

**New Testament Eschatology and the Environmental Crisis of South Korea:
Toward a Contextual Christian Environmental Ethic**

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Abstract

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The first purpose of this M.A thesis is to scrutinize understandings of the apocalyptic texts of the New Testament as propagated by early Western missionaries to Korea in order to unveil the origins of the indifferent attitude of South Korean Christians toward environmental issues. My working assumption is that the tremendous influence of certain brands of Western theology brought by Western missionaries from their home countries are the ultimate root of this apathetic stance of South Korean Christians, especially Western theologies associated with biblical literalism and dispensationalism

The second purpose of this M.A thesis is to find a way to use the New Testament as a resource to ground a Korean environmental ethic by investigating selected eschatological visions of the New Testament, namely, Mk 1:12-13; Rom 8:19-23; and Rev 21:1-7, 22:1-5. In general, the eschatological visions of the New Testament texts are characterized by various and ambivalent voices. However, my argument in

this project will be that eschatological New Testament texts describe cosmic renewal of creation through transformation and reconciliation of creation, rather than abolition of creation. Moreover, the earliest Christian eschatologies are *inaugurated* eschatologies which illustrate that the Kingdom of God and the new creation already have come into being for believers in the tension between two different eras, the “already” of fulfillment and the “not yet” of consummation. The image of the nonviolent relationship between the human Jesus and “wild” nonhuman animals (Mk 1:12-13), the hope for the reconciliation of all creation through God’s action in Christ (Rom 8:19-25), and the symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-7; 22:1-5) enable us to uncover an environmental ethics to better fulfill God’s eschatological vision of the reconciliation of all creation in two distinct eras, “already” but “not yet.” Much work has already been done on these themes, but much still remains to be done.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Argument.....	1
Methodology.....	2
 Chapter One: The Apathetic Attitude of Korean Protestant Churches	
toward Environmental Issues	4
The Origins of the Apathy.....	4
Dispensational Premillennialism: The Theology of the Early American missionaries to Korea.....	8
Literal Interpretation of the Bible.....	8
The Second Coming of Christ in Dispensational Premillennialism.....	9
Dispensational Concept of Israel and Church.....	10
Ecological Shortcomings of Dispensational Premillennialism.....	11
Pessimistic Attitude toward the Future.....	11
Escapist Conception of the Rapture (Eco-unfriendly Eschatology).....	12
 Chapter Two: The Eschatological Vision of Mark 1:12-13:	
Peaceful Kingdom as the Reconciliation of All Creation	14
Introduction.....	14
The Relationship of Mark 1:12-13 and Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:17-25.....	15
The important Concepts: The Wilderness and the Wild Animals.....	20
The Wilderness.....	20
The Wild Animals or Wild Creature	26

Jesus and the Peaceable Kingdom.....27

Conclusion: Mark 1:12-13 as Ethics through an Eco-theological Lens.....33

Chapter Three: The Eschatological Vision of Romans 8:19-25:

From the Groaning of Creation to Its Glorious Freedom through Christ.....35

Introduction.....36

The Relationship of Romans 8:19-25 and Genesis 3: 17-19.....36

Ecological Implications of Genesis 3:17-19.....38

The Important Concepts: Creation, Bondage to Decay and Subjection to Futility39

The Creation.....39

A Short History of the Interpretation of Creation.....39

Bondage to Decay and Subjection to Futility.....40

The Groaning, Waiting, and Liberation of Creation.....43

Conclusion: Romans 8:19-25 as Ethics through
an Eco-theological Lens.....45

Chapter Four: The Eschatological Vision of Revelation 21:1-7 and 22:1-5:

**The Symbiotic Interdependence of Earth and its Inhabitants
in the New Jerusalem.....47**

Introduction.....47

The Relationship of Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5 and Genesis 1:1-2:4a,
and Ezekiel 47:1-12.....48

The Important Concepts: A New Heaven and a New Earth,	
The Vanished Sea, the River of Life and the Tree of Life.....	51
A New Heaven and a New Earth.....	51
The Vanished Sea.....	53
The River of Life.....	56
The Tree of Life.....	58
Conclusion: Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5 as Ethics through	
an Eco-theological Lens.....	59
Conclusions.....	61
Bibliography.....	64

Introduction

Argument

What are the eschatological visions of the New Testament? Do these visions give readers an image of desolate darkness or of bright hope in the future concerning nature or the ecosystem? Dispensationalists who have similar theological understandings of eschatological visions as Premillennialists argue that God will destroy all ecosystems and faithful Christians will be going up to the kingdom of God in order to meet God and to live there.¹ On the other hand, as a sharp critic of this point of view, Catherine Keller expresses her anxiety about this approach given the environmental issues that come with it, saying that “human accountability for the poly-systemic eco-social injustices of the earth is swallowed by the ultimate hope for resurrection into deathlessness.”² Keller’s criticism properly shows us the problem of the theology of Dispensationalism in terms of its eschatological vision and the ethical problems which accompany it.

As a matter of fact, a proper understanding of the eschatological visions of the New Testament is a very important task for believers, because not only does an understanding of these eschatological visions shape Christian’s perspectives about the future of the earth, but it also shapes these Christians’ views of their responsibilities toward the environment. Taking into account this concept, this thesis will first deal with the origin of, or culprit for, the indifferent attitude of the Korean Protestant

¹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 19.

² Catherine, Keller, “No More Sea: The Lost Chaos of the Eschaton” in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 188.

Church toward environmental issues. Second, this thesis will address the eschatological visions of the New Testament, especially Mark 1:12-13; Romans 8:19-23; and Revelation 21:1-22:5, in order to properly understand them. Too often eschatological visions are understood as the total destruction of the eco-systems. But by re-reading the passages above, I argue instead that there are New Testament eschatological visions of reconciliation and renewal or recovery of the proper relationships within all creation. The presupposition of this thesis in dealing with this issue is that the tremendous influences of certain brands of Western theology, especially biblical literalism and dispensationalism, are the ultimate root of this indifferent attitude of South Korean Christians. Moreover, misunderstandings of eschatological texts in terms of humanity's relationship to nature promoted the ultimate root of this apathetic stance of the Korean Protestant Church.

Methodology

As a hermeneutical method for approaching these eschatological texts, I apply the eco-justice principles which the Earth Bible Team has formulated. They are as follows:

1. The Principle of Intrinsic Worth The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.
2. The Principle of Interconnectedness Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
3. The Principle of Voice Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
4. The Principle of Purpose The universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
5. The Principle of Mutual Custodianship Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community.
6. The Principle of Resistance Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the

hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.³

Moreover, I also utilize three key strategies of interpretation, namely suspicion of the texts' anthropocentrism, identification with non-human characters, and retrieval of the perspective or voice of Earth. The six eco-justice principles are criteria to discern if the content of passages in the Bible invites responsible treatment of the environment. In addition, the three key interpretive strategies further strengthen these principles.⁴

³ The Earth Bible Team, "Six Ecojustice Principles," in *Reading from the Perspective of the Earth*, edited by Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski (Cleveland, Ohio: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24.

⁴ The Earth Bible Team, "Ecojustice Hermeneutics: Reflections and Challenges," in *The Earth Story in The New Testament*, edited by Norman C. Habel and Vicky Balabanski (Cleveland, Ohio: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 1-14.

Chapter One

The Apathetic Attitude of Korean Protestant Churches Toward Environmental Issues

The Origins of Ecological Apathy

The lack of environmental concern among the majority of Korean Christian churches haunts the political as well as the natural landscape of the country. The Four Rivers Project (July 2009 – October 2011) in South Korea which was initiated by former president Lee Myung-bak, also a devout Christian elder in a Presbyterian church, has caused environmental damage to South Korean rivers.⁵ Impacts include changing the natural flow of the rivers, increased erosion, a severe algae outbreak, destruction of ecosystems (disappearance of endangered fish) and the separation of people from nature.⁶ In general, the South Korean ecosystem is in a precarious situation, not only because of a serious sandy dust phenomenon related to the rapid industrialization of China but also due to radiation leaks from Japan's nuclear power

⁵ The Four Major Rivers Project is a multi-purpose growth project on the Han River, Nakdong River, Geum River and Yeongsan River in South Korea. The overall project was broken into three sub-projects: revitalizing the four rivers, undertaking various projects on their 14 tributaries, and refurbishing other smaller-sized streams. The project had five key objectives as well: securing abundant water resources to combat water scarcity; implementing comprehensive flood control measures; improving water quality and restoring river ecosystems creating multipurpose spaces for local residents; and regional development centered on the rivers. More than 929 km of rivers and streams, which is twice as long as the distance from the northernmost point of South Korea to its southernmost point, will be restored as part of the project, with a follow-up operation planned to restore more than 10,000 km of local streams. More than 35 riparian wetlands will also be reconstructed. However, in the view of many critics of the project, it is really a camouflaged effort to build a 340 km canal connecting Seoul and Busan, the two largest cities in South Korea. The sites of the project and the actual construction that has been done on it have nothing to do with its stated objectives. See further, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Major_Rivers_Project: http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/598190.html

⁶ Min Gull Jeung, "The Four Major Rivers Project: Destruction of East-Asian Ecological Axis as an Example of Social Retrogression Derived from Anti-ecological Thought," *Environmental Philosophy*, 10 (2010): 21-43.

plants and because of global warming which causes further contamination of the air, earth, rivers, and sea of Korea. In July 2009 while most civic organizations, environmental groups and religious groups, including Buddhists and Catholics, participated in a movement against the Four Rivers project due to the potential environmental damage, most Protestant denominations either supported it or evaded comment on whether they approved of the plan because of the economic benefits of the project.⁷ Such attitudes raise a question: what or who is responsible for them?

In order to find the origin of the indifferent attitude of the Korean Protestant Church toward environmental issues, it is necessary to investigate the theology of the early Western missionaries to Korea which profoundly impacted the belief system of the early Korean Christians. The majority of the early missionaries to Korea taught eschatological concepts according to the viewpoint of Dispensational Premillennialism (whose main doctrines I outline in the next section) and focused on a literal interpretation of the Bible. Thus, it is relevant to study the impact of the history of western missionaries to Korea and their western theology that they brought with them, in particular, the mainstream theology of Christian America out of which many missionaries were sent to Korea.

According to In Soo Kim, Korean Protestantism was launched by the early Western missionaries to Korea, such as Horace G. Underwood, Horace N. Allen, J. S. Gale and S. A. Moffett who came to Korea at the end of the 19th century.⁸ Moreover,

⁷ Shin Young Kim, *An Analysis of Environmental Discourses between Catholic and Protestant in Korea Surrounding the Four-River Project: Focused on Critical Discourse Analysis of Statements* (Seoul, Korea: M.A Thesis in Department of Environmental Planning Graduate School of Environmental Studies of Seoul National University, 2013), 92-102.

⁸ In Soo Kim, *Asian Thought and Culture: Protestants and the Formation of Modern Korean*

according to Kyung-Bae Min, the majority of Western missionaries who came to Korea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were Americans who were deeply influenced by American millenarian movements. These included Moody's Student Volunteer Movement, the First International Conference, and the Niagara Bible Conference, all of which espoused the theology of a Dispensational Premillennialism. These three movements heavily influenced 20,000 students to go to foreign countries like South Korea for missionary work from 1888 to 1920.⁹ Among 1,143 Western missionaries to foreign countries who were profoundly influenced by Moody's Student Volunteer Movement, 31 went to Korea.¹⁰ A. J. Brown illustrates well the theology of American missionaries to Korea, saying that

The typical missionary of the first quarter century after the opening of the country was a man of the Puritan type. He kept the Sabbath as our New England forefathers did a century ago. He looked upon dancing, smoking, and card playing as sins in which no true follower of Christ should indulge. In theology and Biblical criticism, he was strongly conservative, and he held as a vital truth the premillennial view of the second coming of Christ. Higher Criticism and liberal theology were deemed dangerous heresies. In most of the evangelical churches of America and Great Britain, conservatives and liberals have learned to live and work together in peace; but in Korea the few men who hold "the modern view" have a rough road to travel, particularly in the Presbyterian group of missions.¹¹

Accordingly, the eschatological concept of Dispensational Premillennialism heavily influenced the early Korean Church leaders and became the dominant view

Nationalism, 1885-1920: A Study of the Contributions of Horace G. Underwood and Sun Chu Kil (New York: Library of Congress, 1996), 2

⁹ Paul Hang-Sik Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology: Experiences of the Korean Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2011), 134, 145. "They are H. G. Underwood, J. S. Gale, S. A. Moffett, W. M. Barid, Graham Lee, W. L. Swallen, F. S. Miller, A. A. Pieters, J. E. Adams, Norman C. Whittemore, William B. Hunt, Cyril Ross, H. M. Bruen, Arthur G. Welbon and so on"(ibid., 134).

