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‘The stones would cry out’ (Luke 19:40): a Lukan contribution to a hermeneutics of creation’s praise

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Abstract

Beginning from Richard Bauckham’s proposal that the biblical theme of creation’s praise is of considerable importance for an ecological spirituality, this article takes a close look at Luke 19:40, a text largely ignored in ecological readings of the Bible. An examination of Luke’s distinctive account of the entry into Jerusalem and a consideration of the relevant Jewish parallels to the motif of the crying stone leads to a view of the stones’ cry as one of both praise and protest. The ecotheological potential of this text is then discussed and, in contrast to Bauckham’s view of creation’s praise as something creation always and already does simply by being itself, an eschatological view of creation’s praise – and the combined expression of praise and protest – is presented as important, not least for its ecotheological and ethical potential.

Introduction

In an article in *Ecotheology* (2002), Richard Bauckham has drawn attention to the importance of the biblical theme of creation’s praise for an ecological spirituality.¹ Too often, Bauckham suggests, the images of creation praising God found in the Bible are not taken seriously, but dismissed as either ‘some kind of pre-scientific “animism”’ or ‘a mere poetic fancy’.² ‘Both reactions’, Bauckham insists, ‘miss the significance of this biblical theme’.³ He continues:

The passages about creation’s praise are, of course, metaphorical: they attribute to non-human creatures the human practice of praising God in human language. But the reality to which they point is that all creatures bring glory to God simply by being themselves and fulfilling their God-given roles in God’s creation.⁴

¹ Richard Bauckham, ‘Joining Creation’s Praise of God’, *Ecotheology* 7 (2002), pp. 45–59.

² *Ibid.*, p. 47; cf. also p. 59.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴ *Ibid.* Cf. also Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 176–7; Daniel W.

Moreover, and in explicit rejection of the notion that humanity fulfils a priestly role in mediating creation's praise to God, Bauckham suggests that 'it is much more obvious that other creatures can help us to worship God than that we can help other creatures to do so'.⁵ They do this 'primarily by their otherness that draws us out of our self-absorption into a world that exists not for us but for God's glory'.⁶ Indeed, a pressing need, with obvious ecological significance, is 'to allow creation's praise by letting it be'.⁷

Bauckham points to a range of biblical texts as presenting the theme of creation's praise of God: the *Benedicite* found in the Greek additions to Daniel (Dan 3:52–90 LXX); Psalm 148; and 'Isa. 42.10; Ps. 69.34; 96.11–12; 98.7–8; 103.22; 150.6; Phil. 2.10; Rev 5.13; and cf. Ps. 19.1–4'.⁸ Psalm 148 is an especially significant text in this regard, and the Psalter overall the most obvious location of this general theme.⁹ Later, though, Bauckham makes a passing reference to Luke 19:40: 'In a striking use of this biblical theme, Jesus himself claimed that, if human praise of God failed, even inanimate nature would be able to make up for the loss (Lk. 19.40)'.¹⁰ He says no more about this text, nor is it one which has featured among the favourites cited by ecological writers. Generally, those seeking to derive an environmentally friendly message from the Gospels cite the well-known verses where Jesus refers to God's care for birds and flowers (Matt 6:25–34//Luke 12:22–31; cf. also Matt 10:29). These are taken to indicate a harmony with and sensitivity towards non-human creation on the part of Jesus.¹¹ Mention is also often made of the extent to which Jesus' parables employ imagery of the natural world and agriculture.¹²

Hardy and David F. Ford, *Praising God and Knowing God* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985), pp. 77–82.

⁵ Bauckham, 'Joining Creation's Praise', p. 51; see pp. 49–51.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47; cf. also p. 53.

⁹ See Terence E. Fretheim, 'Nature's Praise of God in the Psalms', *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987), pp. 16–30.

¹⁰ Bauckham, 'Joining Creation's Praise', p. 50.

¹¹ Tim Cooper, *Green Christianity. Caring for the Whole Creation* (London: Spire/Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 218; James A. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 143; Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 224–5; Edward P. Echlin, *The Cosmic Circle: Jesus and Ecology* (Blackrock: Columba, 2004), pp. 94–6.

¹² See Matt 6:26–9, Mark 4:1–20, 26–32, John 15:1–8, as treated for example in Sean McDonagh, *The Greening of the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), p. 159; Cooper, *Green*

Our aim in this article is to explore in more detail the possible contribution of this short text to an ecological hermeneutic which places creation, and specifically creation's praise, at its centre, as a hermeneutical lens through which the scriptures are read and appropriated.¹³ Clearly, any broader attempt to develop the biblical and doctrinal theme of creation's praise would need to focus on the more obvious and extensive texts which contain this theme, mostly in the Psalms. Yet we hope to show that Luke 19:40, while offering only a fleeting glimpse of this notion, is both an intriguing and a significant text, which can also be fruitfully engaged in just such a hermeneutical project – though it also raises plenty of difficult questions for the contemporary interpreter. We begin the investigation by considering the text in its literary and cultural context, before proceeding to a discussion of its ecotheological potential.

