causal. Aquinas sees the Creator as respecting the proper dignity of created causes because of “the abundance of his goodness imparting to creatures also the dignity of causing.”¹³

13. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 22, a. 3, trans. by Thomas Gilby, *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae*, vol. 5 (Cambridge, UK: Blackfriars, 1967), 99.

God's respect for creation's autonomy is such that God wants creation to have its own pattern of causality. Aquinas's theology leads to a genuine respect for the proper integrity and independence of the natural sciences. There is never a resort to the "God of the gaps" to solve a scientific problem. One who follows Aquinas would not be inclined to search for a place where God intervenes in creation because God is found in every dimension of creation: God "acts interiorly in all things," because "God is properly the universal cause of *esse*, which is innermost in all things."¹⁴

The divine act of creation is unique. On the one hand, creation is a relationship of absolute nearness and real dependence, where each creature is dependent on God for its existence and capacity to act. On the other hand, God establishes the creature in genuine difference from God's self, and in the relationship of creation—because of God's love and respect for creatures—each creature has its own otherness, integrity, and proper autonomy.

A fundamental principle of this relationship, one grounded in Aquinas's thought and often articulated by Karl Rahner, is expressed in the axiom: radical dependence on God and the genuine autonomy of the creature are directly and not inversely related.¹⁵ In everyday experience it seems that the more one thing depends on another, the less autonomy it has. The relationship of creation is the opposite: the closer creatures are to God, the more they can be truly themselves. We humans know this from the experience of grace: the closer we are drawn into the love of God, the freer we are. In relation to God, "radical dependence grounds autonomy."¹⁶ Creaturely integrity is not diminished because a creature's existence is dependent on God but flourishes precisely in this dependence. This is true not only in the divine relationship to human beings but also in God's interaction with all the dynamics of the natural world, including the emergence of our universe and the evolution of life on Earth.

14. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 105, a. 6, trans. by T. C. O'Brien, *St Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae*, vol. 14 (Cambridge, UK: Blackfriars, 1975), 79.

15. See, for example, Rahner, *Foundations*, 78–79.

16. *Ibid.*, 79.

4. *Empowering Evolutionary Emergence*

One of the radical changes in our view of reality, since the time of Aquinas, springs from the nineteenth-century discovery by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace not only of the large-scale evolution of life on our planet but also of the fundamental role played by natural selection in the evolutionary emergence of insects, eagles, whales, and human beings, and of their wings, eyes, and brains. Then, in the twentieth century, building on Albert Einstein's general relativity and the astronomical observations of Edwin Hubble, cosmologists discovered that the universe is not static but dynamic and expanding, and that it has emerged from an unthinkable small, hot, and dense state over the last 13.7 billion years.

How is this dynamic, evolutionary understanding of reality to be understood in relationship to God's creative act? In Aquinas's view, God's creative act sustains all creatures in existence (*conservatio*) and enables them to act (*concursum*). Clearly in the light of insights into the emergent nature of reality, Aquinas's view needs further development. It needs to be a theology of God's creative act as enabling and empowering the evolutionary becoming of the interconnected world of creatures. This task was taken up by Karl Rahner. He saw the need for a theology of creation that can account for the emergence of the new, as in the transitions from inert matter to living creatures, and from living creatures to self-conscious human beings.

Rahner sees the self-bestowal of the transcendent God as "the most immanent factor in the creature."¹⁷ What is the effect of this presence of God? A fundamental effect of God's creative self-giving presence, Rahner holds, is that creation itself has the capacity for emergence, to become more, to become what is new. Rahner calls this dynamic capacity for the new "self-transcendence." The two concepts of divine self-bestowal and creaturely self-transcendence are interrelated: it is God's self-bestowal that enables and empowers creaturely self-transcendence. This means that God's creative, immanent presence to all things not only enables them to exist, and to act, as theologians like Aquinas taught, but also to evolve into the

17. Rahner, "Immanent and Transcendent Consummation of the World," in *Theological Investigations* 10 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd), 281.

new. This idea of creaturely self-transcendence is worked out in Rahner's anthropology and in his evolutionary Christology, but it plays a fundamental systematic role in many aspects of his theological work.¹⁸

The "self" in self-transcendence means that the evolutionary capacity is truly intrinsic to creaturely reality. It comes from within the natural world. This means that the emergence of the new is completely open to explanation at the scientific level. God's creative presence operates at a strictly metaphysical and theological level. Just as God's creative act enables creatures to exist, so this same creative presence of God enables the new to emerge from within the natural world itself, according to the natural world's own processes and laws. Emergence is a creaturely reality, but it exists only because of God's creative act. God's presence in self-bestowing love enables creatures to exist, to interact, and to evolve.