¹⁰ Ung Kyu Pak, *Milennalism in the Korean Protestant Church: Asian Thought and Culture* (New York and Washington: Peter Lang, 2005), 84.

¹¹ Arthur Judson Brown, *The Mastery of the Far East* (Seoul: Han guk kidokkyo Yoksa Yon Guso, 1995), 540.

among the early Korean Christians.¹² For example, Sun-Ju Kil (1869 -1935) was the originator of the dawn prayer meetings and served the famous Central Church as a senior pastor for twenty years. He was the most important figure in the Presbyterian Church and was called “the father of the Korean church” at that time. Sun-Ju Kil, however, was a Premillennialist. He enjoyed teaching and preaching the Revelation of John by interpreting it with the eschatological concepts of Dispensational Premillennialism; he even wrote the book titled *Malsaehak Youngu* which means “A Study of Eschatology taking into account literalism and the impending second coming of Christ.”¹³ According to Ung Jyu Pak, Samuel H. Moffett¹⁴ who was one of the early missionaries to Korea hoped that Kil would build a Korean society based on his theology. His teaching in terms of eschatology enjoyed popularity among many people because it gave them a future hope to escape from the agony of the oppression of Japanese rule.¹⁵

Another example is Ik-Doo Kim (1874 – 1950) who was a famous person in a powerful prayer and healing ministry who preached eschatological messages numerous times stressing the future aspect of the millennial kingdom and an otherworldly view of salvation. He faithfully followed the theology of premillennialism and Moody revivalism. Importantly, he was one of the leaders of the

¹² Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology*, 137.

¹³ Pak, *Milennialism in the Korean Protestant Church*, 133-34.

¹⁴ Samuel A. Moffett served in Pyongyang in North Korea for 46 years as the first Protestant missionary to Korea. He contributed to create private Christian schools as well as to build the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pyongyang in 1901, currently located in Seoul, South Korea. See Jane Lampman, *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 7, 2007:- <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0307/p14s01-lire.html>.

¹⁵ Ung Kyu Pak, *Milennialism in the Korean Protestant Church*, 133.

Korean holiness Church movement which actively propagated Christianity in Korea.¹⁶ Furthermore, Hyung-Nong Park, who was a distinguished professor of Pyongyang Theological Seminary, and Yun-Sun Park, who was one of the greatest Korean bible scholars (and a Calvinist theologian), were also advocates of Dispensational Premillennialism.¹⁷ As seen from the examples above, not only the majority of the early missionaries to Korea were Americans who taught the theology of Dispensational Premillennialism, but it also became the dominant viewpoint of some of the most influential early Korean Christians.

Dispensational Premillennialism: The Theology of the Early American Missionaries to Korea

Dispensational Premillennialism was embraced by many North American Evangelicals in the late 19th century.¹⁸ Its important concepts are as follows: first, the literal interpretation of the Bible; second, the second coming of Christ; third, the subsequent establishment of the millennial kingdom; fourth, the rapture which will occur before the seven- years tribulation, which will be caused not only by the Antichrist's oppression but also by God's punishment; and fifth, the dispensational concept of Israel, which means God has a special plan to the nation of Israel and blesses them with material.¹⁹

Literal Interpretation of the Bible

¹⁶ After listening his preaching, more than 200 people became pastors in the 1920 – 1930s, see Ibid., 140-45.

¹⁷ Paul Hang-Sik Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology*, 147-54.

¹⁸ Paul S. Boyer, "Millenarianism" in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity* edited by Daniel Patte (New York, N.Y; Cambridge University Press, 2010), 807-10.

¹⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology: Making Sense of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 97-122.

The most distinguishing feature of Dispensational Premillennialism is the literal interpretation of the Bible, particularly of prophecy. Paul Enns considers literalism the basic hermeneutical principle of the Dispensational Premillennialist, saying that

Literal interpretation. Dispensationalists follow a consistently literal method of interpretation, which extends to eschatological studies. Many conservative nondispensationalists interpret the Bible literally with the exception of prophecy; dispensationalists apply the literal scheme of interpretation to all the disciplines of theology. Although the term *literal* may raise questions in some quarters, it should be understood as the normal, customary approach to any literature—the way all language is commonly understood. *Literal*, when describing the hermeneutical approach, refers to interpretive method, not to the kind of language used in the interpreted literature. Literal *interpretation* recognizes both literal and figurative language.²⁰

Moreover, Dispensational Premillennialists have guiding hermeneutical principles that are based on literalism. The first of these principles is that it is most important to keep in mind the immediate context in order to interpret the Bible properly. The second is that an interpreter should see instances of figurative language in the Bible (along with grammatical considerations) as connected with the historical context. The third is that the New Testament not only unveils the literal fulfillments of the promises in the Old Testament, but it also shows that the special plan for Israel is unlike God's plan for the church. The fourth is that unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible should be considered capable of literal achievement today or in the near future.²¹

The Second Coming of Christ in Dispensational Premillennialism

This doctrine explains that the rapture will take place before the tribulation. Moreover, Dispensational Premillennialists divide it into two stages: the Second

²⁰ Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* (2nd ed.; Chicago, IL: Moody, 2008), 554.

²¹ John F. Walvoord, "Interpreting Prophecy Today, Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980), 6-8.

Advent and the church's rapture. After seven years of the tribulation, the Second Coming of Jesus will occur for the judgment of the world and initiation of the Kingdom of God for the millennium.²² Millard J. Erickson argues as follows:

The second coming, then, has two stages or phases. In the first phase Christ comes *for* the church, to remove it from the world. In the second phase He comes *with* the church, to set up the earthly kingdom, establish His rule, and initiate the millennium.²³

Moreover, in the point of view of Dispensational Premillennialists, human history can be distinguished between the present age and the age to come. This present age is a limited time and is under the reign of Satan. On the other hand, the age to come is considered an everlasting time due to having no terminus as well as being under the rule of God. Thus, even though God rules over this age in principle, the actual ruler of this age is Satan in the view of Dispensational Premillennialists.²⁴

Dispensational Concept of Israel and Church

Another central concept of Dispensational Premillennialism is the distinction between the church and Israel in terms of the redemptive history of God. In the viewpoint of Dispensational Premillennialists, Israel has made a special and literal covenant with God. The people of Israel receive unconditional blessings from God, which the Old Testament grounds in God's promise to Abraham and his descendents, regardless of how Israel responds to God in the future.²⁵ According to Paul Hang-

²² Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology*, 185.

²³ Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 127.

²⁴ Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology*, 186.

²⁵ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute: 1965), 137-38.

Sik Cho, God has chosen the church and Israel for completing two distinct plans.

Cho argues as follows:

For Israel, the blessings are material and associated with the Earth while blessings for the church are futuristic and heavenly in nature. This will be most evident during the millennium when Israel will rule upon the Earth while the raptured church will already be present in the heavens.²⁶

In the view of Dispensational Premillennialists, God will reassemble the people of Israel in order to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah 11:1-11, Jeremiah 16:14-16, and so on. Thus, the contemporary re-founding of the nation of Israel in Palestine is considered the first sign of the final reassembling of Israel, which means the second coming of Christ (Israel's Messiah) impending with power and glory to reign over the world at the end of the tribulation.²⁷ On the other hand, the church was begun at Pentecost in Acts. Dispensationalists consider a period between Pentecost and the pre-tribulational rapture as the ecclesiastical age. Moreover, the church for dispensationalists means the saints of the present dispensation.²⁸

Ecological Shortcomings of Dispensational Premillennialism

A Pessimistic Attitude about the Future

One of the disadvantages of Dispensational Premillennialism is its pessimistic view toward the future of human history as well as social conditions. Dispensational Premillennialists assert that social conditions will deteriorate in this present

²⁶ Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology*, 183.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

²⁸ Erickson, *A Basic Guide to Eschatology*, 117-18.

dispensation.²⁹ Harold Heohner, who was a biblical scholar at Dallas Theological Seminary, indicates such pessimistic fatalism when he criticized Christians who participated in social movements in order to transform social problems. He criticized them as follows “I think the whole thing is wrong-headed... I just can’t buy their basic presupposition that we can do anything significant to change the world. And you can waste an awful lot of time trying.”³⁰

As shown above, Dispensational Premillennialists believe in the powerlessness of human action to halt evil and injustices in society. Moreover, D. L. Moody, who was one of the leading figures of Dispensational Premillennialism, described not only the world as a “wrecked vessel” but also human history as “getting darker and darker,” saying as follows

I look on this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat, and to me, “Moody, save all you can.” God will come in judgment, and burn up this world, but the children of God don’t belong to this world; they are in it, but not of it, like a ship in the water. This world is getting darker and darker, its ruin is coming nearer and nearer; if you have any friends on this wreck unsaved you had better lose no time in getting them off.³¹

The pessimistic tendency of Dispensational Premillennialists toward social problems and the future of human history makes Christians less responsible for social transformation.

Escapist Conception of the Rapture (Eco-unfriendly Eschatology)

One of the most dangerous features of the eschatology of Dispensational

²⁹ Cho, *Eschatology and Ecology*, 189.

³⁰ Harold Heohner, “Is Christ or Satan Ruler of This World?” *Christianity Today*, 34 (5 March 1990) 43.

³¹ D. L. Moody, “Return of Our Lord,” in *The American Evangelicals, 1800-1900: An Anthology* edited by William G. McLoughlin (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 185.

Premillennialism is the concept of the Rapture, because it contains the seeds for a pessimistic way of life focused on escapism. Most proponents of the Rapture understand it as a way out of a collapsing world, a hiding place from the coming storm. Thus, this makes people have an indifferent attitude toward social problems and issues, such as leaking nuclear power plants, the population explosion, widespread hunger, global warming, and ecological disasters. For example, when Grace Halsel asked a man who was a Rapture believer in the dispensational premillennialist sense about his feelings on living in the midst of political, economic and environmental threats to the world, he responded with a simple answer: “I heard Falwell sum up his reason why a nuclear Armageddon would not bother him. ‘You know why I’m not worried? he said. ‘I ain’t gonna be here.’”³² As such, the concept of the Rapture within Dispensational Premillennialism lay the groundwork for the indifferent attitude of many American Christians as well as many Korean Christians when it comes to social issues, including the environmental crisis.

Moreover, Dispensational Premillennialism considers that it is a part of God’s plan that ecosystems will be destroyed and believers will be saved in the rapture before the horror of the final ecological catastrophes at the end of the world.³³ The early Korean Christians received this theology from the missionaries to Korea and now this form of theology continues in Korean religious society. Thus, this understanding of eschatology through the lens of Dispensational Premillennialism is the main culprit for the apathetic attitude of Korean Protestant Christians toward environmental issues today.

³² Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelist on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1986), 39.

³³ *Ibid.*, 40.