Luke's version of the entry into Jerusalem

The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a piece of triple tradition, based – assuming Markan priority – on Mark's account (Mark 11:1–10//Matt 21:1–11; Luke 19:29–40). Jesus sends his disciples to find a donkey, on which he then rides into Jerusalem, acclaimed by the crowds who hail him in words from Psalm 117:26 (LXX): 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' (εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου; Mark 11:9, repeated identically in Matt and Luke, though Luke uniquely adds 'king', ὁ βασιλεύς, after ὁ ἐρχόμενος). Matthew uniquely cites Zechariah 9:9 to interpret this event as a fulfilment of the prophetic vision of Israel's king coming to Jerusalem on a donkey (Matt 21:4–5).

Luke's redaction reshapes the story significantly. First, he introduces a second reference to the Mount of Olives, which all three accounts give as the initial location from where Jesus sends his disciples to find the donkey (Mark 11:1; Matt 21:1; Luke 19:29), as Jesus commences the actual entry (Luke 19:37). Thus Luke reiterates the location which itself has an important resonance with prophetic and apocalyptic expectation (Zech 14:4). More significantly, for our purposes here, Luke expands the brief reference to

Christianity, p. 172. See also Ian Bradley, *God is Green: Christianity and the Environment* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1990), p. 78.

¹³ On the general topic of the articulation of such an ecological hermeneutic, see Ernst Conradie, 'The Road towards an Ecological Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics', *Scriptura* 93 (2006), pp. 305–14; idem, 'Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project', *Scriptura* 85 (2004), pp. 123–35; David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt and Christopher Southgate, 'Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: A Typology of Hermeneutical Stances', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21.2 (2008), pp. 219–38.

the crowd's crying out, and recasts it as an explicit expression of praise. While Mark introduces the acclamation of Jesus with a brief phrase – 'And those who went before and those who followed were shouting ...' (Mark 11:9, ESV) – Luke describes it in much more detail: 'the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen' (Luke 19:37, ESV). As is frequently remarked, Luke's is a gospel particularly full of prayer and praise (e.g. Luke 1:46–55; 2:29–32; 7:16; 13:13; 17:16–18) and Luke often introduces this theme where his sources do not have it (e.g. Luke 15:6–7//Matt 18:13; Luke 18:43//Mark 10:52//Matt 20:32).¹⁴ Here he emphasises it and makes it unmissable.

Luke also edits the cry of the crowd from the Markan account, omitting 'Hosanna' in both places where it occurs in Mark (Mark 11:9, 10) and adding to the acclamation of the coming one, identifying him explicitly as 'the king' (ὁ βασιλεύς). Also omitted by Luke is the second cry of blessing: 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David' (Mark 11:10). Instead, Luke follows the initial blessing on the king who comes in the name of the Lord with a continued song of praise: 'peace in heaven and glory in the highest' (Luke 19:38), words which clearly echo the praise voiced by the heavenly host with the angel in Luke 2:14. Indeed, it is interesting to note the complementary parallels here: the heavenly host proclaim 'peace on earth', while the earthly host in Luke 19 proclaim 'peace in heaven'.¹⁵

Only in Luke is the crowd's acclamation of Jesus followed by a report concerning 'some of the Pharisees' – interestingly described as being 'among the crowd' (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου) – who urge Jesus to rebuke his disciples (Luke 19:39). It is this request which evokes Jesus' answer: 'I tell you, if these are silent, the stones will cry out' (v. 40).

This is followed, again only in Luke,¹⁶ by a further report of Jesus' reaction on drawing near to Jerusalem (vv. 41–4): he weeps over the city, lamenting her failure to know 'the things that make for peace' and to recognise the time of her 'visitation', and predicting her violent destruction at the hands

¹⁴ Luke also introduces a number of references to Jesus praying: e.g. 9:18, 28; 11:1. On the theme of prayer and praise in Luke, see Leon Morris, *Luke* (TNTC; Grand Rapids, MI, and Leicester: Eerdmans and IVP, 1988), p. 50; Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 109–12.

¹⁵ Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X–XXIV)* (AB 28A; New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 1251; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 687.

¹⁶ Though comparable material is found in Mark 13:1–2, 14// Matt 24:1–2, 15// Luke 21:5–6, 20, also Matt 23:37–9//Luke 13:34–5.

of her enemies – a destruction so total that ‘they will not leave one stone upon another’ (v. 44, ESV).