Rahner links this pattern of self-transcendence to Christology, seeing Jesus Christ as both God's self-bestowal in the Word made flesh to the universe of creatures and, in his humanity, as the self-transcendence of the created universe to God. I believe it needs to be linked more fully to pneumatology as well, so that the emergence of the new, as when life first appears in a lifeless universe, can be seen as given through the Word and in the Holy Spirit. As Athanasius says, "The Father creates and renews all things through the Word and in the Spirit."¹⁹ He sees the Spirit as the one who "binds creation to the Word."²⁰ Much more recently, Walter Kasper has written of the Creator Spirit:

Since the Spirit is divine love in person, he is, first of all, the source of creation, for creation is the overflow of God's love and a participation in God's being. The Holy Spirit is the internal (in God) presupposition of communicability of God

18. See, for example, Rahner's *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (London: Burns and Oates, 1965); "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966); "Immanent and Transcendent Consummation," 273–89; and various passages in his *Foundations*.

19. Athanasius, *Serapion* 1:24, in Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 224.

20. *Ibid.*, 225.

outside of himself. But the Spirit is also the source of movement and life in the created world. Whenever something new arises, whenever life is awakened and reality reaches ecstatically beyond itself, in all seeking and striving, in every ferment and birth, and even more in the beauty of creation, something of the being and activity of God's Spirit is manifested.²¹

The Spirit of God is the Life-Giver who enables and empowers the emergence of galaxies and stars, the Sun, and its solar system, with Earth placed at the right distance from the Sun to enable life: the first forms of prokaryotic life; more complex life forms; the extraordinary flourishing of sea creatures; flowering trees and shrubs; the diversity of land animals, mammals, and human beings with their extraordinarily complex brains. God's presence through the Word and in the Spirit enables the universe of creatures to exist, to interact, and to evolve within the one community of life on Earth within a dynamic, evolutionary universe. God seems prepared to create through long, complex processes of emergence, respecting the processes, rather than through constant intervention. How might we think theologically of the power of God at work in all of this?

5. Accepting the Limits of Creaturely Processes

In the Christ-event, self-giving love is revealed as the way of God. The incarnation and, above all, the cross of Jesus reveal a God who enters into the vulnerability of love in a kenotic way (Phil 2:7). Paul sees Christ crucified as the very "power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). For Christian theology, the absolutely vulnerable human being on the cross is the true revelation of God. As Walter Kasper has said, in the extreme vulnerability of the cross we do not find the loss of divinity, nor the absence of divinity, but the true revelation of divinity.²² In Jesus crucified, divine power is revealed as the boundless power of unthinkable love. It is revealed as the omnipotence of love. The power of God revealed in the cross is not a power to dominate but a power-in-love.

21. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 1983), 227.

22. *Ibid.*, 195.

The resurrection of the Crucified reveals the power of this divine love to heal, liberate, and bring creation to transfigured new life. Divine power-in-love is capable not only of the vulnerability of the cross but also of bringing forgiveness, participation in divine life, and resurrection life to human beings. The resurrection promises fulfillment to the whole interconnected creation (Rom 8:19-25). To believe in God as all-powerful is to believe in the omnipotence of divine love and its eschatological victory over sin, violence, and death. The vulnerable self-giving love of Christ gives expression in our finite, creaturely world to the divine nature. This self-bestowing love, revealed in Jesus' life and death and culminating in the transforming power of the resurrection, is the true icon of the Triune God in our world and the true revelation of divine omnipotence.

This same pattern of divine power-in-love discovered in the Christ-event can be read back into the divine act of creating a universe of creatures. Power-in-love can be thought of as characterizing the whole divine act of creation, God's original creation, God's ongoing creative act, and God's eschatological fulfillment of creation. In all of this, God freely creates in a way that respects the limits and integrity of creaturely processes. This means that we can think of God as waiting upon the proper evolutionary unfolding of these finite processes.

