

# Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

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This article is meant to be both of general interest, and to act as a discussion starter for the Melanesian Association of Theological Schools' Study Institute on "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation". This Study Institute, in turn, is intended to involve theological students in discussions going on in preparation for the World Council of Churches' General Assembly in Canberra, between February 7-20, 1991. The Council will relate the theme of "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)" to Christian doctrine, by borrowing the title of the following poem: "Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation":

*Where families are fractured  
by domestic upheavals  
and children forced on to streets  
to fight for survival*

*Where more resources are spent  
on arms and destruction  
and less attention paid  
to sickness and starvation*

*Come, Holy Spirit  
Heal our wounds  
Renew the Whole Creation!*

*Where the acquisition of things  
has become an obsession  
and the worth of a human being  
is measured by one's possessions*

*Where our air, tress, and seas  
are besieged by pollution  
and purblind mercenary greed  
threatens our environment*

*Come, Holy Spirit  
Heal our wounds  
Renew our Whole Creation!*

*Where countries are split apart  
by communalism and racism  
and innocent blood is spilt  
by wanton acts of terrorism*

*Where internecine warfare  
sets nation against nation  
and a nuclear holocaust  
looms ominous on our horizon*

*Come, Holy Spirit  
Heal our wounds  
Renew the Whole Creation!*

Cecil Rajendra, Malaysia.

We will, therefore, begin with some introductory comments on the theme of JPIC, then give a short outline of the debate so far, and then make some suggestions about a Melanesian contribution to the debate.

## **Section A**

In the beginning, when God created the universe. . . . So God created human beings, making them to be like Himself. . . . Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth, and being it under their control. . . . God looked at everything He had made, and He was very pleased (Gen 1:1-31).

The first of the two accounts of creation in Genesis affirms the unity and integrity of creation, by listing every main type of creature, and declaring that they are all made by Him, and He is pleased with them all. Human beings, male and female, are created to be like God in caring for His creatures, as He cares for them. Their control of the earth is not an act of dominance, but an act of stewardship, for they, too, are creatures, and are involved with those, over whom they have been given control.

Modern science, like religion, tries to cope, at once, with the diversity and the unity of creation. While religion looks for the source of unity, in the overall love of God for all the creatures He has made, scientists look for a single unifying law, or material force. It would seem possible to say that any such law, or force, would be the material expression of the spiritual love of God, and would be shaped

and guided by that love. In the past, philosophers used to look for a single unifying law, or reason, behind the universe, which they called the “Word” or “Logos”. Christians identified that “Word” with the Word of God, and said that it became flesh in Jesus Christ. So, the search to integrate the “oneness” of each individual creature with the “oneness” of the whole creation is both a scientific, and a religious, task.

When we look around us, we see things, each of which, we define as being in some way “one”, everything from a sub-atomic particle, through a piece of rock, to a human being. Within these “ones”, there may be smaller “ones”, yet, at the same time, they are part of bigger “ones”, as human beings are bodies made up of many members, and, at the same time, are members of the “bodies” of one, or more, human communities. Each of these bodies, therefore, has certain a wholeness, or integrity, which is capable of holding together diversity, and, at the same time, has the ability to be integrated within a greater whole, by being related to other bodies. Because they are “ones”, made up of related “ones”, and are able to relate to other “ones”, they have the ability to fall apart, to disintegrate, and then to reintegrate, by relating themselves in new, more-complicated ways to the other “ones” around them. By this ability to disintegrate and reintegrate, they are able to change, and to relate ever more fully to the rest of the universe. They are rescued from being trapped in a lifeless rigidity, which would isolate them from the universe around them, and are called to ever-deeper relationships of love. So, the process of change, of disintegration, followed by reintegration, is a movement from death to new life, which we see going on throughout creation. It is by this process of death and resurrection that the Holy Spirit assists in renewing the integrity of whole of creation, as He assisted in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

On a material level, the process of the breakdown of old forms, and the emergence of new ones, is called by scientists “evolution”. It is seen to take place among the simplest particles that make up atoms, and as the particles combine to form atoms, so the atoms combine to form molecules, which, in turn, combine to form something higher, and so the movement goes on, step by step, until it reaches human beings. As the movement goes on, there are many places where it seems to be blocked, or it changes direction by accident, so, some people have concluded that the whole process is an accident, a mixture of chance and necessity, the work of a blind watchmaker, the result of a blind material force pushing from below, with no sense of purpose.