Interpreting ‘the stones would cry out’

The crucial phrase for our purposes here, as we have already made clear, is Jesus’ comment, unique to Luke, that, if his disciples were silent, ‘the stones would cry out’ (οἱ λίθοι κλάξουσιν, 19:40). Two questions are of obvious interest: To what extent should we take this reference as (merely?) some form of poetic hyperbole? What is envisaged as the content and character of the stones’ hypothetical cry?

Most commentators have noted the parallel to Luke 19:40 in Habakkuk 2:11: ‘For the stone (יִסֶּה) will cry out from the wall, and the beam from the woodwork (יָרֵב) respond’ (ESV). The context is a prophetic oracle against the wealthy and arrogant wicked who oppress the righteous, who ‘build a town by bloodshed, and found a city on iniquity’ (2:12, NRSV). Joseph Fitzmyer labels it ‘a threat uttered against a nation which plunders people and acquires gain by violence’.¹⁷ It is by no means surprising, in the context of the ancient Near East, that stones should be cast in this role. Not only were stones often venerated and seen as animate beings, but also appear to have delivered oracles. Indeed, some texts from Ugarit ‘mention an announcement . . . and a whispering . . . of stones . . . , paralleled by the speech of trees’, an interesting parallel to Habakkuk’s stone and wood imagery.¹⁸

C. F. Evans has drawn attention to the further use of this motif in apocalyptic writing, where the crying stone is a sign of the end, one indication of the cosmic catastrophe that is unfolding.¹⁹ 4 Ezra 5:5, for example, includes as part of the depiction of the terrible days to come upon the earth the following: ‘Blood shall drip from wood, and the stone shall utter its voice; the peoples shall be troubled, and the stars shall fall’ (NRSV). The *Lives of the Prophets*, a Jewish work probably dated to the first century CE, is even more specific about the context of the stone’s cry: ‘he [Jonah] gave a portent concerning Jerusalem and the whole land, that whenever they should

¹⁷ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, p. 1252.

¹⁸ M.C.A. Korpel, ‘Stone’, in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd edn; Leiden and Grand Rapids, MI: Brill and Eerdmans, 1999), p. 818, who also draws attention to the wider evidence for the veneration and oracular function of stones in the ANE. Habakkuk also represents a prophetic critique of the veneration of stones and wood as ‘idols’ (אֱלִילִים 2:18–20; cf. also Isa 37:19; Jer 2:27; 3:9), though this does not negate the possibility – as in 2:11 – that they might convey YHWH’s message. Our thanks to Francesca Stavrakopoulou for alerting us to this important aspect of the ancient cultural context.

¹⁹ C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (London: SCM, 1990), p. 682.

see a stone crying out piteously the end was at hand. And whenever they should see all the gentiles in Jerusalem, the entire city should be razed to the ground' (11:10–11).²⁰ What these various references suggest is that, while the idea of stones crying out tends to appear as part of a series of striking events which mark some impending crisis, and thus as a sign of unusual and potentially catastrophic cosmic activity, the motif itself is reasonably well-established, and not to be seen as merely a hyperbolic image (any more than the idea of cosmic catastrophe should be seen in these terms).²¹

These Jewish parallels also begin to suggest some possible answers to the second question we posed above: what is the envisaged content and character of the stones' cry? Evans' conclusion from Jewish exegesis of Habakkuk 2:11 is that the stone's cry was understood as an accusation, and that the cry in Luke 19:40 is similarly to be interpreted.²² Linking v. 40 with vv. 41–4, and citing Adolf Schlatter's comments, he suggests that the stones' cry is 'factual and not hypothetical' and relates to the fall of Jerusalem: 'When the confession of the disciples comes to be silenced by the opposition of Jerusalem, the stones of the already ruined Jerusalem will cry out that Jesus was king, and was rejected.'²³ Fitzmyer similarly links verses 40 and 44. He sees the stones' cry as an acclamation of Jesus as God's agent of salvation, but then links this with v. 44, which 'now specifies how the stones will cry out'.²⁴

The apocalyptic and eschatological parallels to the image of the stones crying out make such a link attractive: the entry into Jerusalem is followed (only in Luke) by a depiction of destruction and judgement on the city and its inhabitants, comparable in some respects with the so-called Markan apocalypse (Mark 13), paralleled in Luke 21 (and Matt 24). Certainly, the

²⁰ ET quoted from Charlesworth, *OTP* 2, p. 393.

²¹ See Edward Adams, *The Stars will Fall from Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World* (LNTS; London: T & T Clark, 2007), for a recent assessment of the cosmic catastrophe language in the New Testament, and in Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources. Against N. T. Wright in particular, Adams argues that this language is used to depict what is conceived – within the terms of first-century cosmologies – as a truly cosmic destruction and/or transformation, not merely as vivid metaphor for radical historical and political change.