Chapter Two

The Eschatological Vision of Mark 1:12-13: Peaceful Kingdom as the Reconciliation of all Creation

Introduction

The eschatological visions of the Bible hold both positive and negative ethical implications, because not only does an inherited understanding of these eschatological visions shape Christian perspectives on the contemporary ethical issues, but it also shapes Christians' views of their responsibilities toward these political, socio-economic, and environmental issues. In particular, proper understanding of New Testament Eschatology plays a pivotal role in contemporary times due to the emerging ecological crisis and people's recognition of the importance of environmental ethics. However, as has often been noted in recent decades, it is difficult to find a positive and proper view of environment ethics within the New Testament texts because New Testament eschatology at first glance seems to represent conflicting viewpoints, whether as final cosmic catastrophe (e.g., Mk. 13:24-25; Heb. 12:25-29; 2 Pet. 3:5-13; Rev. 6:12-17) or as cosmic peace through God's action in Christ (e.g., Mk. 1:12-13; Rom. 8:19-23; Rev. 21:1-7, 22:1-5). Many Christians have an apathetic view of the environmental issues, because they think that in the end time, God will destroy all creation.

However, most of contemporary biblical scholars argue that the eschatological texts in the New Testament do not represent the total destruction of nature, even the texts which illustrate cosmic catastrophes. According to N. T. Wright, the images of cosmic catastrophe in Mk. 13:24-25 point not only to a momentous socio-political

change but also to a denial of the destruction of the world.³⁴ Richard J. Bauckham and Steven Bouma-Prediger interpret 2 Pet 3:13 as a restoration of creation.³⁵

Edward Adams claims that the catastrophic images in New Testament eschatological texts signify a renewal of creation rather than annihilation.³⁶ Thus, following this scholarly trajectory, this thesis deals with biblical texts which present future hope in terms of the relationship of creation, humanity, and God (Mk 1:12-13; Rom 8:19-25; and Rev 21:1-7; 22:1-5).

The Relationship of Mark 1:12-13 and Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:17-25

It is impossible to understand the content of the New Testament without proper consideration of the Hebrew Bible. Marcus J. Borg points out the continuity between two collections as follows:

There is far more continuity between the two than the later division between Judaism and Christianity suggests. Not only is the Hebrew Bible part of the Christian Bible, but it was the sacred scripture for Jesus, his followers, the early Christian movement, and the authors of the New Testament.³⁷

Moreover, Kristin Nielsen points out that “a text is always part of an ongoing dialogue between older and younger texts. Our task as exegetes is therefore to try to trace this dialogue.”³⁸ Thus, when exegetes address Mark 1:12-13, it is rational to

³⁴ N.T Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth: the Biblical Picture of Christian Hope* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999), 9.

³⁵ Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 50: Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1983), 324-335; Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, second edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 69-71.

³⁶ Edward Adams, *The Stars Will Fall from Heaven: “Cosmic Catastrophe” in the New Testament and its World* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2007), 256-59.

³⁷ Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but not Literally* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 185.

³⁸ Kristin Nielsen, “Intertextuality and Biblical Scholarship,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2 (1990): 91.

discuss it in tandem with the eschatological texts of the Hebrew Bible, such as Isa. 11:6-9 and 65:17-25. These illustrate the harmonious relationship of the animal world including human beings in the eschatological vision.

Many scholars of Isa. 40-66 consider that Isa. 11:6-9 was influenced by Isa. 1-39.³⁹ Isa. 65:17-25 illustrates a return to the primeval conditions of Eden as an eschatological vision. Richard L Schultz expresses the main theme of Isa. 65:17-25 as follows:

The piling up of diverse descriptions of the better future as a new earth, as a newly created city, as a prolonged lifespan, as domestic tranquility, as spiritual intimacy, as the cessation of animal hostility (which is never described as resulting from the fall), paralleled in various biblical texts, suggests that these are not to be taken too literally.⁴⁰

Moreover, Schultz also indicates inter-texts which are closely related with Isa 52:17-25:

- The mention of “the former things” in 17b reminds one of similar expressions in 41:22; 42:9; 43:9, 18; 46:9; and 48:3 (cf. also 65:16b), though the reference is probably more comprehensive here.
- The use of the call/answer word pair in v. 24 recalls its use in 55:6, 58:9, 65:1, and 66:4 and emphasizes the intimate spiritual relationship between God and Israel that will then prevail.
- The summary quotation of 11:6-9 in v. 25 is the most evocative link between the two major sections of Isaiah.⁴¹

First, it is necessary to focus on the correlation between Isa. 11:6-9 and Isa. 65:25 which portray peaceful coexistence of animals and then study the correlation with

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 1-7; John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, the Eighth-century Prophet: His Times & His Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 67-69.

⁴⁰ Richard L. Schultz, “Intertextuality, Canon, and ‘Undecidability’: Understanding Isaiah’s ‘New Heavens and New Earth’ (Isaiah 65:17-25),” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20.1 (2010): 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

Mark 1:12-13. The relationship between the two texts helps us to reconstruct the function and intention of the Markan text. The majority of exegetes consider Isa. 65:25 to be a summarizing quotation of Isa 11:6-9.⁴² Isa 11:6-9 and Isa 65:25 have similarities in terms of the usage of words and structures as follows:

Isaiah 11:6-9	Isaiah 65:25
6	25
A) The Wolf shall live with the lamb	A) The Wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
B) The leopard shall lie down with the kid,	
C) The calf and the lion and the fatling together,	
D) And a little child shall lead them.	
7	
A) The cow and the bear shall graze,	
B) their young shall lie down together;	
C) and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.	B) the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
8	
A) The nursing child shall play	
B) over the hole of the asp,	C) but the serpent – its food shall be dust!
C) and the weaned child shall put its hand	
D) on the adder's den.	
9	
A) They will not hurt or destroy	D) They shall not hurt or destroy
B) on all my holy mountain;	E) on all my holy mountain,
C) for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord	
D) as the waters cover the sea.	
	F) says the Lord. ⁴³

We can see the similarities of Isa. 11:6-9 and Isa. 65:25. They show similar usage of vocabulary in Isa. 11:7 C and Isa 65:25B (“and the lion shall eat straw like the ox”

⁴² Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 245-51.

⁴³ Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:27 in New Revised Standard Version.

[וְאֵיכָל־חֶבְרֹן]) as well as Isa 11:9 and Isa 65:25 D-E (“They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain” [לֹא־יִגְרְעוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְכָל־הַר קִדְשִׁי]). Moreover, the two texts apply the same word (“wolf” [זֶבֶד]) in 11:6A and in 65:25A.⁴⁴ In addition, these two texts have thematic similarities. For example, Isa. 65:25 A and Isa. 11:6-7 B mention “wolf” [זֶבֶד] and “the lamb” [וְטֹלֵה] “Both texts refer to predatory and non-predatory animals, and the activities described in both texts are similar.”⁴⁵

Furthermore, Isa. 11:8AB and 65:25C uses words of similar meaning, even though exact terminology differs: in 11:8AB we find “asp (פִּתְוִן)” and “adder (צַפְעוֹנִי)” in 65:25C we find “serpent” (וְנִחָשׁ).⁴⁶

If we take into account the fact that Isa. 65:25 is the short version of Isa. 11:6-9⁴⁷, it is necessary to address Isa. 11:1-5 which is the context of Isa. 11:6-9 in order to understand the full meaning of this text. The subject of Isa. 11:1-5 is the coming of a new royal figure (Messiah) who will bring messianic peace and justice in the world (v.2). The motive of the new royal figure to rule the world righteously results from the spirit of the Lord.⁴⁸ In Isa. 11:3-5 the Messianic figure carries out righteousness and equity not only toward the wealthy but also the poor and the vulnerable. In Isa. 11:6-9 the eschatological vision extends the realm of righteousness and peaceful harmony from the relationship between humans to that between predatory animals,

⁴⁴JTAGM. Aan Ruiten, “The Intertextual Relationship Between Isaiah 65,25 and Isaiah 1, 6-9,” in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Studies in Honour of A.S. Van Der Woude on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, edited by F. Garcia Martinez, A. Hilhorst and C. J. Labuschagne (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1992), 35.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁶ New Revised Standard Version.

⁴⁷ Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London, UK: Sheed and Ward, 1994), 110.

⁴⁸ Van Ruiten, “The Intertextual Relationship Between Isaiah 65,25 and Isaiah 1, 6-9,” 36

domesticated animals, and defenseless children.⁴⁹

According to Walter Brueggemann, the new and peaceful relationship for nature in Isa. 11:6-9 is possible through the reordering of human relationships in Isa. 11:1-5. In other words, “The distortion of human relationships is at the root of all distortions in creation.”⁵⁰ The story of Genesis chapter 3 is a backdrop of Isa. 11:1-5. Humans’ unlimited enmity and greed destroyed the relationships between humans as well as between humans and non-human creation, including wild animals. The Earth contained all kinds of violence before the Flood (Gen. 6:11, 13). However, God could not remove humans’ enmity. Thus, as a compromise, God made a covenant with Noah that allowed people to kill animals for food. The more time passed the more hostility expanded between humans and non-human creation, including animals. Therefore, we can see God’s solution to address this problem in the eschatological visions of Isa. 11:1-9 and Isa. 65:17-25, which illustrate the recovery of the non-violent relationships of the Garden of Eden through the messianic king and his righteous rule.⁵¹

Turning to Mark 1:12-13, Richard Bauckham argues that Isa. 11 should play a pivotal role in our understanding of it. The Markan text reads: “And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He (Jesus) was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts [τῶν θηρίων]; and the angels waited on him.”⁵² There are some theological connecting points between Isaiah 11:1-9 and Mark 1:9-13. First, Isaiah 11:1-9 and Mark 1:9-13 both mention the

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 99-101.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵² Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), 75.

endowment of a righteous figure (a Davidic figure) with the Spirit. Second, both texts describe the reconciliation of relationship between human beings and wild animals through the Davidic figure (Jesus). Third, the story of Gen. 3, interpreted in ancient Jewish tradition as Adam succumbing to Satan (see Wisdom 2:23-24; Life of Adam and Eve 12-16; cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:2; Rom. 16:20), is a background of Isa. 11. The theme is reversed in Mark 1:12-13, which has Jesus achieving- victory over Satan, even though the text does not provide details of this occurs.⁵³ We can see the shriveled realm of Satan after Mark 1:12-13. For example, Jesus announces, “The kingdom of God is near” in Mark 1:14-15 which means opposing the realm of Satan (cf. 3:27). Moreover, in Mark 1:21-28, Jesus’ first public act of power is powerful exorcism of a person who was possessed by Satan. Such evidences point to a collapsing of Satan’ dominion.⁵⁴

The Important Concepts: The Wilderness and the Wild Animals

The Wilderness

In Mark 1:12-13, four important concepts appear in a series: the wilderness, Satan, the wild animals, and angels. These four expose the relationship between human beings and wild animals. Mark 1:13 announces that Jesus went to the wilderness. What is the concept of the wilderness? Numerous scholars argue that the concept, “wilderness,” has a variety of meaning in the Bible. William Stegner argues that the wilderness or the deserts [הַיַּשְׁמֵן] which appear in Exodus and Numbers can mean: place of danger,

⁵³ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York and London: The Anchor Bible Doubleday, 2000), 169-70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 170.

of divine grace, or of the sins of the Israelites.⁵⁵ Johannes Pedersen claims that wilderness threatens humans and domestic animals' wellbeing: "For the Israelite the wilderness is the home of the curse. Wicked demons are at work here (Lev. 16,10.21 f.), but for human beings it is uninhabitable. Not only normal humans, but also the animals belonging to the world of man, keep far from it."⁵⁶ According to Robert Barry Leal, there are four main tendencies identifiable in their biblical wilderness traditions:

First, there is in the Bible an attitude of negativity, characterized by fear of the wilderness and often accompanied by feelings of repulsion and hostility. Wilderness is to be shunned. In this approach there is also a tendency to associate wilderness with sin and devilish creatures.

Second, there is a periodic recognition in the Bible that, despite the horrors of the wilderness, it is a place where encounters of considerable personal and national significance take place. It is where God and angels are encountered at times of crisis, where people are called to important tasks, and where they are challenged and tested.

A third approach is to see wilderness not just as a place of critical encounter but also as the site of God's grace expressed through history. Here God disciplines, purifies, and transforms, and it is here that aspects of God's nature and will are revealed.