In his late work, Edward Schillebeeckx has written on the defenselessness and vulnerability of God. He discusses this divine vulnerability at three levels: God's defenselessness in creation, God's defenselessness in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit's defenselessness in the church and in the world.²³ He explains that he speaks of the defenselessness of God rather than of divine powerlessness, because powerlessness and power contradict one another, whereas defenselessness and power need not: "We know from experience that those who make themselves vulnerable can sometimes disarm evil!"²⁴ In creation, he sees a kind of divine yielding on God's part as God makes room for the other, and in creating human beings, God makes

23. Edward Schillebeeckx, *For the Sake of the Gospel* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 88–102.

24. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 90.

God's self vulnerable to human freedom. Schillebeeckx sees God's act of creation as "an adventure, full of risks."²⁵ This does not do away with divine creative and saving power. This creative power, however, does not break into creation from outside. It comes from within creation and shows itself as "the power of love which challenges, gives life and frees human beings."²⁶

To say that God waits upon creatures is not to suggest that God is simply allowing things to run their course. God was with Jesus in his cross, holding him in love, and acting powerfully in the Spirit, transforming evil and death into the source of healing for the world. In creation, too, divine power can be seen as the transcendent power-in-love that has an unimaginable capacity to respect the autonomy and independence of creatures, to work with them patiently, and to bring them to their fulfillment. This is not divine passivity but the creative and powerful waiting on another. God works with creaturely limits and waits upon them with infinite patience. By creating in love, God freely accepts the limitations of working with finite creatures.

Based upon the incarnation and the cross of Christ, it can be said that there may be circumstances when God freely accepts the limitations of creating in and through finite entities and processes, because of God's love and respect for finite creatures and for creaturely processes. God achieves the divine purposes, not in ways that override the proper autonomy of creaturely processes, but by an infinite power-in-love that lives within the process and accompanies creation in love, promising to bring it to healing and fulfillment in Christ.

6. Suffering with Suffering Creation

Evolution is a costly process, involving not only cooperation and symbiosis but also creatures preying on other creatures and competing for resources. Random mutations provide novelty that enables evolutionary emergence, but they more often bring damage and suffering. Death is intrinsic to the pattern of evolutionary emergence that can occur only through a series of generations. The costs of evolution, and above all the terrible costs of human violence, have

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 91.

raised important theological questions not only about God's power but also about God's engagement with the suffering of creatures.

Does God suffer with suffering creatures? For thinkers like Irenaeus and Athanasius, the concept of divine impassibility defends the biblical and Christian concept of the radical transcendence of God and does this precisely in opposition to Hellenistic views. At the center of their thought is the Christian concept of *creatio ex nihilo*. Because God is radically other than all creatures, God can enable the whole world of creatures to exist constantly and faithfully. God's impassibility defends divine otherness against tendencies to see God as trapped within the vicissitudes of creation, as at the mercy of changing human emotions, or as arbitrary and fickle like pagan gods or human tyrants. It points to the constancy and fidelity of divine love in creation, salvation, and final fulfillment.

These are fundamentals of Christian theology that must, and can, be safeguarded, I believe, in a contemporary theology of a God who suffers with suffering creation. The way forward is by reflection on the trinitarian, eternal, constant passion of love that freely chooses to create a world of creatures and to embrace these creatures in the incarnation. The particularity of the incarnation can teach us that this divine passionate love is not only general but engages with the particular and the concrete. Divine passionate love embraces each specific creature in the divine act of creation and new creation in Christ. In the light of the incarnation and the cross, it is appropriate to speak of God's compassionate suffering with suffering creation as long as compassionate suffering with creatures is affirmed of God by way of analogy; where it is understood that God's capacity for feeling with creation, springing from eternal divine passionate love, is a capacity that God possesses in a completely transcendent way, infinitely beyond human capacities for empathy with others.