Yet, there are others who point out that, in human beings, the process of evolution has produced creatures, who are conscious, creative, and have a sense of purpose. Moreover, with this consciousness, creativity, and purpose, human beings have a sense of being in touch with a consciousness, purpose, and creativity greater than their own, from which their own comes, and which is drawing them to itself, in order that they may cooperate ever more fully with it. The question then arises, whether this same power of attractive persuasiveness was at work earlier on in the evolutionary process, calling creatures onward into ever-more complicated forms of internal organisation, until, in human beings, they became conscious of a purpose and plan that has been giving overall direction to their free movement all along. Such an overall plan and purpose, guiding all creatures, would be what we call the providence of God.

In this case the providences of God, the love by which He attracts creatures towards Himself, so that they can cooperate in the coming of His kingdom, would not only be at work in human beings, but in all creatures, from subatomic particles, upwards. Each would respond to God's particular care, with the level of sub-conscious awareness, of which it was capable, and would reach out to the more-organised forms of life that lay beyond it, which would, in turn, reach out towards more-organised forms of life, until those forms became so organised that they were conscious of being organised, and so could reach out towards the organiser Himself. So, human beings, being conscious, may truly be seen as being at the top of the process of evolution, and, while still being involved with the creatures, from which they have come, are in direct touch with the creator, and are involved in His continuing work of creation. So, human beings represent the creatures to the creator, and the creator to the creatures. In that sense, they are given, by the creator, the duty to care for, and organise, and control, the other creatures. Since each creature is, in some sense, touched by God's providential care, each has a value in its own right, yet each depends upon, and is organised by, the levels of life above it. So, human beings do have the power, given to them by God, to control all other creatures, but they should do so, not just for the convenience of human beings, but for the sake of the creatures themselves, so that they can fulfil their purpose in the overall plan of creation.

Since human beings have disobeyed, and have often failed to carry out the work of caring for each other, and for all creatures that God entrusted to them, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to proclaim the coming of His kingdom, and to recall human beings to their true place in the carrying out of God's plan. As regards to other human beings, the task of human beings is to work for justice and peace, but,

as regards to all other creatures, it is to work for the integrity of all creation. That integrity is given by the one God, who is the source of all unity. If we say that Jesus Christ has made that one Creator God known in a uniquely-full way, we do so in an inclusive sense, rather than in an exclusive sense, so that we can cooperate with all people of good will. If creation had an integrity of its own, apart from God, it would be a material machine or organism, driven by its own force, and with no being to respond to, and, so, with no freedom to respond, and no freedom to change from what the chances and necessities of its own nature made it. If creation were run by a pantheistic, “green”, impersonal life force, which some might call “nature”, which indwells all, then it would, at one, be confined by the limits of the creatures it indwells, and yet, within those limits, would completely direct the actions of the creatures it moved. Neither atheism nor pantheism leaves room for human responsibility. The highest ideal they would allow would be conservation, in the sense that human beings would be required not to interfere with, or go against, the natural energies, by which the natural machine, or life force, pushed all creatures along, to ensure the overall survival of creation.

Yet, if there is a personal God, then personal beings, such as human beings, are responsible to Him for their care of His creation. Such a God would be beyond the natural processes, by which nature is driven and organised. We have described those processes as the process of evolution. At the same time, because He is beyond the processes of evolution, He is able to draw close to the creatures, who are involved within the processes of evolution, and show His love and care for them, in such a way that, while not being dominated by Him, they freely respond and so cooperate in His shaping of their lives. This relationship of love and response takes place most clearly between God and human beings, but all creatures are, in some way, responsive. We see this, even in the way that clay responds to the potter, and much more in the way that farm animals or pets respond to their owners. Sometimes, human beings exercise the love of God for His creatures on His behalf, since they are created in His likeness, and act as His stewards, but there are vast areas of life, where creatures evolve and thrive, without direct contact with human beings. There, God must care for His creatures in other ways, since: “Look at the birds, they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest, and put in barns; yet your Father in heaven cares for them (Matt 6:26). Human beings are at the highest level of organisation in the order of creatures, but all the lower levels have their own degree of organisation, value, and responsiveness, by which God can show His love for them, and unite them with each, and with Himself.

So, God's purpose is to unite the whole of creation to Himself by love. Therefore, nothing is to be wasted or abused. On the other hand, the higher creatures may use the lower creatures for their own just ends, even to the extent of eating them. That may be seen as part of the process of taking lower levels of organisation into higher levels, of bringing new life from death. Even in this, the value and responsiveness of what is used can be respected.