Finally, there are a number of passages in the Bible which celebrate the wilderness as an aspect of God's good creation, to be honored and regarded with awe. It provides refuge in time of need and even serves as a moral and spiritual haven for those in need.⁵⁷

To begin with Leal's first point, there are so many negative references toward wilderness in the Hebrew Bible, especially the prophetic writings. When the authors

⁵⁵ Richard W. Stegner, "Wilderness and Testing in the Scrolls and in Matthew 4:1-11," *Biblical Research* 12, 19 quoted in Robert Barry Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness* (New York: Washington: Peter Lang, 2004), 53.

⁵⁶ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (Copenhagen & London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 455.

⁵⁷ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible Toward a Theology of Wilderness*, 63.

of Isaiah illustrate the demolition of Babylon by the Medes at God's will, they use wilderness as an abhorrent image in Isa. 13:21-22a to describe the result: "But wild animals will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will live, and there goat-demons will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces." In addition, the authors of Isaiah understand "the demise of Edom in terms of its reversion to" wilderness, associated with chaos and confusion, as in Isaiah 34:11: "But the hawk and the hedgehog shall possess it; the owl and the raven shall live in it. He shall stretch the line of confusion [*tohu*] over it, and the plummet of chaos [*bohu*] over its nobles."⁵⁸ We also find the negative view toward wilderness in the New Testament texts. For example, in the Synoptic Gospels, the wilderness of Judah is the setting in which, Jesus meets Satan. Implicitly, the wilderness is regarded as the place where Satan dwells. In ancient society, wilderness was where humans could not control their environment. That is why the wilderness contains the meaning of the dwelling place of wild animals and evil spirits.

The second meaning of the wilderness, however, is more positive. It is reckoned as a place of important encounters. a privileged place. Leal remarks:

Especially in the Hebrew Bible, wilderness is the privileged site where God confronts the Hebrew people or their representatives at times of crisis in their lives. In the wilderness God calls and leads them to decisions and actions of considerable significance; God challenges and tests them; God witnesses their shortcomings; and God disciplines and punishes them for their sin and rebellion. In this way the wilderness becomes the site of numerous theophanies, which bring with them significant revelations and gifts, as well as judgment and periodic punishments.⁵⁹

The wilderness is an important meeting place where Moses encounters God

⁵⁸ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 74-75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

(Ex. 3). In addition, when Hagar flees from Sarai and goes to the desert, she encounters the Lord there and in this place the Lord makes remarkable promises to her (Gen. 16). Furthermore, Elijah, having defeated the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, flees to wilderness and receives help from angels and finally encounters God through a small voice at Horeb,⁶⁰ “the mountain of God,” in the wilderness, and receives an important message for Israel (1 Ki. 18-19). This phenomenon continues in the New Testament texts, in which the wilderness is a place of positive significance for both Jesus and John the Baptist. John the Baptist is closely related with the wilderness. All four Gospels refer his voice as the “voice of one crying in the wilderness [φωνῆ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ]” (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; and Jn. 1:23). He preaches in the wilderness of Judea and baptizes the people of Israel. The wilderness is also an important place for Jesus. Jesus receives baptism from John the Baptist and encountered the Devil there. Moreover, Jesus prays in the wilderness (lonely place) to God. For Jesus, the wilderness is the meeting place with his Father, God (Mk. 1:35 and Lk. 5:16).⁶¹

Third, wilderness is considered the place where God gives grace to the people of Israel. Sometimes in the wilderness God applies discipline to the people of Israel. The people often have to undergo negative experiences in the wilderness. However, these experiences give God opportunities to train them for discipline, purification, and transformation, experiences often entailing considerable cost and pain. For example, a horrific death among people of Israel took place in wilderness due to the rebellion of

⁶⁰ Interestingly, “*horeb*” in Hebrew means ruin, devastation, dryness, and desert. See Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.; Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 350.

⁶¹ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 98-114.

Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses (Nu. 16). Moreover, they have to wander from place to place in the wilderness for forty years in order to enter the Promised Land because of their reluctance to follow the advice of Joshua and Caleb (Nu. 13-14). These incidents teach the remnant of the people of Israel the importance of purity and holiness and the reality of God's presence in their midst.⁶² According to Susan Power Bratton, these unhappy incidents in the wilderness not only help to purify the people of Israel but also enhance their faith toward God:

The wilderness served as an environment for freeing the children of Israel from Egyptian desires and practices and for reintroducing to them the faith of their ancestors. The stresses of wilderness travel helped to clarify matters of faith and belief. Isolation or solitude was important to their understanding of their former dependence on Egyptian culture and their need for renewal as children of Abraham.⁶³

A further positive example related to the wilderness concerns theophany and Yahweh's making of a covenant between himself and his people Israel. God appears to Moses at Mount Horeb in the wilderness and tell his name to Moses: "I am who I am (Ex. 3:14)." Subsequently, seventy of the elders of Israel, along with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu experience theophany at Horeb in the wilderness when Moses receives the Ten Commandments from Yahweh as certification of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel (Exodus 24). All these examples provide positive image of the wilderness.

The fourth approach to the wilderness is to think of it as God's good creation. This view is sometimes problematized in Israel's faith traditions because Canaanite

⁶² Ibid., 138.

⁶³ Susan Power Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife: The Original Desert Solitaire* (London and Toronto: University of Scranton Press, 1993), 57.

religion believed in the sacralisation of nature.⁶⁴ However, many passages in the Hebrew Bible celebrate the wilderness as an aspect of God's good creation as well as temporary refuge of God's people. The wilderness plays a pivotal role in David's life. It is a refuge to David and his followers from Saul's threat and becomes a base from which to fight against the Philistines (1 Sa. 23: 15 – 26:25). The creation stories of Genesis imply that Earth or nature has intrinsic value. According to Norman C. Habel, the Earth (*erets*) and all its residents have intrinsic good. Habel claims:

God does not pronounce light and Earth "good," thereby imprinting them with integrity from a position of authority. Rather, they "are good," and God experiences them as good; *Elohim* "sees" they are good. The integrity of *erets* is a given, discovered by God in the creation process. The "good" which God experiences in the *erets* is probably not "good" in some dualistic or moral sense. "Good" is God's response to what is seen, experienced in the moment of creation.⁶⁵

All creation, including heaven, sea, land, and air has its intrinsic value and goodness. There is no difference between wilderness (desert) and cultivated land in terms of its value in God's viewpoint. Bratton agrees with this view, saying that

In terms of God's judgment, there is no difference between the domestic and the wild, nor between the useful and nonuseful. All are good before God. All have inherent worth because they were made by God. The Bible declares the worth of "every living being that moves" and of "all animals that creep on the ground." The wolf, howling in the canyon, is a creature created by God and judged good by Him. So are the crocodile and the grizzly bear. So are the jellyfish and the snake.⁶⁶

Thus, we have identified the four main aspects of the biblical concept of wilderness: negative place, place of encounter with God, place of experiencing God's

⁶⁴ Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 196-97.

⁶⁵ Norman C. Habel, "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1," in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, edited by Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (Cleveland, Ohio: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 42.

⁶⁶ Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness, and Wildlife*, 291.

grace, and place having intrinsic worth. Let us examine the related concept, “wild animal,” and then we will be in a position to return to Mark 1:12-13 with fresh insights.

The Wild Animal or Wild Creature

Before starting this section of our biblical inquiry, it is necessary to reflect on what the term “animal” means in our modern context, which is different for what it meant in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. According to Stephen D. Moore, the modern term “animal” owes a major debt to Descartes contrived:

The Cartesian elevation of individual subjectivity was obtained by reconceiving the relations between human and nonhuman animals in terms that were absolutely oppositional and hierarchical. But the term “animal(s)” is perhaps not the best one in this context. Prior to the Cartesian revolution in philosophy, there were no “animals” in the modern sense. There were “creatures,” “beasts,” and “living things,” an arrangement reflected in, and reinforced by, the early vernacular Bibles. As Laurie Shannon notes, “*animal* never appears in the benchmark English of the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), or the King James Version (1611)... Descartes was the creator of the animal in the peculiarly modern sense of the term.”⁶⁷

Thus, this thesis will not use the term “animal,” but rather the term, “creature” or “beast.” The word θηρίον used in Mk. 1:13 means a beast of a particular kind, especially a “quadruped beast (creature) which is differentiated from birds, reptiles and fish, although snakes can also be meant by θηρίον (Gen. 6:20; 7:20; Ps. 148:10, Hos. 2:18, Enoch. 7:5, Mos. 29:13, Barn. 6:18 and so on).”⁶⁸ In general, the word

⁶⁷ Stephen D. Moore, “Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark,” in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, edited by Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 79-80, quoted from Laurie Shannon, “The Eight Animals in Shakespeare; or, Before the Human,” *PMLA* 124 (2009): 476.

⁶⁸ Q.v. “θηρίον” in Walther Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early*

also refers to the wild (carnivorous) beast which threatens domesticated creatures or human beings. There are many examples in the biblical material in which wild beasts are represented as threatening humans either directly or indirectly, such as by attacking flocks and herds, thereby damaging people's livelihood.⁶⁹ Bauckham remarks on the negative effects of such encounters: "seeing these animals purely from the perspective of sporadic human contact with them can produce a distorted and exaggerated view of their enmity to humans."⁷⁰ Sometimes this negativity could extend to paranoia. Philo of Alexandria, who considered the wild beast as humans' enemy, misunderstood the Egyptian hippopotamus as a man-eater.⁷¹

Jesus and the Peaceable Kingdom

Lynn White Jr, the hugely influential medieval historian and the most cited author in relation to eco-theology, wrote the classic article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." This short article drew much attention from theologians and biblical scholars. In it he argues that the culprit of the ecological predicament is the Western Christian world-view, based on (mis)interpretation of the Bible. He argued that the concept of the superiority of humanity as made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-30) not only created dualism between humanity and nature, but it also legitimized the exploitation or domination of nature for human benefit.⁷² Biblical theology has been

Christian Literature, revised and edited by Frederick William Danker third edition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 455-56.

⁶⁹ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 106. Direct threat to human beings: Gen. 37:20,33; Lev. 26:6,22; 2 Kgs. 2:24; 17:25-6; Prov. 28:15; Jer. 5:6; Lam. 3:10-11; Ezek. 5:17; 14:15; 34:25,28; Hos. 13:7-8; Amos 5:19; Rev. 6:8; threat to people's livelihood through attacking domesticated creatures: Lev. 26:22; 1 Sam. 17:34-7; Hos. 2:12; Amos 3:12; John 10:12).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷² Lynn White Jr, "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis," *Science*, 155 (1967): 1203-07.

influenced by this anthropocentric viewpoint. This viewpoint is the backdrop of my investigation of Mk. 1:13, which differently illustrate the kingdom of God through Christ. This thesis focuses on finding the answer to this question: How might God's kingdom and the role of Jesus within it be reconceived so as to have more positive ecological implications for the relations between all living creatures, human and nonhuman alike, especially human relations with nonhuman beasts (animals)?

Edward W. Said, best known as the founder of postcolonial theory, remarks on the importance of beginnings in written work:

Every writer knows that the choice of a beginning for what he will write is crucial not only because it determines much of what follows but also because a work's beginning is, practically speaking, the main entrance to what it offers. Moreover, in retrospect we can regard a beginning as the point at which, in a given work, the writer departs from all other works; a beginning immediately establishes relationships with works already existing, relationships of either continuity or antagonism or some mixture of both.⁷³

Based on this argument, we need to pay special attention to the first passage and the first word of Mark's Gospel: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Αρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]).⁷⁴

The word, Αρχὴ in Mark: 1:1 has two meanings, "beginning or start of being" and "power or empire."⁷⁵ In addition, the word, εὐαγγελίου means "Good News."⁷⁶

According to Simon Samuel, these words connoted both the *imperium* of Rome and

⁷³ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 3.

