Celebrating Eucharist in a Time of Global Climate Change

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Abstract: Climate change is an urgent issue facing the whole human community in the 21st century. For Christian believers, committed to love for God’s creation and to respect for the dignity of every person, responding to this issue will need to be central in the life of faith. What does global climate change mean for a Christian community that gathers each Sunday in the name of Jesus to listen to the Word of God and break the bread? This article begins with scientific insights on long-term and human-induced climate change. It draws on insights on creation and the Eucharist both from the West (Teilhard de Chardin) and from the East (John Zizioulas). It builds on these with a theology of the Eucharist as the living memory of all God’s creatures.

WHILE I WAS RE-WORKING THIS ARTICLE, The Australian newspaper carried a story of a lecture given by Tim Flannery, director of the Museum of South Australia. The headline was “Climate calamity forecast by end of century”. In the article, Flannery is reported as saying that by the end of the century, temperatures will have risen by 3°C. The cause of this, he says, is simply human beings using fossil fuels. Australia burns more fossil fuel per capita and exports more coal than any other nation. A three degree rise in temperature would mean the loss of world heritage areas, the destruction of our coral reefs and our cities under increasing water stress. The Murray could dry up or be seriously damaged. Even a temperature rise of two degrees would mean the loss of Kakadu and our mountain rain forests, with their fauna.1

This news report is one among many. It seems that every day there are new media reports about global climate change. There is a growing sense of urgency about the issue. While scientific experts disagree about the details of their predictions, few now dispute that global warming is

happening, that it will get far worse, and that our use of fossil fuels is a major cause. It seems clear that this will be the most important issue that the human community will face in the twenty-first century. For a Christian believer, committed to love for God’s creation and to respect for the dignity of every person, responding to this issue will be necessarily a central dimension of the life of faith.

I will explore this issue in relation to the celebration of the Eucharist, which I take to be central to the life of the Christian community. What does global climate change mean for the Christian community that gathers each Sunday in the name of Jesus to listen to the Word of God and break the bread? This article begins with some brief ideas from science, first on long-term climate change and then on human-induced climate change. Then it gathers insights on creation in relation to the Eucharist from the West (Teilhard de Chardin) and from the East (John Zizioulas). Finally, it builds on these ideas with the theme of the Eucharist as the living memory of all God’s creatures.

LONG-TERM CLIMATE CHANGE

It has long been clear that our planet goes through a pattern of ice-ages followed by warmer interglacial periods. Since the 1970s, this pattern has been better understood by scientists. They have been able to show that three regular variations of the orbit of the Earth cause predictable cycles of long-term climate change.

The most frequent of these variations is a wobble in the Earth’s rotational axis, called precession, which occurs about every 22,000 years. The second is a variation to the tilt in the Earth’s axis, and it occurs every 41,000 years. The third is caused by the shape of the orbit of the Earth around the Sun, and it occurs every 100,000 years. These three variations do not have much effect on the amount of solar energy hitting the Earth, but they affect its distribution. They cause substantial change to both the regional and the seasonal distribution of the heat that comes from the Sun. The result is a predictable cycle of ice ages followed by warmer periods.

The last ice age was about 20,000 years ago. The present interglacial period (the Holocene) is about 12,000 years old and well advanced. Ice cores taken from Antarctica and Greenland and transported to laboratories provide a record of climate change over the last 400,000 years. They provide a record of temperature variation and, in addition, the gases trapped in tiny air bubbles in the ice reveal the level of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere in different periods. Scientists
have also been able to map the distribution of the ice sheets during these different periods.

All of this has shown the close relationship between three factors: the variations in solar radiation hitting the Earth, the size of the ice sheets, and the levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere. While long-term climate change is driven by variations in the Earth’s orbit, it takes effect by altering the cycles of carbon dioxide and methane and the size of the ice sheets. What has changed is that it is human activity that is now impacting on the levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere and causing the ice sheets to melt. Human beings are changing the planetary energy balance in a substantial way.2

**HUMAN-INDUCED CLIMATE CHANGE**

An appropriate level of trace gases in the atmosphere is essential for life as we know it. These gases include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous acid, as well as water vapour. When the Sun’s energy reaches Earth, part of it is reflected back by the atmosphere, the clouds and the surface of the planet. Trace gases absorb some of this heat and prevent it escaping into space. This is “greenhouse effect”. It means that the average temperature of the Earth over the last 700 million years has ranged between 5°C and 25°C, allowing life to evolve and flourish on Earth.