The link between God's dealings with humanity, and His dealings with nature, is also made in the Psalms. It is not only for human beings that the Lord provides food, but for all living beings: "All living beings look hopefully to You, and You give them food when they need it" (Ps 145:15). The Lord cares for each suffering person, and for each star, with the same individual attention: "He heals the broken hearted and bandages their wounds. He has decided the number of the stars and calls each one by name" (Ps 147:3-4). The whole of nature is called upon to rejoice, because the Lord will rule the people of the world with justice and fairness (Ps 96:10-16). The basis of God's care, for both humans and all other creatures, is His covenant faithfulness, revealed in the covenant at Sinai, and traced back through the covenant with Abraham, through the covenant with Noah, to the covenants with the first human beings. The terms of God's covenant at Sinai are the Law, but the same consistency of care is shown in God's treatment of nature, and Psalm 19 uses the glory of the regular natural order as the counterpart to the glory of the justice of the law: "How clearly the sky reveals God's glory! How plainly it shows what he has done! Each day announces it to the following day. "The laws of the Lord are right" (Ps 19:1, 2, 8). The integrity of God's treatment of creation is of a piece with the integrity of His justice. Both are based on His love, and we should respond to His love by cooperating with Him, in working for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

If it is this world that God is uniting with Himself by love, then there can be no separate "other world", into which human beings can escape if they utterly spoil this world. The "next world" will be the final stage, in recreation out of breakdown, which is going on all the time in this world. The pattern for Jesus Christ's coming at the end of the world is set by His first coming, when the death of His body led to the resurrection of that same body, not its replacement by another. So, the death of this world will lead to its resurrection in a new "spiritual", more-fully-organised form. It will be our Lord Jesus Christ, who will be responsible for this final organisation, or "recapitulation".

If we can see God as constantly at work in bringing new life out of death and disaster, then we are freed from both complacency and despair.

We have no room for complacency, for the disasters and deaths that take place are real disasters to creatures, for which God cares, and if they are not able to make their contribution to the final integration of creation, then creation will be all the worse for it. The wholesale destruction of species, the infertility caused by pollution and decay, the threat of flooding, through global warming, are real disasters, which leave that much less to be taken up into the final uniting of the world with God. It is a death and disaster, in the same way that any act of war or injustice prevents a human being from contributing their full potential to the union of humanity with God.

Nevertheless, although we should do all we can to prevent environmental and human disaster, and should mourn them when they do happen, we should not despair. God's creative love is always capable of fostering new life out of the most hopeless, and barren, situation. "Yet for all this, nature is never spent. There lives a dearest freshness deep down things."<sup>1</sup> Reports of the inhumanity of humans to each other, or of the destruction of the environment, make us think that things have gone so far that there is nothing that we can do. We think we are in terminal decline, in a tailspin. We either turn away, and try to pretend it is not happening, by thinking of something else, or we stare at it in a fixed trance, helpless, even willing the very disaster we fear to happen so that, at least, it will break the tension. Either mood can produce false "apocalyptic" teaching about the end of the world. But the true teaching is a message of hope. Disaster is like sin. It cannot be ignored, or forgotten, but it can be forgiven, and the damage it does cannot separate us from the love of God, who is forever reaching out to us, to unite us, and all creation, to Himself. It is a message of hope, for us, and for all creation: "Who then can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship, or persecution, or hunger, or poverty, or death? . . . There is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God, which is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 8:35-39). And, by our union with Christ, we are able to unite the whole of creation with Him: "Yet there was hope that creation, itself, would one day be set free from its slavery to decay, and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:20-21). Likewise, in Colossians, we have a vision of the final integrity of creation, not by itself, but in union with God, through Jesus Christ: "through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur", in *English Journal*, 53-4 (4/1964), p. 285.

universe back to Himself” (Col 1:20). We do not fold our arms, and leave it to God to do it all. Nor do we let our arms hang limp with despair. Nor do we rely on our own hands alone, even if aided by the latest technology. Instead, we look at the situation, to see what is going on in human and natural terms, and then ask what signs there of God’s love in action, so that we can cooperate with what He is doing. In many situations, we may be able to see progress and development, the emergence of new life, through new, and better-organised ways, of doing things, the breaking-down of barriers that keep people apart in, isolated units, in order to build up a new unity between creation and God. Yet, on other occasions, there may be forces of breakdown at work, so strong, that the usual methods of human coping cannot deal with them. Then we need to look to see how, even in the midst of death, God is already raising up new life. Where there is injustice, we are to look for signs of dignity, courage, and forgiveness among the oppressed, so that we can strengthen them in their struggle. Where there is war, or violence, we are to look for ways to counter it, with peace and non-violence. Where there is destruction of creation, and disruption of its integrity, and ecological balance, we need to see how new species are springing up, to fill the niches left by the destruction of others, and how new relationships are being worked out between creatures. We need to see, also, how it is, that it is often the poorest, who are nearest to other creatures, and so most sensitive to them, who are taking a lead in working out new relationships with the creatures, and, so, working to restore the integrity of creation. So, working for justice for the poor and working for the integrity of creation, often go together. In both cases, we are “resisting the threats to life”.