²² Evans, *Saint Luke*, p. 682. Evans also notes rabbinic references to the 'accusing stone' based on Hab 2:11. Similarly, Eduard Schweizer comments that '[t]he "crying out" of the stones may be understood as an indictment, as in Habbakuk 2:11' (*The Good News According to Luke* [London: SPCK, 1984], p. 300).

²³ Evans, *Saint Luke*, p. 682. Similarly, Josef Ernst, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1976), p. 528: 'Wenn die Jünger jetzt nicht reden und bekennen dürfen, dann werden die Steine der zerstörten Stadt Jerusalem sprechen.'

²⁴ Cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, pp. 1246, 1252, 1259.

context of eschatological judgement for Jewish uses of the ‘stones crying’ image makes it feasible to see that context here too, and thus to read the stones’ cry as a cry of accusation or protest, a warning of judgement on those who failed to recognise ‘the time of your visitation’ (οὐκ ἔγνωσ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς σου, Luke 19.44).²⁵

However, to link vv. 40 and 44 closely, and thus to see the stones’ crying as their being brought to ruins, is questionable in a number of respects. First, it assumes that the stones of v. 40 are the stones of the buildings of Jerusalem, which is certainly open to question, given that the words are uttered by Jesus while ‘drawing near’ to Jerusalem, ‘on his way down from the Mount of Olives’ (v. 37). The stones most likely to take the place of the shouting crowds at that point in the journey might well be the stones along the way, rather than those that form part of the city’s buildings in the distance.²⁶

Second, the lament over Jerusalem (vv. 41–4) is rather distinct from the exchange with the Pharisees regarding the crowd’s praise, and it is doubtful that the (hypothetical) role Jesus claims the stones might (actively) fill in v. 40 is to be equated with their (passive) overturning in v. 44.

Third, and most importantly, there are strong reasons to suggest that what the stones might do in v. 40 is take up the crowd’s cry of praise. The neatly balanced and concise phrasing implies that if the crowd were to be silent (ἐὰν οὔτοι σιωπήσουσιν) the stones would take up the acclamation of Jesus (οἱ λίθοι κράξουσιν), since this simply cannot be silenced or contained. Luke has, as we have noted, made a point of describing the crowd’s shouts explicitly as those of praise to God and of recasting their words accordingly. Since it is Luke alone who offers this description, and Luke alone who provides the comment about the stones, the possibility that these two facets of Lukan redaction are related is strong. One of the few commentators to develop this idea is Joel Green, who rejects the apocalyptic reading of 19:40, and the relevance of any parallel with Habakkuk 2:11 (mistakenly cited as Hos 2:11), arguing instead that the claim is that the stones would ‘pick up the chorus of joyful praise’ if necessary.²⁷ By way of Hebrew Bible parallel, Green

²⁵ Cf. E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), p. 226, who notes that ‘the Qumran commentary on Habbakuk takes the passage (Hab. 2:8) as a prophecy of the capitulation of Jerusalem (and her wicked priests) to the army of the Kittim (=Romans?)’.

²⁶ Cf. John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (WBC 35C; Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), p. 927: ‘the stony terrain around them . . .’

²⁷ Green, *Luke*, p. 688, with n. 27. In a similar way, Nolland (*Luke 18:35–24:53*, p. 927) notes the verbal parallel with Hab 2:11 but sees the stones’ cry in Luke as very different in character. ‘In the biblical tradition’, he writes, ‘there is a strong sense that nature participates in the witness and celebration of what God is doing . . . The disciples are

notes the theme of ‘creation responding with joy’ in Psalm 96:11–13 and Isaiah 55:12.²⁸ There seems much to be said for the idea that what the stones would voice is praise, though this does not perhaps exhaust the meaning of our verse.

Green also notes, significantly, that the motif of stones replacing humans occurs earlier in Luke, at 3:8: ‘do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham’ (ESV).²⁹ It is notable that in this text too, the context is one of rebuke. One facet of the rebuke is, undoubtedly, the implication that the idea of stones being made into Abraham’s children, or acclaiming the coming of Israel’s king, is, or seems, unlikely.³⁰ The statements are hyperbolic to the extent that they challenge a particular stance – that those who count themselves sons of Abraham do not need to repent (3:8), or that the disciples should cease their acclamation of Jesus (19:39) – with an extreme counter-example: God can make children even from stones, or can evoke praise even from stones, should human beings refuse to respond as they should. The use of the stones in these texts is thus another example of Luke’s rhetoric of reversal, his insistence that the good news turns the world’s hierarchies upside-down, lifts up the lowly and thus calls forth their response of praise.³¹ These comments invite consideration as to whether the themes of praise and protest or rebuke can somehow be combined and the apocalyptic setting of the stones’ cry be taken into account.