⁷⁴ The phrase "the Son of God" is textually uncertain. See, Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 169-70.

⁷⁵ Q.v. "Αρχὴ" in Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 137.

⁷⁶ Q.v. εὐαγγελίου, *ibid.*, 402.

the theo-political “beginning” of Rome.⁷⁷ Moreover, “εὐαγγελίου” was used to designate victories of Roman emperors in wars with other nations.⁷⁸ Thus, the beginning passage in Mark could be an especially meaningful sentence for Markan readers or hearers who already knew the usage of these words in Roman imperial propaganda. Therefore, this passage could be illustrating that Jesus is the powerful agent who begins the Empire of God in opposition to the earthly Roman Empire.⁷⁹

The start of the invasion of God’s kingdom begins with Jesus’ baptism in Mark. Just as Jesus comes up out of the water, he sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him (1:10). This designates that Jesus is the agent of God’s kingdom who received the Holy Spirit in order to expand the kingdom.⁸⁰

Because of this, Satan, who rules over earthly empires, tries to defeat Jesus in the wilderness in order to obstruct the inbreaking of God’s kingdom. But, Jesus overcomes this test and wins a victory against Satan, and immediately afterwards he announce, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (1:15). Through this declaration, Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God penetrates even into the Roman Imperial world through the agency of his ministry, which has just begun.⁸¹

Before announcing the advent of God’s kingdom, however, the author of the Gospel has illustrated an important feature of kingdom in 1:13. In this passage, the four characters appear: Jesus, Satan, the wild beasts, and angels. There are many

⁷⁷ Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 89-93.

⁷⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 130.

⁷⁹ Samuel, *Postcolonial Reading*, 95-97.

⁸⁰ Seong Hee Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire: A Korean Postcolonial Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 62.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

different viewpoints on the relationship between these four characters.

According to Adela Yarbro Collins, the brief account of Jesus' testing in Mk. 1:12-13 portrays two fighting camps in the cosmic warfare. One camp consists of Jesus and the angels; the antagonistic camp consists of Satan with the wild beasts. Collins remarks that "Mark 1:12-13 pits Jesus, the Spirits of God, and the angels, on the one hand, against Satan, wild animals, and (it is implied) demons, on the other."⁸² Additionally, James Edwards argues that "mention of the beasts follows immediately after the mention of Satan, the tempter and adversary, suggesting the beasts' alliance with Satan."⁸³ Ezra Palmer Gould provides a more neutral interpretation of the wild beasts: the wilderness of Judea happens to be the dwelling place of wild beasts.⁸⁴

However, there are still other ways to interpret these wild beasts in a wilderness context. Richard Bauckham, Joel Marcus and David Rhoads all argue that the wild beasts do not suggest antagonistic imagery vis-à-vis Jesus. Instead, the text implies a positive relationship between Jesus and the wild beasts.⁸⁵ Rhoads states that "The words 'and he was with the wild beasts' are an aperture into the overall view of nature in Mark's Gospel. Wild beasts are examples of nondomesticated creation, which pose a threat to humans."⁸⁶ But the wild beasts do not pose a threat to Jesus here. Rhoads argues that this image in Mk. 1:13 unveils Jesus' role as messianic agent who makes

⁸² Collins, *Mark*, 153.

⁸³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 41.

⁸⁴ Ezra Palmer Gould, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 13.

⁸⁵ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creature*, 113; Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 169-70; David M. Rhoads, "Who Will Speak For the Sparrow? Eco-Justice Christicism of the New Testament," in *Literary Encounters with Reign of God*, edited by Sharon H. Ringe and H. C. Paul Kim (New York and London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 67.

⁸⁶ Rhoads, "Who Will Speak For the Sparrow?," 74.

peace with all creation. “In Mark’s view, Jesus has come in part to bring harmony between humans and the rest of the created order-exercising an authority (dominion) in which animals are not a threat to humans.”⁸⁷

Similar to Rhoads, Bauckham argues that “Mark portrays Jesus in peaceable companionship with animals that were habitually perceived as inimical and threatening to humans.”⁸⁸ Moreover, Bauckham gives a detailed explanation of why the wild beasts in Mk. 1:13 do not imply a hostile relationship with Jesus. There are some significant points in Bauckham’s argument. Firstly, the usage of the verb “waited on” (διηκόνουσι αὐτῷ) designates not the armies of heaven, but ministering angels.⁸⁹ Secondly, ancient Jewish literature, including biblical literature, does not represent wild animals as collaborators of the demonic. Instead, wild beasts are sometimes used in a metaphoric sense for the demonic, because of their dangerousness (e.g., Lk. 10:19; 1 Pet. 5:8, Ps. 91:13). However, metaphoric usage tells us very little about Mark’s use of actual wild beasts in the narrative. Wild beasts do appear in the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Jewish literature as hostile to human endeavors. For instance, *the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* refers to wild beasts in parallel with Satan or demons. Again, this was just an expression of people’s feelings about wild beasts as a menace to human beings. Wild beasts and demons, in different ways, are depicted as types of threatening non-human enemies.⁹⁰ Thirdly, the wild beasts do not strive against Jesus in Mk. 1:13, because the usage of the words ἦν μετὰ τῶν simply illustrates physical proximity (Mt. 5:25; Jn. 9:40; 12:17; 20:24,

⁸⁷ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁸ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 119.

⁸⁹ Robert A. Guelich, *Word Biblical Commentary: Mark 1-8* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 26, 39.

⁹⁰ Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 115.

26) or even a strong positive sense of association as in Mark (3:14; 5:18; 14:67; cf. 4:36).⁹¹ According to Douglas Hall, the word μετὰ “with” in Mk. 1:13 is very important because it alludes to the language of love, *being-with*.⁹² Hall writes that in

their better expressions, Christian theology and ethics have known how to express all this with respect to two of the dimensions of our human relatedness: God, and our human partners (the neighbor). But Christian theology has rarely explored the meaning of this fundamental ontological assumption [that being is being-with] for the third major dimension of our threefold relatedness as creatures, namely, our relation to the extra-human world.⁹³

Thus, this “with” language in Mark 1:13 can be read as Jesus’ peaceful companionship with the wild animals. He does not try to change their wild nature. Instead, not only does Jesus let them live in their wilderness in peace but he also affirms them as creatures of God which share the world with human being in peace.⁹⁴ Bauckham concludes that “The messianic peace with wild animals promised, by healing the alienation and enmity between humans and animals, to liberate humans from that threat.”⁹⁵

Joel Marcus takes a similar stance as Bauckham and Rhoads, saying that “in the OT and later Jewish writings the en-mity between human beings and wild animals is regarded as a distortion of the original harmony that existed between them in Eden.”⁹⁶ He concludes that Jesus as messianic figure recovers “an idyllic future in which the

⁹¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), 126-27.

⁹² Douglas Hall, “Stewardship as Key to a Theology of Nature,” in *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives: Past and Present*, edited by R. J. Berry (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 140.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁴ Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology*, 129.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹⁶ Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 168.

enmity between wild animals and humans beings will be miraculously overcome.”⁹⁷

Thus, all three scholars persuasively consider Mk. 1:12-13 as an eschatological image of the reconciliation of all creatures, and a resumption of the peaceful relationships between them lost as a result of human sinfulness.

Conclusion: Mark 1:12-13 as Ethics through an Eco-theological Lens

Our study raises the question as to what the ethical implications might be of this reading of Mk. 1:12-13. Negative stereotypes of wild beasts and wilderness have long created inherently antagonistic view of the relationship between the human Jesus, and the wild beasts in Mk. 1:12-13. As I have argued, however, Mk. 1:12-13 not only unveils the Kingdom of God as entailing redeeming and reconciling relationships between all creatures, including those between humans and wild beasts modeled on Isa. 11:1-5 and 65:17-25, but it also points us to the possibility of living with other all fellow creatures in peace. Mk. 1:13 also shows us Jesus as the Messiah who overcomes the temptations of Satan and inaugurates the messianic age. After Jesus’ inauguration of the kingdom of God, the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God will be completed in the future. However, people can begin to realize it in the present by respecting wild beasts and preserving their habitats in order to fulfill God’s eschatological purpose of ecological renewal in the present time, as suggested by Mk. 1:12-13. Recognizing that the Kingdom involves a reconciliation of relationships between all creature enables us to better understand the nature of Christ and how we ought to live.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 169.

Chapter Three

The Eschatological Vision of Romans 8:19-25: From the Groaning of Creation to Its Glorious Freedom through Christ

Introduction

In church history, the letter to the Romans played a pivotal role in emergent Protestant theology. Martin Luther, the father of reformed theology, experienced a strong change in his theology, especially in terms of soteriology. His salvation theology of justification by faith alone, not by deed, came from his exegetical work on the letter to the Romans. The majority of New Testament scholars also have focused on the topic of the salvation of human beings when they interpret Romans. Thus, focusing on the destiny of non-human creatures in Romans might seem to be a tangential matter. Paul, at first glance, seems to have no soteriological concern for non-human creatures, but instead focuses on human beings. However, in recent decades, scholars have developed hermeneutical possibilities for studying the letter to the Romans from an ecological perspective, taking into account the environmental situation which faces in the world, such as pollution, ozone depletion over Antarctica and global warming. However, scholars argue today that in Rom. 8:19-23 Paul suggests some significant concepts for ecological theology, such as that salvation includes all creation.⁹⁸ Thus, it is appropriate to examine Rom. 8:19-25, in ways that take into account the ecological implications of the text.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., David G. Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2010), 74-75. Further examples are listed below.

The Relationship of Romans 8:19-25 and Genesis 3:17-19

Rom. 8:19-25 deals with the picture of suffering and yearning for redemption through Christ of all creation in the present situation.⁹⁹ The Hebrew Bible is considered as the background of Paul's theology. In particular, Gen. 3:17-19 probably is the most closely related with Rom. 8:19-25, because it illustrates the origin of God's punishment to nature because of Adam's sin. Rom. 8:19-25 offers a sophisticated analysis in terms of the aftermath of human sin. Adam was an important figure for Paul not only as a father of the human race but also as a representative symbol of the first human enslaved by sin.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, as David Horrell notes, it is the central doctrine in the Christian tradition that "sin and death came to affect all humanity, through the representative and original human, Adam. For Paul, Adam forms an important 'type' of Christ."¹⁰¹

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass (Adam), much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. (Rom. 5:12-15, NRSV)

James D. G. Dunn remarks on: "the dominance of the whole Adam motif" for Paul, "-with restoration of creation cursed for Adam's sin and dependent on man's

⁹⁹ Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 506.

¹⁰⁰ Brendan Byrne, "An Ecological Reading of Rom. 8.19-22: Possibilities and Hesitations," in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, edited by David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate and Francesca Stavropoulou (New York and London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 91.

¹⁰¹ Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 38.

own restoration (8:19-23).”¹⁰² Also, Brendan Byrne argues that, for Paul, “Adam’s sin, while it may involve reaching out to a forbidden creature (Gen. 2.16-17; 3.6), was essentially an act of disobedience towards God... [prompting] an action of God designed to punish human beings for their sin.”¹⁰³ Interestingly, although the offender against God’s order is a human being, “Adam,” the aftereffect of Adam’s sin extends over all creatures:

And to the man he said, “because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘you shall not eat of it’, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:17-19, NRSV)

Gen. 3:17-18 illustrates the relationship between the human (Adam) and the Earth that became the victim, due to Adam’s sin. Not only does the land produce thorns and thistles for Adam but even eating the food of the land does not suggest a gift from God so much as, the alienation humans from both Earth and God.¹⁰⁴ However, the possibility of a reversal of this fate and relationship is illustrated in Rom. 8:19-25. According to Marie Turner, “the series of groaning, which form such a striking section of the chapter, represents a reconnection of the earth and humankind, reinforced through the prayers and intercession of the spirit.”¹⁰⁵ The groaning of all creation is decreased continually. Turner also argues that the reconciling work of

¹⁰² James D. G. Dunn, *World Biblical Commentary Romans 1-8 Volumes 38A* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1998), 467.