In his book, *Resisting the Threats to Life*, Preman Niles gives examples of poor people concerned for, and working for, the integrity of creation, he quotes Mamani, from Bolivia: “I see two contending nations in Bolivia. On the one hand, the immigrant minority, identifying itself as Christian, maintains an ideology of accumulation, domination, and oppression. We Indians, on the other hand, believe that the gifts of creation should benefit all, and that consumption should be limited to what is necessary. Our Aymara communities, and those of all Andean native peoples, are participatory. Our sense of community extends to the relationship between people and all of creation. It includes safeguarding the harmony of nature. If the churches are really concerned for the integrity of creation, they will have to recover a gospel that is good news for all of creation.”<sup>2</sup> Such a

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<sup>2</sup> Preman Niles, *Resisting the Threats to Life*, Geneva Sw: WCC Publications, 1989, p. 16.



participatory approach, in which the sense of community is extended to the relationship with all creation, is shared by Melanesian people.

It is only by building up healthy, “whole” relationships, at one-and-the-same time with God, with all other people, and with all other creatures, that we can work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The opposite approach, of dominating other people, and all other creatures, in order to make money from them, at all costs, has often been taken as realistic, as the only way to survive.

In such a view, there is either no place for God, or He is used as an idol, a tool to back up the selfishness of the rich and powerful. Now, social and environmental breakdown is making it plain that it is the dominating approach that is unrealistic, and is threatening the life of all, including themselves. Many of us, in many ways, find ourselves caught up in structures and attitudes of domination, so the call to work for justice, peace, and integrity of creation, is not just a call to oppose the dominators, but to “repent, for the kingdom of god is at hand”.

*Questions:*

1. Is our concern for justice for human beings related to our concern to safeguard the integrity of creation?
2. What can we learn from science, about the integrity of creation?
3. How is the providence of God at work among creatures other than human beings?
4. Do other creatures have any value in themselves, and any rights, apart from their usefulness to human beings?
5. How should the church relate to the “green” movement for environmental concern?
6. When current environmental crises provoke talk about the end of the world, how should the churches react?

**Section B**

The following outline to the background of the discussion of “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation” is based on articles by R. H. Preston,<sup>3</sup> and articles on

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<sup>3</sup> R. H. Preston, *The Future of Christian Ethics*, London UK: SCM Press, 1987.

“Issues of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation”.<sup>4</sup> Parallel with the debate within the ecumenical movement, has been the growth of the “green” movement, of whom “Friends of the Earth” are articulate spokespeople. Their address in Papua New Guinea is PO Box 2554, Konedobu NCD. Also, the United Nations has produced the Brundtland Report.<sup>5</sup> Various churches have also been conducting their own debates on environmental questions, as well as on questions of justice and peace.

The first title, used by the ecumenical movement, to express its involvement in the problems of the world, was “The Responsible Society”. Discussions of the problems of the world was related to belief in God, and the recommendations, that resulted from discussions, were meant to act as a mid-point between basic Christian doctrine and immediate application to specific problems. As work was done on an ever-wider range of problems, so it became necessary to consult experts from a wide range of fields. Members of “young”, “third world” churches played an increasing part in the discussions, and their concerns influenced the topics discussed. A common issue in many discussions was the need to deal with the results of rapid social change. Increasingly, it became necessary to take note of the effects of this rapid social change, not only on human beings, but also on the whole environment.

Therefore, in 1979, the World Council of Churches convened a conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on “The Contribution of Faith, Science, and Technology, in the Struggle for a Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society”, to which leading scientific experts and theologians, including many from the third world, were invited. Concern for the survival of planet earth had been growing during the 1970s, partly as a result of a report made by the Club of Rome in 1972, which made an exaggerated claim that the earth was running out of resources. Despite the later admission by the Club of Rome that the report had, indeed, been exaggerated, scientists continued to produce evidence of the damage being done to the environment by human activity. The United Nations sponsored an influential book by Barbara Ward and Renee Dubois,<sup>6</sup> to emphasise that care of the planet was vital to the survival of the human race. It was against this background, that, in 1974, the World Council of Churches began to talk about a

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<sup>4</sup> “Issues of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation”, in *Ecumenical Review* 41-4 (October 1989).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *Brundtland Report: Our Common Future*, Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Ward, and Renee Dubois, *Only One Earth*, New York NY: Norton, 1972.

sustainable society. The word “participatory” was added soon after, to reflect the concern of third world theologians, for participation in development. The report of the MIT Conference was entitled “Faith, Science, and the Future”. It represented an attempt by the scientists and theologians to give an integrated, unitive view of the world, based on the discoveries of science about the interrelatedness of all life, and the Christian belief in one Creator, who cares for all life. Third world theologians pointed out how far science, conducted by first-world theologians, was conditioned by first-world interests, and called for greater participation by third-world representatives, responsible for the control of science. They pointed out that most first-world science was conducted for military or commercial reasons, and, so, contributed to the domination and exploitation of the third world by the first world.