Walter Kasper points out that to speak of divine suffering with creation is not the expression of a lack in God but the expression of a capacity to love in a transcendent and divine way. God does not suffer from lack of being but suffers out of love that is the overflow of the divine being.²⁷ Suffering does not befall God but expresses the

27. The Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel contrasts the biblical theology of divine pathos, expressed in the prophetic literature, with the Greek

divine freedom to love. A self-giving love involves allowing the other to affect oneself. Thus, “suffering and love go together.”²⁸ This is not a passive being-affected but a free, active allowing the other to affect oneself. Because God is love, God can suffer with us. For Elizabeth Johnson, too, analogical speech about the suffering of God does not mean that God suffers because of some intrinsic deficiency or because of some external force. It does not mean that God suffers by necessity or that God suffers passively. It points, rather, “to an act of freedom, the freedom of love deliberately and generously shared.”²⁹ Divine suffering with us springs from the compassionate loving act of the triune God in creating a world of creatures and embracing them in redemptive love.

Christian believers are surely right to see in the cross the symbol of a God who loves us with a love that involves a compassion, a suffering with us, beyond any human capacity for being with another in their pain. It is not that the human physical and emotional states of Jesus are simply transferred to the life of the eternal Trinity. Rather, it is that the passionate love of God-with-us expressed in the cross represents the truth of the transcendent God’s capacity to be with creatures in boundless passionate love. The gospel tradition of the glorious risen Christ still bearing the wounds of the cross suggests that the sufferings of creation are forever remembered and taken up in the healing, compassionate love of God.

7. Beauty and Violence in Nature and the Work of Love

Annie Dillard’s *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is a powerful reflection on the natural world, based on a year of living quietly at Tinker Creek, in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia, observing nature closely, backed by wide reading in the sciences and in theology.³⁰ Her work asks

philosophical concept of God’s immutability; see Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 2. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1–47.

28. Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ*, 196.

29. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 266–67.

30. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1974, 1999).

fundamental questions: Is the natural world unutterably beautiful, so that if we took the time to really see we would be transformed? Or is it extremely wasteful and violent in a way that we seldom face? The same questions arise for many who watch the brilliantly executed television documentaries on the natural world presented by David Attenborough and others.

I am convinced that the natural world is profoundly beautiful and that its beauty has always nourished human existence, art, and spirituality. Over and over again, in ever new ways, it is experienced as absolute gift. But it is also deeply ambiguous. No one can delight in the predation, the pain, and the enormous scale of loss in nature. In our time, we know, in a way that earlier generations did not, that the costs are not extrinsic but profoundly built into evolutionary emergence and the way the natural world functions. The beautiful and the violent are in many cases two sides of the one reality. As Holmes Rolston puts it, “The cougar’s fangs have carved the limbs of the fleet-footed deer, and vice versa.”³¹

So can we affirm without reservation simply from observation that the natural world is unambiguously good? I think that, from empirical observation alone, this could be said only with important reservations. Biblical faith, of course, does pronounce creation as good. But as Christopher Southgate notes, in his important treatment of these issues, biblical faith actually affirms both the “good” and the “groaning” of creation.³² Without revelation, simply on the basis of observation and reason, it is possible to come to the conclusion that there is a Creator and to believe in the goodness of the Creator. But there are also real obstacles in the way of these positions because of the ambiguity and violence in the natural world, of which we humans are a part.

For Christianity, the affirmation that creation is unambiguously the work of love is an affirmation that comes from revelation in Christ. It is affirmed on the basis of faith in the God revealed in Christ and in hope in this God’s eschatological healing and fulfillment.

31. Holmes Rolston III, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* (1987; repr., Philadelphia and London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), 134.

32. Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 1–18.

The nature of God is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, in his life, death, and resurrection, as a God of radical love. On this basis, on faith, we can affirm not only the unqualified goodness of the Creator but also the unqualified goodness of creation when it is fulfilled in Christ. Meanwhile, creation is “groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:22-23). The rest of the natural world, too, needs redemption, healing, and transfiguration in Christ. What is not obvious to empirical observation can be affirmed in the light of Christ: the natural world is entirely the work of divine love, destined for fulfillment in God. It was long ago affirmed on the basis of Jewish faith by the author of the Wisdom of Solomon:

For you love all things that exist,
and detest none of the things that you have made,
for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.
How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?
Or how would anything not called forth by you have been
preserved?
You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love
the living.
For your immortal spirit is in all things (Wis 11:24–12:1).