Humans force the climate by increasing levels of carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere. They do this by burning fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas), by land clearing and by various agricultural practices. In 1992, many governments of the world, including that of Australia, signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Under this convention, the research of thousands of scientists from many different countries was coordinated and gathered in the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This Panel’s fourth report is due in 2006. In its third report (2001), it states: “there is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities”. It says that human activities will continue to change atmospheric conditions during the 21st century. Global average temperatures and sea levels will rise under all IPCC scenarios. The report projects an increase in global average surface temperature of between 1.4°C and 5.8°C.3

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The global average temperature increased 0.75°C during the period of extensive measurement beginning in late 1800s. About 0.5°C has occurred after 1950. A recently released report commissioned by the Australian Government accepts that further climate change is now inevitable and will need to be adapted to in all decisions made by Australian governments and industry. It points out that some regions are highly vulnerable to climate change: Cairns and the Great Barrier Reef, the Murray Darling Basin and south west Western Australia. The climate modeling by CSIRO’s Division of Atmospheric Research predicts that average temperatures across Australia will increase somewhere between 0.4°C and 2°C by 2030 and between 1°C and 7°C by 2070. They predict a rise in sea level and an increase in cyclonic wind intensity.

It is clear that the danger of melting the ice sheets and the need to preserve coastlines puts a very low limit on human interference with climate. The oceans are already storing an excessive amount of heat and this will have long-term consequences even if the climate is stabilised. Those in low-lying areas like Kiribati, Tuvalu and Bangladesh are not only under threat, but already experiencing enormous problems. A one metre rise in sea levels would flood rice fields in Bangladesh, Viet Nam, Thailand, India and China, and force many millions from their homes. The Christian community that assembles Sunday after Sunday in Australia cannot but bring this issue to the centre of consciousness, prayer and action. It raises the theological question: How is climate change related to our Christian experience of the Eucharist? I will begin to explore a response to this question with some key ideas from Teilhard de Chardin and John Zizioulas.

LEARNING FROM THE WEST: TEILHARD DE CHARDIN (1881-1955)

There appears to be a revival of interest in Teilhard de Chardin with conferences and collections of scholarly articles being published on his work. Among recent books on various aspects of his work, is a new study by Thomas King of Teilhard’s *The Mass on the World*. At the beginning of his book, King notes that Teilhard’s *Mass* has been embraced recently by both Pope John Paul II and the then Joseph...
Cardinal Ratzinger. This is notable because Teilhard was never allowed to publish his beloved Mass, or any other religious or theological writings, during his lifetime. In Gift and Mystery Pope John Paul II wrote that the Eucharist “is celebrated in order to offer ‘on the altar of the whole earth the world’s work and suffering’ in the beautiful words of Teilhard de Chardin”. Then in his final encyclical on the Eucharist, he proposes a cosmic theology of the Eucharist:

This varied scenario of celebrations of the Eucharist has given me a powerful experience of its universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all of creation. The Son of Man became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest, who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the mysterium fidei which is accomplished by the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ.

I have quoted this text at length not only because it refers to, and builds on, Teilhard’s Mass but because it partially anticipates the work of this article, in offering a theology of the Eucharist that is radically connected to the redemption of the whole of creation in Christ. In The Spirit of the Liturgy, Cardinal Ratzinger also brings out the inner connection between creation and the Eucharist and refers positively to Teilhard’s Mass. He sums it up: “The transubstantiated Host is the anticipation of the transformation and divinization of matter in the christological ‘fullness’.” The Eucharist “provides the movement of the cosmos with its direction; it anticipates its goal and at the same time urges it on”. In a recent book on the Eucharist, Walter Cardinal Kasper also takes up Teilhard’s thought on the Eucharist. He sees it as a

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rediscovery of the ancient cosmic doctrine of the Eucharist and describes its role as anticipating and contributing to the divinization of creation.11

All his life Teilhard longed for this kind of recognition by the wider church of the deep theological interconnection between creation and the Eucharist. He was born in Auvergne in southern France and, from his early days, was shaped by his passion for rocks and fossils, and by Ignatian spirituality, with its focus on radical commitment to Jesus Christ and to finding God in all things. While serving as a stretcher bearer on the front line during World War I, Teilhard wrote his first important essay, on “Cosmic Life”. Already communion had become his central theme, communion with the Earth, and communion with God in creation. To this he would add the deeply held conviction that union differentiates.