Indeed, taking seriously the features of the Lukan context and redaction, it seems that we should find a way to take both these aspects of the stones’

marking a moment of high destiny; if *their* marking of it were to be silenced, then the stony terrain around them would need to take their place.’

²⁸ Green, *Luke*, p. 688.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ However, the (somewhat different) idea that stones could act as progenitors is found in the ANE, and possibly alluded to in Isa 51:1–2. See M.C.A. Korpel, ‘Rock’, in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd edn; Leiden and Grand Rapids, MI: Brill and Eerdmans, 1999), p. 710. Our thanks to Francesca Stavropoulou for this point. Cf. also Jer 2:26–7, and 3:9, where Judah is said to have committed adultery with stone (אֲבָדָה) and tree (עֵץ). Here in Luke, unsurprisingly, given the character of prophetic critique of such ‘idolatrous’ veneration of stones, the motif does not imply some progenerative ability on the part of the stones but rather the conviction that God could make children – or bring forth shouts of praise – from stones.

³¹ See e.g. Luke 1:46–55; 4:18–19; 6:20–6. On the rhetoric of reversal in Luke, see John O. York, *The Last shall be First: The Rhetoric of Reversal in Luke* (JSNT Sup 46; Sheffield: SAP, 1991); Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (SP 3; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 22.

cry into account.³² The function of the stones' cry as a replacement for the shout of the crowd, explicitly described by Luke as a shout of joyful praise, strongly suggests that this is the theme the stones would take up, were the disciples to fall silent. Yet both the Lukan context and the Jewish parallels also suggest that the stones' cry is depicted as an implicit expression of rebuke and protest. Just as the complacency of those who reckon themselves children of Abraham can be shaken by the insistence that God *could* raise up children for Abraham from the stones, so if the acclamation of God's anointed were silenced, the very stones would take up the cry.³³ Moreover, both the Lukan context and the Jewish parallels point strongly to an apocalyptic and eschatological understanding of the stones' cry: this kind of extraordinary voicing of praise and protest by the stones is a sign of the impending day of reckoning (ἐπισκοπή). What significance all this might have for an ecological engagement with this text is our next topic for consideration.

An ecological reading of Luke 19:40

Any attempt to use biblical texts to resource a theological and ethical response to the ecological issues of today faces with particular sharpness the challenge entailed in all attempts to bridge the gap between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the contemporary interpreter. While inhabitants of the ancient world were by no means unaware of the potential damage human activity could do to the earth,³⁴ nor ignorant of the ways in which patterns of agricultural practice could be more or less sustainable, our location as post-industrial, scientifically informed inhabitants of a global society facing

³² The combination of praise and critique is evident elsewhere in Luke, not least in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55).

³³ It is interesting here to note a feature of Matthew's account, which does not, of course, include Luke's stones text. Once Jesus arrives in the temple after his descent from the Mount of Olives (Matt 21:12ff.) the blind and the lame come to him, and he heals them (21:14). The chief priests and the scribes react with indignation, and Matthew reports this in a way which recalls the shouting of the crowds along the journey: 'But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?"' (21:15–16, ESV). Jesus replies with a quotation from Ps 8:3: 'Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise"?' (21:16, ESV). In the Psalm itself this is hardly a rebuke, but here it seems to convey something of that force, just as does Luke's use of the stones: you have failed to recognise the arrival of God's anointed, and to offer fitting praise, but these little people (or these stones) do! Again, the politically charged theme of reversal is apparent.

³⁴ See John Seymour and Herbert Girardet, *Far from Paradise: The Story of Human Impact on the Environment* (London: Green Planet, 1990), pp. 45, 53.

massive ecological challenges is worlds apart from the consciousness of the biblical writers. That means, despite plenty of somewhat superficial appeals to biblical texts in ecotheological writing, that any attempt to read the Bible ecologically should be cautious and candid in the hermeneutical moves it develops and entails. On the other hand, despite the need to stress and acknowledge the cultural and historical ‘gap’,³⁵ it is vital for Christian theology to find ways to draw on the biblical tradition in formulating and articulating responses to changing contexts and challenges. Luke 19:40 is, of course, only one tiny and enigmatic piece in the tapestry of biblical texts which, in various ways, allude to the theme of creation’s praise. And an ecotheological reading of these texts moves far beyond their original contexts and authors’ intentions. Yet a deliberately creative and constructive engagement with such texts can, we would argue, help to resource an ecotheological ethic.