¹⁰³ Brendan Byrne, “An Ecological Reading of Rom. 8.19-22,” 90.

¹⁰⁴ Marie Turner, “The Liberation of Creation: Romans 8:11-29,” in *Creation Is Groaning: Biblical and Theological Perspectives*, edited by Mary L. Coloe (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013), 65-66.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

Christ enables the righteousness of God to liberate all creation from the aftereffects of Adam's sin.¹⁰⁶ In other words, Jesus' death and resurrection effect salvation not only just for humans but for all creation.¹⁰⁷

Ecological implications of Genesis 3:17-19

The account of Gen. 3:17-19 begs ecological analysis. Many scholars note that although this curse is a divine curse which causes a deterioration of the relationship between humankind and the earth, it also exposes "a realistic reflection of the hardships and challenges facing those who sustained their existence through their toil in the hilly lands of the region."¹⁰⁸ Westermann remarks on this point when he interprets this text as follows:

Man's work is always in some way tied up with toil and effort; every area of work throws up its thorns and thistles which cannot be avoided; every worthwhile accomplishment demands sweat. Acknowledgment and acceptance of this fact have nothing to do with pessimism. It is sober realism which protects work from any dangerous idealizing¹⁰⁹

In other words, this curse reflects ancient people's difficulty in their agricultural daily life at that time. However, the beginning of agriculture also marks the beginning of environmental problems. In the Garden of Eden, human beings can eat the fruit from the trees. However, they also have to eat farm produce, such as barley and wheat, after being expelled from Eden (Gen. 3:17-19). Such farming aggravates the relationship between the human being (*adam*) and the land (*adamah*), because it

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁷ Jewett, *Romans*, 513-21; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 471-76.

¹⁰⁸ Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Claus Westermann, *Creation* (New York and London: Fortress Press, 1974), 102.

requires intensive cultivation in order to yield a sufficient harvest.¹¹⁰ For this reason Gen. 3:18 mentions that “the land will produce thorns and thistles for you,” which illustrates not only enmity in the relationship between humankind and nature but also the painful labor and sweat of human beings. As Callicott notes, the launching of agriculture in human history announces the beginning of the human being’s destruction of the land’s fertility by their abuse of it.¹¹¹

The Important Concepts: Creation, Subjection to Futility, and Bondage to Decay

Creation

A Short History of the Interpretation of Creation

The most difficult point concerning interpretations of Rom. 8:19-23 is the word “creation” (κτίσις; occurring once in each verse). Does the meaning of this word contain all creation or not? These verses have been interpreted or understood very differently. For example, Irenaeus argued that the word “creation” (κτίσις) means the created world containing all or some human beings.¹¹² Martin Luther in his later life considered this word as referring to “created things.” Calvin further added “inanimate creatures such as trees and stones” to Luther’s definition when he encouraged his church members to live an eschatological life.¹¹³ John Wesley understood this word to refer to “all creatures” which forget their paradisiacal state in the Garden of

¹¹⁰ J.B Callicott “Genesis and John Muir,” in *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion and Public Policy*, edited by Carol S. Robb and Carl J. Casebolt (Berkeley, CA: Orbis Books, 1991), 125.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹¹² David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2010), 65.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

Eden.¹¹⁴ However, Origen interpreted this word very differently. He considered it as referring to celestial bodies, but also angelic forces. To the contrary, Augustine understood it as human's spirit, soul, and body. Aquinas and Ambrose saw it as referring to both celestial bodies and human beings, but they did not think this word included ecosystems such as animals and plants.¹¹⁵ These different interpretations of the word continued into modern theological and New Testament scholarship. For instance, Karl Barth viewed the terms κτίσις as referring to human beings and all creatures. On the other hand, Käsemann considered the meaning of this word to encompass all creation.¹¹⁶ Writers on eco-theology who emerged in the early 1970s likewise asserted that the word κτίσις embraces all creation. In general, most ecotheological scholars apply Romans 8 as evidence to show the positive future of the entire ecosystem as well as to focus on today's environmental issues.¹¹⁷ We will be better positioned below to determine the precise meaning of κτίσις our passage.

Bondage to Decay and Subjection to Futility

Romans 8 mentions only once the creation's bondage to decay (ἡ δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς, 9:21) in connection with the promise that creation will be liberated. It is difficult to determine what precisely this "bondage to decay" refers to. Most scholars

¹¹⁴ Michael J. Toolan, *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2001), 82.

¹¹⁵ For further examples of interpretations of this word κτίσις, see Bruce W. Longenecker, "Narrative Interest in the Study of Paul," in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* edited by Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 3-16.

¹¹⁶ Ernest Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 64.

¹¹⁷ Horrell *Greening Paul*, 69; Harry Alan Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2006), 212-13; ; Brendan Byrne, "Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8.18-22" in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, edited by Norman C. Habel (Cleveland, OH: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 198.

argue that God has subjected creation to decay.¹¹⁸ Brendan Byrne mentions that “the passive verb *hypetage* suggests a reference to the action to God.”¹¹⁹ In other words, God is the subduer who inflicts this fate on all creation. Then, what is the reason for this action? Relevant here is Rom. 1:20-23, which suggests that the primary cause of the futility is humans’ failure to worship to God as creator:

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. (Rom. 1:20-23, NRSV)

In other words, idolatrous human beings refused to know and worship God.

However, “God has consigned all to disobedience, in order to have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32; cf. Rom 5:20, Gal. 3:19-24). Similarly, creation came under enslavement to decay, and was then viewed as a consequence subjected by God to futility, in hope.”¹²⁰

Another origin for the “bondage to decay” of creation is the curse for Adam’s sin which is illustrated in Gen. 3:17. Actually, Gen. 3:17 does not refer to a cursing of the entire creation by God, but only a cursing of the ground (LXX: γῆ) which consigns the soil or earth to thorns, thistles, and plants. However, according to Edward Adams, the change in linguistic usage from ground (γῆ) to creation (κτίσις) can be shown in

¹¹⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 470-71; Byrne, “Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8.18-22,” 198.

¹¹⁹ Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 260.

¹²⁰ Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 74.

ancient Jewish literature.¹²¹

Rom. 8:20-21 refers to the creation that was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free. As mentioned above, we define that Adam's disobedience to God's order (Gen.3) and the refusal of humans to worship to God are not only the origins of the phrases "bondage to decay" and "subjection to futility of creation," but they also present a general picture of the corruption and futility of human beings. Rom. 5:12-14, in which Paul writes: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.... [D]eath exercised dominion from Adam" (NRSV) In other words, Paul considers Adam's fall as the source of both sin's entry into the world and the origin of the current situation of creation.¹²² According to Harry Alan Hahne, the understanding of the aftermath of sin in Jewish apocalyptic writings has three aspects:

The first, most frequently, the sin of fallen humanity or the Watchers brings corruption, disease, death, decay, suffering and sorrow. Usually the fall causes death to become part of the cycle of nature and human experience, but more rarely the human lifespan is shortened.

The second, Sin frequently leads to vanity of life in this age. Labour is futile since hardship and failure are inevitable. Even the best things in this life, such as beauty, youth, strength, wealth and happiness, are subject to limitations and will eventually pass away in death.

The third, Sin also causes major disruptions in the orderly operation of nature. After the fall, animals became no longer as obedient to humans, nor could they speak. The earth was corrupted by the fall of humanity or the Watchers. Times of extensive sin, such as the pre-flood era and the last days, have cosmic irregularities, such as aberrations in the patterns of

¹²¹ Adams, *Constructing the World*, 178.

¹²² Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 76.

heavenly luminaries, earthquakes, widespread crop failure, plagues, birth defects and disturbances among animals.¹²³

Thus, we can discern the general understanding of the symptoms of “futility” or “decay” for Jews of Paul’s era, even though Paul does not spell out these symptoms detail.

The Groaning, Waiting, and Liberation of Creation

The main content of Paul’s argument in Romans 8:19-22 is that the current groaning of creation is a part of the process for liberation and glory ordained by God. The majority of New Testament scholars agree that these verses allude to Gen. 3:17-19 in which Adam is cursed by God due to his failure (his sin).¹²⁴ In this respect, Paul’s writing parallels the Jewish theology in which Adam’s sin affects the present situation of all creation, as well as the apocalyptic concept of the re-creation or renewal of heaven and earth. According to Walther Bindemann, although the content of Rom. 8:19-22 is found in Jewish apocalyptic writings, Paul uses them for developing his unique emphasis by adding the concern for all creation.¹²⁵

As shown above, regarding the term for creation (κτίσις) in Romans 8:19-23, there are three possibilities for what is included in its meaning, namely (1) the believing human world, (2) unbelievers and the non-human creation, and (3) the non-human creation. However, the majority of contemporary scholars interpret it as the latter meaning (the non-human creation).¹²⁶ In order to properly interpret the

¹²³ Hahne, *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation*, 212-13.

¹²⁴ Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 75.

¹²⁵ Walther Bindemann, *Die Hoffnung der Schöpfung: Romer 8, 18-27 und die Frage einer Theologie der Befreiung von Mensch und Natur* (Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1983), 29 quoting in Adams, *Constructing the World*, 175.

¹²⁶ Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 73.

meaning of this word κτίσις we need to study the ancient Jewish understandings of this word. The Jewish meanings of this word are “act of creation,” “creature,” “created universe,” and “non-human creation.”¹²⁷ Among them “non-human creation” is the meaning of κτίσις most relevant to our Romans passage. Interpreting the term as “act of creation” and “creature” is not acceptable. Nor can “created universe” (in the wide sense including heaven, earth and every human being) be a proper interpretation of this word, because verses 22-23 distinguish believers from the κτίσις. Moreover, Paul’s stress in terms of human’s volitional culpability for sin in Romans make it impossible that “Paul would say that unredeemed humanity was subjected to futility and enslaved to decay ‘not of its own will’, that is, through no fault of its own (οὐχ ἑκοῦσα).”¹²⁸ Thus, the meaning of κτίσις in Rom. 8:19-22 can only be interpreted as “non-human creation.”¹²⁹

Paul writes that “all creation has been groaning in labor pains until now” (8:22). However, such a representation of this pain is offset by the expression of expectations for a future hope. Paul illustrates that κτίσις (non-human creation) is waiting in hope for the revealing of the sons of God in verse 19. Interestingly, the verb ἀπεκδεχόμεαι (to wait eagerly) is used elsewhere for designating the Christian hope (Rom 8:23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5; Phil 3:20). From this viewpoint, the eschatological vision of Romans 8:19-22 may be implying that “creation’s state of anticipation has been heightened or awakened by the eschatological event of the death and resurrection of Christ and by the partial revelation of the sons of God in the present time (vv. 14-

¹²⁷ Adams, *Constructing the World*, 78-80.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

16).”¹³⁰ In other words, the present suffering of all non-human creation is not meaningless. Instead, the fulfillment of the hope of non-human creation is part of what is anticipated in the eschatological event.

Conclusion: Romans 8:19-25 as Ethics through an Eco-theological Lens

What are the ethical dimensions of Rom. 8:19-25? First and foremost, we should keep in mind the principle of intrinsic worth, the first of the set of six eco-justice principles: the universe, earth and all its components have intrinsic worth / value.¹³¹ Not only human beings but also all creation has its own value. Human action and behavior play a pivotal role in the extinction or enhancement of other parts of nature, including animals, plants, and the oceans. Humanity and creation are bound up in the situation of “co-groaning.” Nonetheless, Rom. 8:19-25 describes the future hope of all creation to be liberated from futility and bondage to decay. The Christ-event enables God’s decisive action to liberate all creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 announces that if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. Based on this declaration, we realize that Christians who live in the tension of two different eras, the “already” of fulfillment and “not yet” of consummation, have as responsibility a ministry of reconciliation for all creation. This calls in turn for a life style of “other-regarding moral responsibility beyond the limits of the human community.”¹³² Such a life style would limit believers from indulging in excessive appetites and acquisitiveness. One possible expression of it would be Christian vegetarianism as an appropriate action to the eschatological vision of a peaceable and

¹³⁰ Ibid., 180.