Unable to celebrate the Eucharist, he wrote an essay called The Priest near the Aisne River in 1918. A short time later, in 1923, he wrote “The Mass on the World” in the Ordos Desert, while on a scientific expedition in Western Mongolia. Teilhard’s Mass is not to be thought of as a kind of devotional extra alongside his more substantial works like The Human Phenomenon. His Mass is a carefully worked and reworked text that reveals what is at the centre of Teilhard’s thought.12

He begins by saying that since he has neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, he will lift himself to the “majesty of the real” and “make the whole Earth” his altar.13 On this altar he will offer all the labours and all the sufferings of creation:

All the things in the world to which this day will bring increase; all those that will diminish; all those too that will die: all of them, Lord, I try to gather into my arms, so as to hold them out to you in offering. This is the material of my sacrifice; the only material you desire.14

Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during this day say again the words: This is my Body. And over every death-force which waits in readiness to corrode, to

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11. “In an ecclesiastical situation in which a one-sidedly individualistic understanding had veiled the much more comprehensive doctrine put forward by the tradition, he discovered anew the cosmic dimension and irradiation of the Eucharist. He did not confuse the transubstantiation in the strict sense of this word with the universal presence of the Logos; but he saw that the Eucharist indicates the direction to be taken by the cosmic movement, namely the divinization of the world, which it anticipates.” Walter Cardinal Kasper, Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church (New York: Crossroad, 2004) 127.
12. See King, Teilhard’s Mass, 59-95.
wither, to cut down, speak again your commanding words which express the supreme mystery of faith: This is my Blood.15

As his prayer unfolds, he sees the power of God at work in Christ and present in the Eucharist as transforming the Earth from within: “It is done. Once again the Fire has penetrated the earth.... Without earthquake or thunderclap: the flame has lit up the whole world from within.”16 Because the Word is made flesh, no part of the physical universe is untouched. All matter is the place of God. All is being divinized. All is being transformed in Christ: “Through your own incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate.”17 Because of this, Earth, the solar system and the whole universe become the place for encounter with the risen Christ.

Now, Lord, through the consecration of the world the luminosity and fragrance which suffuse the universe take on for me the lineaments of a body and a face – in you.... As for me, if I could not believe that your real Presence animates and makes tractable and enkindles even the very least of the energies that invade me or brush past me, would I not die of cold?18

So, my God, I prostrate myself before your presence in the universe which has now become living flame: beneath the lineaments of all that I shall encounter this day, all that happens to me, all that I achieve it is you I desire, you I await.19

Teilhard sees the risen Christ as united to the immanent God who is creatively present to all creatures, enabling them to exist and to evolve. The incarnation is extended and prolonged in the Eucharist. The unique presence of Christ in the Eucharist is extended in the divinizing presence of Christ at work in the whole of creation. The Eucharist is an effective prayer for the transformation of the universe in Christ. It points towards and anticipates the divinization of the whole world in Christ.

LEARNING FROM THE EAST: JOHN ZIZIOULAS (1931- )

John Zizioulas, a distinguished lay theologian and ecumenist, was ordained Metropolitan of Pergamon in 1986 and called to serve in the Ecumenical Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church. At the heart of his theology is the trinitarian theology of God as communion. Since he understands God’s being as communion, Zizioulas sees communion as the deepest reality. It is the very being of things. Being is communion. Zizioulas says that “it is communion that makes beings “be”: nothing exists without it, not even God”.20

Because his view of God is radically trinitarian it is also fully personal and interpersonal. And in the light of this relational view of divine life, he understands the human person not as an individual but as someone who goes out of self to others. These others include not only the trinitarian God and other human beings, but also the other creatures of Earth and of the universe. Zizioulas spells out his ecological theology particularly in a series of lectures given at King’s College London in 1989.21 Since 1994 he has been actively involved in a series of summer seminars on environmental issues sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the World Wide Fund for Nature. These seminars have gathered people from around the world, including environmentalists, educators, scientists and theologians, to discuss the ecological issues confronting our global community.

At the heart of Zizioulas’s ecological theology is his conviction that the ecological crisis cannot be met simply by scientific or ethical arguments. While these clearly have their place, far more is required. Zizioulas insists that, if we hope to change priorities and life-styles, we will need a different culture and a different ethos. As a Christian theologian, Zizioulas is convinced that what is needed above all is a liturgical ethos. Of course, he recognises that ecological conversion can be inspired by many other sources as well as Christianity, but he sees the Christian community as possessing a unique foundation for a radically ecological ethos in its Eucharistic spirituality.