Bauckham’s proposal, one we would want to affirm and develop, is that the theme of creation’s praise can make an important contribution to an ecological theology. Put differently, we would propose that creation’s praise can serve as a doctrinal or hermeneutical lens, which can help to enable a fruitful engagement with the Bible in the contemporary task of rearticulating the theological tradition in the light of ecological issues we face.³⁶ The biblical theme of creation’s praise can help to reconfigure the tradition in ways which avoid the sense that creation is merely the stage on which the story of human redemption takes place. To take but one example, the famous Westminster Larger Catechism of 1647 opens with a headline question and response: ‘What is the chief and highest end of man? Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.’ Feminist criticism has taught us to resist the androcentrism implicit in gender-exclusive language, such that we would immediately wish to replace ‘man’ with ‘humanity’, or some such similar term. But what if we were to take a further step, recasting the heavily anthropocentric focus of this theological tradition, and replace ‘humanity’ with ‘creation’?³⁷

³⁵ As is done e.g. by Rudolf Bultmann and by Dennis Nineham: see Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden (London: SCM, 1985); Dennis Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (London: SPCK, 1976).

³⁶ Cf. further Conradie, ‘The Road’; Horrell et al., ‘Appeals to the Bible’.

³⁷ This comment should not be taken to imply that we regard any form of anthropocentrism as inimical to an ecological theology. For further discussion, specifically in relation to Rom 8:19–23, see Cheryl Hunt, David G. Horrell, and Christopher Southgate, ‘An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8.19–23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 59/2 (2008), pp. 546–79. Cf. also the comments of Brendan Byrne, ‘Creation

How might Luke 19:40 help us to develop our reflection on this biblical contribution to an ecological theology? A number of points deserve comment and reflection.

First, it is notable that the theme of creation's praise is very rare in the New Testament, most of the prominent examples, as noted above, coming from the Hebrew scriptures. Of the two New Testament examples Bauckham mentions, Philippians 2:10 seems rather centred on the acclamation of articulate beings, human, angelic and demonic, especially given the close conjunction of bending the knee (2:10) with confessing that Jesus is Lord (2:11). This anthropomorphic depiction of universal acclamation need not exclude a sense that all creation will be encompassed in its scope, but neither does it do much to promote that idea. By contrast, the second text, Revelation 5:13, expresses much more clearly the praise and acclamation of 'every creature (πάν κτίσμα) in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them' (NRSV). Luke 19:40 is thus not only a significant addition to a limited New Testament repertoire, but also the sole New Testament reference to the explicit possibility of praise uttered by what we might call inanimate creation, and one found on the lips of Jesus too. While we would firmly reject any pseudo-Marcionite tendency to relativise the value of Old Testament texts *vis-à-vis* the New Testament, it is both proper and inevitable that Jesus Christ stands at the centre of any Christian theological construal of the biblical narrative. The phrase in Luke 19:40 may be just one short phrase, but it can nonetheless be a crucial one, alluding briefly to the wider biblical theme of the whole of creation's praise and thus providing that theme with an echo in the Gospel tradition. As such it could function in a way similar to the equally brief phrase in Mark 1:13 – 'He was with the wild animals' – which Bauckham has elsewhere explored as a brief allusion to the wider theme of the messianic establishment of peace among all creatures in the eschatological age.³⁸ (These images are interestingly combined in Job 5:23, where the depiction of God's deliverance includes the declaration that 'you shall be in covenant (בר־יהך) with the stones of the field, and the wild animals shall be at peace with you'.)

Second, we might wonder whether Luke 19:40 raises some questions about the way in which Bauckham and others depict the reality of creation's

Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8:18–22', in Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Earth Bible, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 193–203, 198.

³⁸ Richard Bauckham, 'Jesus and the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age', in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Carlisle: Eerdmans and Paternoster, 1994), pp. 3–21.

praise. Daniel Hardy and David Ford, for example, comment that '[c]reation's praise . . . is the shining of its being, the overflowing significance it has in pointing to its Creator simply by being itself'.³⁹ Similarly, Bauckham, as we have seen, insists that the biblical depiction is indeed one in which 'all creatures bring glory to God simply by being themselves and fulfilling their God-given roles in God's creation'.⁴⁰ As he puts it elsewhere: 'The creation worships God just by being itself, as God made it, existing for God's glory. Only humans desist from worshipping God; other creatures, without having to think about it, worship God all the time. There is no indication in the Bible of the notion that the other creatures need us to voice their praise for them.'⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that none of the biblical examples of the theme cited by Bauckham quite says that creation worships 'simply by being itself'. Many are an invocation to praise, with no more indication that non-human creation necessarily responds to the call, or already fulfils it, than that humanity does (Dan 3:52–90; Ps 69:34; 96:11–12; 98:7–8; 103:22; 148; 150:6; Isa 42:10–11; Joel 2:21–2). Some have (or in some cases, also have) a clearly eschatological context in view (Ps 96:11–12; 98:7–8; Isa 42:10–11; Joel 2:21–2; Phil 2:10–11; Rev 5:13). Some texts indicate that creation stands as testimony to God's glory and greatness (Ps 19:1–4; 104). Moreover, none says explicitly that the creation's praise consists in its simply being itself, although some of the images – the sea roaring, etc. – would imply that the 'natural' movements and noises could indeed constitute the praise. This might lead us to question, not least in light of Luke 19:40, whether the biblical notion of creation's praise should be seen as something creation does and has always done, simply 'by being itself', or whether it is better interpreted as an eschatological goal, the calling and *telos* of all creation, just as is the praise of all humanity.⁴² The (potential) cry of the stones in Luke 19 does not consist of a continuation of what the stones have always done, in their very existence as stones, but rather of a dramatic and eschatological cry of praise, which at the same time protests against the failure of humanity to recognise God's anointed. Similarly, the visions of creation's praise in both