¹³¹ Horrell, *The Bible and The Environment*, 13.

¹³² Horrell, *Greening Paul*, 190.

renewed creation, along with other political, social, and economic actions designed to protect species from extinction and generally heal our ravaged planet.

Chapter Four

The Eschatological Vision of Revelation 21:1-7 and 22:1-5: The Symbiotic Interdependence of Earth and its Inhabitants in the New Jerusalem

Introduction

The Book of Revelation joins the other eschatological texts, already discussed in profoundly influencing believers' attitudes toward environment and creation. In particular, the catastrophic images in the Book of Revelation such as the destruction of rivers, water turning to blood, burning forests and grasslands, the a great earthquake, and much else of this sort, inculcates a negative tendency in believers toward nature, namely, that the destruction of the present creation and ecosystem is unavoidable event ordained by God.¹³³ Thus, the Book of Revelation many times has been used to justify environmental destruction. Luke T. Johnson's remark that the history of the interpretation of Revelation is largely a story of tragic misinterpretation is apposite here.¹³⁴ The calamities of Revelation need not designate inevitable destruction of the ecosystem. Rather, as Barbara R. Rossing, has argued, those environmental disasters show impending signs or warnings of what may happen if unjust oppressors continue to do unjust actions to the environment.¹³⁵ Actually, the

¹³³ Adams, *The Stars will Fall from Heaven*, 238-39. In recent years, however, many conservative Christians (evangelicals) have supported an ecological reading of the Book of Revelation. For example, Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, representative of green evangelical environmentalism, criticizes premillennialism. Moreover, he considers not only that physical creation is worthy as God's creation, but also that the natural world is a gift which God commands us to care for and protect. See Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Redeem Life on Earth* (San Francisco, LA: Harper & Row, 1984), 109.

¹³⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 573.

¹³⁵ Barbara R. Rossing, "For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically" in *From Every People and Nation*, edited by David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 175.

direct target of God's punishment of the Book of Revelation is not the environment but the empire. As Stephen Moore also argues, the destroyers of the natural environment in 11:18 are the Romans who depleted and polluted it for economic and profit.¹³⁶

The New Jerusalem in Revelation presents a positive ecological vision and has been a major resource for eco-theological interpreters of the book. The story of the eschatological vision of the New Jerusalem begins in Rev. 21:1 and extends to 22:5. The background of the New Jerusalem is to be found in various Hebrew Bible texts, such as Gen. 1-3, Isa. 65-66, Ezek. 40-47, Zech. 14:8-11, Isa. 35:5-7 and Joel 3:18 among others.¹³⁷ The New Jerusalem of Revelation 21-22 is an earth-centered vision that shows us the eschatological dwelling place of God is on earth and not on another planet or in a spiritual realm.¹³⁸ This chapter will attempt to elaborate these eco-friendly features of the book of Revelation.

The Relationship of Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5 to Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Ezekiel 47:1-12

The authors of the New Testament drew from the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint to form their texts, none more than the author of Revelation. Rev. 21:1-22:5, the conclusion of Revelation, displays this tendency abundantly. The topic of this part of John's vision is the New Jerusalem. The image of Rev. 21:1, that of "a new heaven and a new earth," is combined with the picture of the glorious New Jerusalem (Rev.

¹³⁶ Stephen D. Moore, *Revealing the New Testament*, (Stockbridge, MA: Thinking Strings), 592-93.

¹³⁷ G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 1043-46; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation To John* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 561.

¹³⁸ Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 148.

21) and the image of the fruitful garden (Rev. 22). As stated earlier, the New Jerusalem where God resides comes down to earth from heaven. According to Duncan Reid, the picture of God's dwelling with human beings in the New Jerusalem means recovery of the Garden of Eden in Gen. 1-2.

More significantly, it redeems the first dwelling of God with human beings: the Garden of Eden. It is not a return to Eden, because the new dwelling place of God with human beings is a city. This affirms human culture-literally human civilization-and the history of its development.¹³⁹

The story of Genesis 1-2:4a is the story of making "the heavens and the earth" (Rev. 21:1). It is important to note that God's creative work is a process of separating or ordering from the previously formless things.¹⁴⁰ God creates light and separated it from the darkness to make day and night (Gen. 1: 4-5). God's creative work continues to create the dome of the sky to separate the waters from the waters (v. 6). Also, after gathering in one place the water under the sky, God allows land to appear (vv. 9-10). This separating and ordering process also entails creating vegetation (vv. 11-12), sea creatures, and birds (vv. 20-21); dividing animals into three types: livestock, wild animals, and animals which crawl on the ground (vv. 24-25), dividing day from night; and dividing the human being into male and female version (vv. 27). God declares that all things (not only human beings) that he has made are very good (vv. 31). John Rogerson remarks that this implies the creation is still good in that it provides the order and stability in which the life given by God can be lived out.¹⁴¹ John Hartley

¹³⁹ Duncan Reid, "Setting aside the Ladder to Heaven: Revelation 21.1-22.5 from the Perspective of the Earth" in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, edited by Norman C. Habel (Cleveland, Ohio: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 239.

¹⁴⁰ Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 23-24.

¹⁴¹ John Rogerson, *Genesis 1-11 Old Testament Guides* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 63-64.

considers that creation is good insofar as its harmonious and ordered existence “support[s] all life forms as God had made them.”¹⁴² In addition, Gerhard von Rad mentions that God’s declaration of the goodness of all creation “refers more to the wonderful properness and harmony than to the beauty of the entire cosmos.”¹⁴³ Based on this reflection on Genesis, we can better understand the images in Revelation 21:1-5 that is, the world will be restored to its former perfect state and God and humanity will be reconciled. Just as God and Adam and Eve once walked together in the garden, so in the Revelation text, God will dwell with humanity in a restored garden.

The New Jerusalem vision in Rev. 21-22 is also informed by Ezek. 40-48, especially Ezek. 47. However, the New Jerusalem vision in Rev. 21-22 significantly modifies the vision of the new temple in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel’s new temple vision, the priestly elites control not only the admission to the temple but also ritual purity and adherence to *torah*. There is division between the people and the priests. In contrast, in the New Jerusalem vision in Rev. 21-22, the temple no longer exists: “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb is its temple” (21:22; cf. Mark 11:22-25). In other words, everyone can enter the New Jerusalem.¹⁴⁴ Rossing notes, “God’s presence is not confined to a temple, but now extends to the entire creation. Revelation further universalizes and ‘democratizes’ Ezekiel’s elite priestly vision by extending priestly status to all God’s people.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² John E. Hartley, *Genesis* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 50.

¹⁴³ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1963), 59.

¹⁴⁴ Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 185.

¹⁴⁵ Barbara R. Rossing, “River of Life in God’s New Jerusalem: An Eschatological Vision for Earth’s Future,” in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 217.

Different from the gates of Ezekiel's temple (Ezek. 44:1-2), the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem are always open: the gates will never be shut by day-and there will be no night there (Rev. 21:26). Even foreigners and the poor can enter this city.¹⁴⁶

Although the New Jerusalem is an urban space, it is also a primeval garden. The pictures of both the "tree of life" and "river of life" connote the garden images of Paradise which can be seen in the second Genesis creation account:

Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. (Gen. 2:9-10)

Ezekiel also has the picture of tree and river:

On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing. (Ezek. 47: 12).¹⁴⁷

Thus, Gen.1-2:4a and Ezek. 47 are creatively combined in Rev. 22:1-5 to form the New Jerusalem.

The Important Concepts: A New Heaven and a New Earth, the Vanished Sea, the River of Life, and the Tree of Life

A New Heaven and a New Earth

The first book of the Bible begins with the creation story and the last book of the Bible, closes with a renewed creation (Rev. 21:1-22:5). Contrary to contemporary popular apocalyptic thought, epitomized by dispensational premillennialism which

¹⁴⁶ Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 188.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

asserts that faithful believers shall be “raptured” at the end of the world in order to meet and live with God, the New Jerusalem vision of the Book of Revelation does not show us the image of rapture. Instead, the New Jerusalem is an earth-centered vision.

God goes down to Earth in order to dwell with residents of the Earth:¹⁴⁸

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. (Rev. 21:1-3)

We can see the same usage of the word “dwell” (σκηνοῶ) in the Gospel of John, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, John 1:14). According to Barbara Rossing, the main message of the Bible is God’s love story that has God going down to earth in order to dwell with us.¹⁴⁹

Rossing also notes “The Gospel of Matthew calls Jesus ‘Emmanuel,’ which means in Hebrew ‘God is with us.’ Revelation proclaims that same message of God’s dwelling in our world [I]t is the message that God’s home is no longer up in heaven, but here in our midst, incarnate on earth.”¹⁵⁰

This vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1) which is illustrated with the vision of the New Jerusalem, is an important concept for the ecological interpretation of the Bible. Steven Bouma-Prediger argues that “God’s good future is earthy. It includes a renewed heaven and earth.”¹⁵¹ Bouma-Prediger also mentions that the vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” does not mean discontinuity with

¹⁴⁸ Rossing, “River of Life in God’s New Jerusalem, 214-15.

¹⁴⁹ Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 148.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁵¹ Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 107.

the old heaven and the old earth. But rather “a new here connotes new in quality, in contrast to what is old.”¹⁵² Eugene Boring explains this idea further:

Even though the first earth and the first heaven have passed away, the scene continues very much as a this-worldly scene. This is due, in part, to the fact that the other world can be spoken of only in language and images from this world. More importantly, it is an affirmation of the significance of this world and history, even after the new heaven and new earth arrive. . . . The advent of the heavenly city does not abolish all human efforts to build a decent earthly *civilization* but fulfills them. God does not make ‘all new things,’ but ‘all things new’ (21:5).¹⁵³

Interestingly, the heaven and the earth “are linked together as corresponding parts of creation.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, the heaven and the earth became not only a renewed creation but also one unit in terms of integrity and value.

The Vanished Sea

An interesting point in the imagery of the “new earth” is that there is no more sea in it (Rev. 21:1). Why does the sea exist no longer? G. K. Beale lists five possible meanings that the term “sea” (*thalassa*) may have in this passage: 1) the origin of cosmic evil, 2) the unbelieving, rebellious nations that cause tribulation for God’s people, 3) the place of the dead, 4) the primary location of the world’s idolatrous trade activity and 5) a literal body of water.¹⁵⁵ Although the majority of scholars interpret the image in light of biblical chaos traditions and fear of the sea, that is not the main meaning. As Catherine Keller points out, the sea elsewhere in Revelation is the location of evil (Rev. 13:1) and a place where commercial ships sail (Rev. 8:9, 18:11-

¹⁵² Ibid., 107.

¹⁵³ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1989), 220.

¹⁵⁴ Reid, “Setting aside the Ladder to Heaven,” 234.

¹⁵⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1043-46

17).¹⁵⁶ The connection between the two meanings is that God does not want the sea to be used by the Roman Empire as a route to exploit people and nature. For the empire, the route of the sea played a pivotal role because it used the sea as an important shipping and trade route in controlling vast territories and peoples and amassing prosperity.¹⁵⁷ The Roman Empire's maritime trade was a major reason for Rome's international omnipotence. Rossing quotes from Aristides who applauded the trade system by sea which was a way to supply the Roman Empire with products from the colonized nations:

The arrivals and departures of the ships never stop, so that one would express admiration not only for the harbor, but even for the sea ... So everything comes together here, seafaring, farming ... all the crafts that exist or have existed, all that is produced or grown. What-ever one does not see here, is not a thing which has existed or exists, so that it is not easy to decide which has the greater superiority, the city in regard to present day cities, or the empire in regard to the empires which have gone before. (Aelius Aristides, Orations 26.13)¹⁵⁸

The sea trade was the means of exploitation of other nations. Thus, the author of Revelation criticizes such commerce Rev. 8:9: "A third of the sea turning to blood ... and a third of the ships were destroyed." Rev. 17-18 critiques Roman commerce more generally, sometimes in veiled terms, and its effects on the environment. Rev. 11:18 speaks about God "destroying the destroyers of the earth," and 18:6 calls for a repayment in kind. Rev. 17:16 refers to the body of the "whore," symbolizing Rome,

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Keller, "No More Sea: The Lost Chaos of the Eschaton" in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 183-89.