Zizioulas understands human beings to be called by God to be “priests of creation”. He distinguishes this priestly task that he finds in the early church from the medieval and particularly the Roman Catholic notion of the sacrificial priesthood. He sees each baptised person as called to be, like Christ, a fully personal being. This involves being relational rather than self-enclosed, able to go out of self to the other, in

what Zizioulas calls ek-stasis. Persons are always ecstatic, in the sense that they achieve personhood only in communion with others. Human beings are called to relate in a fully personal way to God, to other humans and to other creatures of God. In God’s plan, humanity and the rest of creation will come to completion in Christ though each other. Humanity comes to its completion and creation comes to participate fully in the life of God, by humans relating in a fully personal and loving way with creation.

When humans come to the Eucharist, they offer to God the fruits of creation. In the Eucharist, creation is lifted up to God in offering and thanksgiving. In the East, the Eucharistic Prayer is known as the Anaphora, a word which means the lifting-up. From the human side, the Eucharist is the lifting-up of creation to God. The Holy Spirit is invoked to transform the gifts of creation, and the community assembled, into the Body of Christ. In Zizioulas’s theology, the exercise of this priesthood involves all the baptized faithful. He points out that early Christian liturgical texts followed Jewish prayers in beginning from a blessing of the gifts of creation. All ancient Eucharistic liturgies began with thanksgiving for creation and then continued with thanksgiving for redemption in Christ. All of them were centred on the lifting up of the bread and wine to the Creator rather than on the consecration of the elements.22

Just as, for Zizioulas, this “lifting up” of creation is not confined to the ordained but is the God-given role of all the faithful, so it is not restricted to liturgical celebrations but is meant to happen in the whole of life. It involves all human interactions with the rest of creation. The “lifting up” of creation is meant to be played out around the planet continually by every human being. Fundamentally this priestly task is nothing other than an authentic love for other creatures in all their specificity, a fully human and personal love of them in God. Our stance towards the rest of creation, our personal engagement with it as fully relational beings, is a central dimension of our life before God and fundamental to our salvation in Christ.

The ecological crisis requires the deepest resources of the human community. What Zizioulas points out is that in the Eucharist there is a profound and radical source for an authentically ecological ethos and culture. As Patricia Fox says, Zizioulas’s view is that it is “the culture created through the living ethos of a vibrant Christian community, centred on the Eucharist” that offers the most powerful long-term resource for ecological commitment. She says: “the liturgy is the key formative source of initiation into a way of being that can shape and

transform humanity's relationships and behaviour towards every other entity.”

In Zizioulas’s view, it is Christian Eucharistic practice that is capable of sustaining an ongoing conversion to a personal and loving stance before the rest of creation. It does not provide answers to the practical questions that confront us, but it does provide a profound motivation and a genuinely ecological ethos: “All this involves an *ethos* that the world needs badly in our time. Not an ethic, but an *ethos*. Not a programme, but an attitude and a mentality. Not legislation, but a culture.”

### EUCHARIST AS THE LIVING MEMORY OF ALL GOD’S CREATURES

In what follows, I will gather insights from Teilhard and Zizioulas into a theology of the Eucharist as the *living memory* of the whole of creation. Because of the urgency of the issue of global climate change, my focus will be on the Eucharist as the living memory of the community of life on Earth. This includes, of course, not only the diverse living things that inhabit our planet, but also the atmosphere, the seas and the land. I will develop this theme by working through four steps: the Eucharist as the living memory of creation as well as redemption, as sacrament of the transformation of all creation in Christ, as anticipation of the participation of all God’s creatures in the life of the Trinity and as solidarity with the victims of climate change.

#### 1. The Memory of Creation as well as Redemption

The concept of *anamnesis* is central to Eucharistic theology. The word can be translated as a memorial or simply as memory, but I think it is best translated as living memory. In every Eucharist, we remember the events of our salvation in Christ, in such a way that they are made present to us powerfully here and now and that they already anticipate the future transformation of all things in Christ. This kind of memory not only recalls the past but acts in the present and opens out towards God’s future. It is natural and appropriate for the Christian community to focus its attention in the Eucharist on the central events of Christ’s death and resurrection. But it is also appropriate to remember, with Zizioulas, that every Eucharist is a thanksgiving memorial for God at work in creation as well as in redemption.