³⁹ Hardy and Ford, *Praising and Knowing God*, p. 82 (our emphasis).

⁴⁰ Bauckham, 'Joining Creation's Praise', p. 47.

⁴¹ Bauckham, *God*, p. 177.

⁴² As our colleague Mark Wynn has pointed out, this would connect well with Aquinas' focus on the *telos* of humanity and creation. See now Dominic Coad, 'Creation's Praise of God: A Proposal for a Theology of the Non-Human Creation', *Theology* 112 (2009), pp. 181–9; Mark Wynn, 'Thomas Aquinas: Reading the Idea of Dominion in the Light of the Doctrine of Creation', in David G. Horrell, Cheryll Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2010), pp. 154–65.

testaments are often focused on the coming day of visitation or judgement, or on the final revelation of God's cosmic victory and unbounded glory.

The different ecological significance of the two views of creation's praise is considerable. On the view that creation praises God simply by its very being, the primary ecological-ethical imperative would seem to be to 'let it be'. Indeed, Bauckham has suggested precisely this point, noting some of the difficulties with the influential model of human stewardship over creation.⁴³ But this view – notwithstanding the value of the suggestion that we should 'interfere' less, should resist the urge to manage, colonise and exploit every corner of the planet – faces serious difficulties.⁴⁴ One is that this view of creation's praise as always and already inherent in its very being suggests that creation is as it should be, with only human beings resisting and refusing the call to praise God. In one sense, given the scientific implausibility of any kind of historical 'fall', this is preferable to a view which requires a past 'event' of creation's corruption which its eventual redemption will reverse.⁴⁵ However, the biblical visions of creation's corruption and restoration can be seen, in part, as intimations of a human perception that creation is not as it should be, and as expressions of hope for its possible future. For the problem with the view of creation as already as it should be, praising God by its very being, with only humans failing to get this right, is that it heightens the *theodical* problem of the immense and ongoing suffering which the processes of creation – understood scientifically as evolutionary processes – have necessarily entailed.⁴⁶ A second problem is that the imperative of 'letting creation be', while not without some value, is both unrealistic and unhelpful. It is unrealistic since, as Bauckham has noted in response to those who reject any form of anthropocentrism, human beings evidently do, *de facto*, have 'unique power to affect most of the rest of creation on this planet'.⁴⁷ Indeed,

⁴³ See Richard Bauckham, 'Stewardship and Relationship', in R. J. Berry (ed.), *The Care of Creation* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), pp. 99–106, esp. pp. 102–3; Bauckham, *God*, p. 172.

⁴⁴ Some of the limitations of such an approach are explored by Christopher Southgate, 'Stewardship and its Competitors: A Spectrum of Relationships between Humans and the Non-Human Creation', in R. J. Berry (ed.), *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006), pp. 185–95.

⁴⁵ See further Christopher Southgate, 'Creation as "Very Good" and "Groaning in Travail": An Exploration in Evolutionary Theodicy', in Gaymon Bennett, Martinez J. Hewlett, Ted Peters and Robert John Russell (eds), *The Evolution of Evil* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), pp. 53–85.

⁴⁶ For reflections on this theme, see Christopher Southgate, 'God and Evolutionary Evil: Theodicy in the Light of Darwinism', *Zygon* 37 (2002), pp. 803–24; idem, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008).

⁴⁷ Bauckham, *God*, p. 173.

one of the most obvious and sobering aspects of the issue of global warming is the indication that human action affects the entire surface of our biosphere, however apparently removed from human habitation and activity. Moreover, this view fails sufficiently to acknowledge the extent to which many of the landscapes and species we see around us are already the product of the interaction of human and non-human creation. Consequently the idea, that creation's praise consists in it being what it is, is of limited ethical value, since it has little scope to foster realistic and scientifically informed ecological engagement. The call to 'leave alone' might help us, say, in pressing for an end to the destruction of the Amazonian rain forest, on the theological grounds that the praise of that wondrous and complex ecosystem, and of the individual elements of it, is in each act of destruction cruelly curtailed. But many other beautiful landscapes – such as the area of moorland on our doorstep – are already the product of centuries of human–nonhuman synergy.⁴⁸ It simply makes no sense to call for Dartmoor to be 'left alone'.