¹⁵⁷ Harry O. Maier, "There's New World Coming! Reading the Apocalypse in the Shadow of the Canadian Rockies" in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, edited by Norman C. Habel (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 175-77.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara R. Rossing, "River of Life in God's New Jerusalem: An Eschatological Vision for Earth's Future" in *Christianity and Ecology*, edited by Hessel and Ruether, 207 quoting from Aelius Aristides *Orations* 26; trans Charles A. Behr, in P. Aelius Aristides, *The Complete Works*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill), 2:75-79.

being “desolated” and made naked by the ten horns (Roman client kings). The theme of repayment in kind is in play here. The verb “desolate” (*eremoo*) was applied to describe depopulation of the colonized landscapes and cities by the Romans. The Jewish historian Josephus used *eremoo* and its cognates to illustrate the destruction of the landscape of Jerusalem in the Roman suppression of the Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E. Rossing quotes Josephus:

Pitiful too was the aspect of the country, sites formerly beautified with trees and parks now reduced to an utter desert (*eremothe*) and stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judaea and the entrancingly beautiful suburbs of her capital, and now beheld her present desolation (*eremian*), could have refrained from tears ... (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.6-7)¹⁵⁹

The same verb can be found in Rev. 18:17: “For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste (*eremothe*)!” Rossing argues that *eremoo* as used even in 17:16 does not contain connotations of rape or sexual violence in its semantic range. Instead, the semantic range of possible meanings of the word is the ecological connotations of a stripped landscape.¹⁶⁰

This stripped landscape is explicitly invoked in the cargo list of Revelation 18:12-13, and the imagery of that entire chapter indicate Rome’s unfair trade, militarism, lucrative slave trade and the trade of natural resources from conquered territories throughout the Mediterranean basin.¹⁶¹ The strong wood was important to build enormous battle ships, chariots and weapons. The Roman merchants brought cedars and citrus trees, very precious timbers, from the Lebanon and North Africa where enormous ecological predicaments occurred because of the Romans’ exploitation of

¹⁵⁹ Rossing, “River of Life in God’s New Jerusalem,” quoting from Josephus *Jewish War* 6.6-7.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁶¹ Rossing, “For the Healing of the World,” 177.

the forests.¹⁶² Rev. 18:13 lists animals among the cargo. Animals were used to produce luxury items. Ivory was used to make statues, writing surfaces, spoons, and to adorn furniture. Also, large quantities of animals were killed for the purpose of entertainment.¹⁶³

In summary, the author of Revelation reveals how much of the natural environment in the colonized territories of the Roman Empire were being stripped and destroyed in order to provide for Rome's insatiable appetites. That's why the sea, the bearer of this exploitative trade, does not show up in Revelation's vision of the "new earth."

The River of Life

The vision of the river of life can be seen in Rev. 22:1. In the middle of the New Jerusalem city flows the river of life with the tree of life on either side. This river of life gives life to everything it touches while it flows. As mentioned above, this vision evokes Ezekiel's nourishing river.¹⁶⁴ Interesting in this vision is the usage of the word δωρεάν, "without cost," which is employed twice:

To the one who is thirsty I will give to drink from the spring of the water of life as a gift (δωρεάν)" (21:6)

This vision again recurs in chapter 22;

Let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift (δωρεάν)" (22:17).

Why does the author of book of Revelation use this word "without money (cost)

¹⁶² David J. Hawkin, "The Critique of Ideology in the Book of Revelation and its Implications for Ecology" *Ecotheology* 8.2 (2003): 169.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

¹⁶⁴ Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 152.

twice? It demonstrates an important characteristic of the New Jerusalem: “New Jerusalem is a vision of a gift economy where creation’s resources are available to everyone, not just to people with money.”¹⁶⁵ Rossing also notes:

The “living waters” of *Revelation*’s New Jerusalem vision are not just part of a future visionary world. This vision can speak concretely about life for the real waters of our world now, for rivers and groundwater sources, for endangered wetlands and estuaries. New Jerusalem’s promise of access to pure, living water for all can offer a prophetic critique of our damage to ecosystems, of waters polluted by industrial and agricultural waste, of the denial of drinking water to those who cannot pay. We are told the one billion people in our world lack access to clean drinking water, while at the same time ‘a legacy of factory farming, flood irrigation, the construction of massive dams, toxic dumping, wetlands and forest destruction, and urban and industrial pollution has damaged the Earth’s surface water so badly that we are now mining the underground water reserves far faster than nature can replenish them.’¹⁶⁶

According to Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, the vision of “living waters without cost” shows us the economy of God against the economy of empire which is characterized by violence and ecological injustice.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, the image of the spring of the river of life functions as a contrast to the deadly ‘spring’ of water that turned to blood and became undrinkable in the plague sequence (Rev. 16:4).¹⁶⁸ Thus, the image of healing of the river of life unveils God’s vision of a sort of re-creation of the Garden of Eden in the center of this New Jerusalem city. All creation is invited to the river of life in the New Jerusalem in a reconciliation of God, human beings, and nature.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Rossing, “For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically,” 178-79.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁶⁷ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 190.

¹⁶⁸ Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 153.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

The Tree of Life

Rev. 22:2 asserts that on either side of the river is the tree of life. This tree is a significant, powerful image. Can we touch or eat the fruit from the tree of life? Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat it in the Genesis story of creation. However, in Revelation's letter to the church at Ephesus, Christ extends permission to eat the tree of life "to everyone who conquers": "To the one who conquers I will give to eat of the fruit of the tree of life that is in the paradise of my God" (Rev. 2:7). Rossing writes:

Think how wonderful this promise of unlimited food must have been in the face of the poverty and hunger that haunted many of John's communities in the first century: abundant fruit, and ever-berating tree, growing beside the river of life with its water flowing as a gift for everyone ... God's holy city provides enough food to all.¹⁷⁰

The leaves on the tree of life functions as medicine: "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 22:2). Regardless of spiritual or physical wounds, God's will is to heal our world. Interestingly, the actual healing power comes not directly from God but from the leaves of the tree of life. This provokes us to rethink the relationship between human beings and nature. Human beings not only can survive through eating the fruits of the tree of life but also obtain therapy through its leaves. Harry O. Maier calls "a symbiotic relationship of interdependence between Earth and its inhabitants."¹⁷¹ Thus, this image of the tree of life suggests that human beings are an intrinsic part of Earth community and should live together with nature in symbiosis.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 154-55.

¹⁷¹ Maier, "There's New World Coming!," 175-77.

Conclusion: Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5 as Ethics through an Ecotheological Lens

David Rhoads argues that Christians today have a similar obligation to that faced by the early Christians, namely, to repent of our lifestyle in order to avoid God's judgment:

On the one hand, if we are not able to repent and change our destruction of the very ecosystems that sustain human life, the consequences may well represent God's judgment upon us. On the other hand, if we are able to repent and create a sustainable life together for future generations on the earth, the results will constitute a transformation that might in some sense represent God's salvation for the human race.¹⁷²

The New Jerusalem vision in Rev. 21: 1-7 and 22:1-5 shows us that God comes down to earth from heaven to dwell with human beings. There is no more sea in the new earth because it was used by the Roman Empire to exploit people and nature. God wants to make relationships between human beings and the nonhuman world different than they were in the Roman Empire. God promises an alternative economic system which enables all human beings to access their needs without cost. The eschatological vision of Rev. 21-22 invites us to a generous lifestyle in which we share our resources with others in order to fulfill the proper eschatological life style and minimize our destructive impact on the environment.

Moreover, the image of the fruit and the leaves on the tree of life evokes a symbiotic relationship between human beings and the earth and implies the importance of a lifestyle of other-regard that extends to, the whole creation. Human beings rely on the ecosystem and so are an intrinsic part of it. We cannot survive without the help of our neighbors, and that reliance extends to nature itself.

¹⁷² David Rhoads, "Reading the New Testament in the Environmental Age," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 (1997): 265.

Humanity is a part of the earth, nothing more and nothing less. Revelation's vision of the New Jerusalem inspires Christians to live in fulfillment of God's eschatological purpose of ecological renewal by radically rethinking their relationship with nature and taking care of the ecosystem.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by emphasizing the importance of New Testament eschatology, arguing that proper understanding of the eschatological visions of the New Testament is very important task for believers. Why? Since such visions are foundational to the Christian viewpoint on the future of the earth Christians responsibility toward the environment, reading texts such as Mark 1:13; Romans 8:19-23; and Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5 closely is important to properly understand the eschatological visions of the New Testament. However, Korean mainline churches not only fail to understand these eschatological visions but also have an apathetic attitude toward environmental issues today in their country as a result of them.

In order to help change this misleading eschatological theology, this thesis dealt with three New Testament texts: Mark 1:1-13, Romans 8:18-23, and Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-5. The thesis argued these three texts illustrate that New Testament eschatology does not refer to total destruction of the entire world. Instead, New Testament eschatology concerns the cosmic renewal of creation through the transformation and reconciliation of creation.

In chapter one, “The Apathetic Attitude of Korean Protestant Churches Toward Environmental Issues,” this thesis addressed the theology of Dispensational Premillennialism which the early Western missionaries to Korea propagated among the early Korean Christians. The thesis, provided a brief history of this theological tradition in order to find the origins of the apathetic attitude of Korean Christians toward the environment. I showed that the negative features of Dispensational Premillennialism, such as literalism, produce a pessimistic viewpoint about the future

of the earth that is at odds with ecotheology and detrimental to the environment. Dispensationalist concepts lead Korean Christians to have a pessimistic fatalism about social conditions, and also the ecosystem. This fatalism fosters a view that participation in social movements is worthless.

In chapter two, “The Eschatological Vision of Mark 1:12-13: Peaceful Kingdom as the Reconciliation of all Creation, I dealt with the ecological implications of the image of Jesus in the wilderness with wild animals. Negative view of the wilderness and wild animals make it difficult to interpret this text as part of Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation. However, this thesis argued that Mark 1:12-13 illustrates messianic peace with the wild animals and symbolic restoration of the conditions of Eden lost through human sinfulness.

In chapter three, “The Eschatological Vision of Romans 8:19-25: From the Groaning of Creation to Its Glorious Freedom through Christ,” this thesis probed Pauline concepts of creation, with special attention to such terminology as “bondage to decay” and consequent “subjection to futility.” I argued that the current “groaning” of creation is, for Paul, part of the result of Adam’s sin (Gen. 3:17-19) and that this human-compromised creation is destined for liberation and glory through Christ.

In chapter four, “The Eschatological Vision of Revelation 21:1-7 and 22:1-5: The Symbiotic Interdependence of Earth and its Inhabitant in the New Jerusalem,” this thesis argued that the New Jerusalem vision is an earth-centered vision. The New Jerusalem descends to a transformed earth, and God lives with human beings on the earth. The image of the “river of life” in the New Jerusalem demonstrates God’s desire to give living water (needed resources) to all creation without cost. Moreover,

the vision of “the tree of life” provides the chance to rethink the relationship between human beings and nature as a symbiotic relationship of interdependence.

The ethical implication of the peaceful kingdom in Mk. 1:12-13, the ethical allusion to the reconciliation of all creation by God’s action in Christ in Rom. 8:19-25, and the ethical connotation of the symbiotic relationship between humankind and nature in Rev. 21:1-7; 22:1-5 all illustrate powerfully Christians’ ethical responsibilities toward nature. Through explicating these texts ecotheologically, this thesis seeks to make a meaningful contribution in terms not only of helping to change the viewpoint of Korean Christians toward the environment, but also of leading to a more ecologically responsible understanding of New Testament eschatology.

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