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This is something that was long ago explored by liturgical scholar Louis Bouyer. In his treatment of the anamnesis of the Eucharist, Bouyer points out that the early Eucharistic Prayers were closely connected to their origins in the Jewish prayer forms used in synagogues and especially in homes, above all in the Passover meal. These prayers were always based on memory and thanksgiving. They begin with a blessing of the gifts of creation. What is called to mind is God’s work that involves both creation and salvation. The anamnesis of both Jewish prayer forms, and the older Christian Eucharistic Prayers, involves an anamnesis of both creation and redemption.

In my view, this is of fundamental importance in a time when human action is radically altering the climate with disastrous effects for human beings and for other creatures on Earth. When we come to the Eucharist we bring the creatures of Earth with us. We remember the God who loves each one of them. We grieve for the damage done to them. We feel with them. We cannot but learn the kind of ethos that Zizioulas speaks of, an ethos that leads to a different way of acting.

This ancient theology can be found at work in our current liturgical texts. In every Eucharist, we begin by bringing creation to the table, bread and wine, “fruit of the Earth and the work of human hands”. Our everyday Eucharistic Prayers bring out the radical inner relationship between God’s action in creation and redemption: “He is the Word through whom you made the universe, the Saviour you sent to redeem us” (2nd Eucharistic Prayer). They make it clear that when we come to the Eucharist we bring creation with us. As Zizioulas says, we lift the whole of creation to God. We praise God on behalf of all of Earth’s creatures: “All creation rightly gives you praise” (3rd Eucharistic Prayer); “In the name of every creature under heaven, we too praise your glory” (4th Eucharistic Prayer).

In every Eucharist, we remember the events of Christ’s life, death and resurrection and experience their power to bring healing and salvation. We also remember God’s good creation, the 14 billion year history of the universe, the 4.5 billion year history of Earth and the emergence of life on Earth in all its diversity and beauty. We remember the vulnerable state of the community of life on Earth today and bring this to God. All of this is caught up in the mystery of Christ celebrated in each of our Eucharists. In the great doxology at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we lift up the whole creation through, with and in
Christ, “in the unity of the Holy Spirit” to the eternal praise and glory of God.\textsuperscript{28}

2. Sacrament of the Transformation of Creation in Christ

A second inner connection between what is happening to the community of life on Earth and our Eucharistic gatherings is found in the idea that the Christ we encounter in the Eucharist is the risen one, the one in whom all things were created and in whom all are reconciled (Col 1:15-20). The risen Christ is the one in whom creation is renewed and transformed: God’s eternal wisdom and plan for the fullness of time is “to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10).

Even when, in the Eucharist, the focus of the memorial is on Christ’s death and resurrection, this is not a memory that takes us away from creation. On the contrary, it involves us directly with creation. It connects us to Earth and all its creatures. When we remember Christ’s death, we remember a creature of our universe, part of the interconnected evolutionary history of our planet, freely handing his whole bodily and personal existence into the mystery of a loving God. When we remember the resurrection, we remember part of our universe and part of our evolutionary history being taken up in the Spirit into God. This is the beginning of the transformation of the whole creation in Christ. As Karl Rahner says, this resurrection of Jesus is not only the promise but the beginning of the glorification and divinization of the whole of reality.\textsuperscript{29}

All of this supports Teilhard’s claim that there is a connection between the Eucharist we celebrate and the transformation of the universe in the risen Christ. I think this relationship is best understood as a sacramental one. The traditional teaching has always been that in eating and drinking we participate in the risen Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17). Bread and wine become sacramentally the body and blood of the risen one. In participating at the Eucharistic table, we participate sacramentally in Christ, but this Christ is the one in whom the universe is being transformed in the power of the Spirit. The bread and wine are the sacrament of the Christ who is at work in creation. What is symbolised is wonderfully made present. What is made present is Christ in the power of resurrection, not only the promise but also the beginning of the


transformation of all things. Every Eucharist is both sign and agent of
the transforming work of the risen Christ in the whole of creation.

The one we encounter sacramentally in the Eucharist is the one in
whom all things were created and in whom all will be transfigured. This
means that human action, which is an expression of love and respect for
the living creatures, the atmosphere, the seas and the land of our planet,
can be seen as not only in continuity with, but also as in some way part
of the work of the Eucharistic Christ. Wilfully pumping up more and
more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, with all its known effects on
the living systems of our planet, cannot but be seen as a denial of Christ.
It is a denial of the meaning of all that we celebrate when we gather for
Eucharist.