The eschatological view of creation's praise, a view in which the voicing of praise may also be an expression of protest, is perhaps a much more fruitful theological and ethical resource. The idea implicit in Luke 19:40 that even inanimate creation might voice its praise if and when humanity fails to do so, might play some part in a depiction of creation as able to react, theologically, in protest at human failure.⁴⁹ And insofar as human failings include the failure to relate to non-human creation in ways informed by justice and peace, this notion of creation's praise as rebuke might contribute to a notion of ecological sin: creation's cry of praise is at the same time a rebuke of humanity's acquisitive self-absorption. With typically elegant expression, Barth makes a similar point: 'even the smallest creatures', he says, make their jubilant if inadequate response to the divine glory. 'They do

⁴⁸ On this, see also Christopher Southgate, 'Protological and Eschatological Vegetarianism', in Rachel Muers and David Grumett (eds), *Eating and Believing: Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2008), pp. 247–65.

⁴⁹ This might enable a theological reworking of the Earth Bible Team's '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' – which, as one of the set of ecojustice principles, is deliberately formulated without using biblical or theological terms, so as 'to facilitate dialogue with biologists, ecologists, other religions traditions . . . and scientists'. See Norman C. Habel (ed.), *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Earth Bible 1; Sheffield: SAP, 2000). The principles are listed on p. 24. For discussion, see, in the same volume, Earth Bible Team, 'Guiding Ecojustice Principles', pp. 38–53, with the quotation above from p. 38. For theological and hermeneutical engagement with the Earth Bible Team's influential and important work, see Conradie, 'The Road'; idem, 'Towards'; Horrell et al., 'Appeals to the Bible'.

it along with us or without us. They do it also against us to shame us and instruct us. They do it because they cannot help doing it.' Thus:

when man accepts his destiny in Jesus Christ . . . he is only like a late-comer slipping shamefacedly into creation's choir in heaven and earth, which has never ceased its praise, but merely suffered and signed, as it still does, that in inconceivable folly and ingratitude its living centre man does not hear its voice, its response, its echoing of the divine glory, or rather hears it in a completely perverted way, and refuses to co-operate in the jubilation which surrounds him.⁵⁰

Barth is here closer to Bauckham in depicting creation's praise as something that non-human creation, in contrast to humanity, always and already does. Indeed, it may in the end be most fruitful to combine the notions of present and eschatological praise, rather than argue for one or the other. As with humanity, creation *does* already praise God, but in ways which are partial and inadequate, marred not only by human activity, but also by the ongoing suffering in which creation and humanity remain enmeshed (cf. Rom 8:19–23). But the eschatologically focused notion of creation's praise is important not least because of the potential it offers to provide a theological basis for a serious ecological ethic. It implies that the ethical imperative is to act in such a way as to enable the coming to fruition and expression of creation's praise. Of course, we must immediately acknowledge that this theological motif does not provide any easy or direct answers to our ecological ethical challenges. But it does recast the question in ways which might invite interesting and significant ethical responses: what actions will most foster the ability of creation to express its praise? It is by no means illegitimate or surprising if, for example, a notion of beauty – along with other non-utilitarian, non-economic, non-anthropocentric criteria – plays a significant part in answers to that question.

Finally, though, Luke 19:40 (along with other texts, of course) raises the question for contemporary interpreters, who wish to make constructive appeal to the biblical theme of creation's praise, how the notion of praise can be meaningfully construed in the case of inanimate matter. What kind of theological ontology and epistemology, what notions of existence and relationality, are required in order for the idea of stones praising God to be 'non-laughable';⁵¹ and can these be expressed in terms which are also scientifically cogent, or must theology here insist that it expresses, in John Milbank's terms, a competing narrative, which offers a *different* story about the

⁵⁰ Karl Barth, *CD*, II/1, p. 648.

⁵¹ A phrase we owe to Mike Higton, in discussion.

world?⁵² Our initial answer to that challenging question – which requires a systematic theological response – is that, just as a theological analysis of sickness and disease would need to be informed by medical science but might at the same time offer a radical challenge to the regnant ideologies of the medical profession, so too an ecologically focused notion of creation's praise will need to be informed by scientific understanding, even while it offers a distinctive and fundamentally theological account of what creation is, and of how its *telos* is focused on its praise of God.⁵³

⁵² John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), e.g. p. 330.

⁵³ This article is an output from a collaborative project at the University of Exeter on 'Uses of the Bible in Environmental Ethics', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant No. AH D001188/1). See <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/uses/>. We would like to express our thanks for the AHRC's support.