3. Anticipating the Participation with All Creatures in the Divine
Communion

One of the things that can be learnt from the East, and from the
theology of John Zizioulas, is that every Eucharist is an eschatological
event. It is an event of the Spirit that anticipates the future when all will
be taken up into God. The Eucharist is profoundly trinitarian. Our
Eucharistic communion, our communion with each other in Christ, is
always a sharing in and a tasting of the divine Communion of the
Trinity. And it is always an anticipatory experience of the future when
all things will be taken up into the dynamic shared life of the triune
God. Eucharistic communion is a participation here and now in the
divine Communion of the Trinity in which all things will be
transfigured and find their eternal meaning and their true home.

In the Eucharist we are taken up into God. We participate in the
divine Communion. It is this Communion that is source of all the life on
Earth. It is this Communion that enables a community of life to emerge
and evolve. And, in ways that are beyond our imagination and
comprehension, it is this Communion that will be the fulfilment of all
the creatures of our planet, and all the wonders of our universe. As we
participate in the Eucharist, we taste in anticipation the fulfilment of all
things taken up into the divine life of the Trinity.

As Tony Kelly has said, “The most intense moment of our com-
munion with God is at the same time an intense moment of our
communion with the earth.”30 We are caught up into God and into
God’s love for the creatures of our planetary community. Kelly points to
the way that the Eucharist shapes our ecological imagination: “The

30. Tony Kelly, The Bread of God: Nurturing a Eucharistic Imagination (Melbourne: Harper-
Eucharist educates the imagination, the mind, and the heart to apprehend the universe as one of communion and connectedness in Christ.” It is in and through this Eucharistic imagination that a distinctive ecological vision and commitment can take shape.31 With this kind of imagination at work in us, we can see the other creatures of Earth as our kin, as radically interconnected with us in one Earth community of life before God. We can begin to see critically – to see more clearly what is happening to the Earth. We are led to participate in God’s feeling for the life-forms of our planet. A Eucharistic imagination leads to an ecological ethos, culture and praxis.

4. Solidarity with the Victims of Climate Change

The Eucharist always involves the memory of the cross. The theologian Johannes Metz writes of the memory of the passion as a “dangerous” memory.32 He sees the cross of Jesus as an abiding challenge to any complacency we might have before the suffering of others. It brings those who suffer to the very centre of Christian faith. It constantly challenges ideological justifications of the misery of the poor and the victims of war, oppression and natural disasters. The resurrection certainly offers a dynamic vision of hope for the suffering of the world, but it does not dull the memory of the suffering ones. They are always present, forever imaged in the wounds of the risen Christ.

This dangerous and critical memory provides an alternative way of seeing. It leads to solidarity, to alternative life-styles and to personal and political action. The World Council of Churches, in its reflections on solidarity with victims of climate change, points to the many communities of people, especially in the Southern hemisphere, who are particularly vulnerable to climate change: “Though their per capita contribution to the causes of climate change is negligible, they will suffer from the consequences to a much larger degree.”33 Climate change aggravates the social and economic injustice between rich and poor in our global community. To contribute to this destruction of lives, of homes, of livelihoods and of communities “is not only a sin against the weak and unprotected but also against the earth – God’s gift of life”.34

The Eucharist, as a living memory of all those who suffer, calls the Christian community to a new solidarity that involves all the human

34. Solidarity with Victims, 10.
victims of climate change and includes the animals and plants that are destroyed or threatened. Solidarity involves personal and political commitment to both of the two strategies that have been identified as responses to climate change, those of mitigation and adaptation. Adaptation will mean re-ordering society, budgeting in readiness for climate disasters, training personnel and allocating resources. In a particular way it will involve, as a matter of justice, hospitality to environmental refugees.

When we Australian Christians gather for Eucharistic celebrations, we gather in solidarity with Christians who assemble for Eucharist in Kiribati, in Tuvalu, in Bangladesh. We gather in solidarity with those who share other forms of religious faith in the Pacific, in South-East Asia, in Africa, and in all parts of our global community. We remember those already displaced from the homes and their heritage. We are painfully aware of the threat to many millions of other people. We are mindful of Australia’s contribution to greenhouse, of our wealth created by coal, of our use of motor vehicles. We pray that in solidarity, that the Eucharist that brings us into peace and communion with God, may “advance the peace and salvation of all the world” (3rd Eucharistic Prayer). We commit ourselves again to discipleship, to an ecological ethos, lifestyle, politics and praxis, as people of Easter hope.