While the debate on a just, sustainable, and participatory society was still going on, a new theme of “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation” was introduced into ecumenical thinking, in a way that overlapped the previous debate. The phrase “The Integrity of Creation” first appears in WCC thinking in the report of the Programme Guidelines Committees for the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC, in 1982. It goes further than talk of sustainability, which implies mere survival, to respect for all living creatures, and recognition of the contribution of each creature to the ecological balance of the whole of creation. Various disasters, such as, Seveso, Bhopal, Three-Mile Island, and, later, Chernobyl, plus the damage caused by acid rain, and the multiple consequences of deforestation, were making it ever clearer that one act of pollution or destruction could have consequences right through the ecological chain, and across much of the planet.

In particular, man was seen to be the main culprit in such disasters, because of his attempts to dominate, and manipulate, other creatures, as well as other human beings, for military or commercial ends. Christian interest in the debate of the degrees of man’s responsibility for the degradation of the earth was sharpened by Professor Lynn White’s article.<sup>7</sup> He argued that the Christian religion puts humanity too much at the centre of the world, and that the control over nature, given to humanity in Genesis, has been used as an excuse to arrogantly dominate nature. Some people, therefore, argued that human beings should be seen as just another animal, and they should conserve the world by doing as little as possible to interfere with other creatures. Christians have replied that the control given by God to human beings was not meant to be used to dominate nature, but to be a

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<sup>7</sup> Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”, in *Science* (March 1967).

form of stewardship, so that humans could look after nature on God's behalf. Having been set free from being dominated by nature, human beings were in a position to discern and assist its inner movement towards ever fuller integration, and to direct that movement to its proper end of union with God.

In recent thinking, therefore, talk about the integrity of creation has taken a greater role, alongside talk about justice and peace. For some people, concern for the environment seems to have overshadowed concern for human beings. The "green" movement has, for some people, become an ideology, with many of the assumptions of a pantheistic religion. Respect for creatures has become a sort of nature worship, and people have been prepared to attack other people in order to defend animals or plants. This is a distortion, which encourages over-reaction against care for the environment. In fact, of course, care for human beings, and care for all other creatures, do go together. Human beings are animals, and they are also more than animals, so they are, at once, able to feel for animals and plants, and also exercise control on their behalf. Also they need plants and animals to survive, if they are to survive themselves. The way we treat other human beings is often, although not always, on a par with the way we treat other creatures. Those who dominate other humans, especially the poor and oppressed, are usually those who dominate the environment. A properly-ordered human society is one that is in a better position to care for the environment, and a better environment makes possible a better society.

The World Council of Churches has recently (March 1990) held a conference on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation at Seoul, Korea. At this conference, participants affirmed that all exercise of power is accountable to God; they affirmed God's option for the poor, the equal value of all races and peoples, that men and women are made in the image of God; that truth is the foundation of free people; the peace of Jesus Christ; the creation, as beloved of God; that the land belongs to God; the dignity and commitment of the younger generation, and that human rights are given by God. The participants covenanted to work for a just economic order, and for the liberation from the bondage of foreign debt; the true security of all nations and people, and for a culture of non-violence; preserving the gift of the earth's atmosphere, and for building a culture that can live in harmony with creation's integrity, and an end to racism. The affirmations and covenants of the conference will be presented to the general assembly of the WCC at Canberra, in February 1991.

*Questions:*

1. What are the major threats to the sustainability of the environment?
2. What hinders full participation by the ‘third world’ in decisions that affect the whole world?
3. Has Christianity encouraged a too-human-centred view of life, and an arrogant domination of nature?
4. A speaker at the Seoul conference on JPIC warned against the idea that God only cares for the poor. Can the bias to the poor be taken too far?
5. Should more be done to ensure equality for women in Papua New Guinea?
6. What basic human rights are necessary to ensure that there is justice for all?

**Section C**

In this section, we shall look at some Melanesian issues, and ask if there is a distinctively Melanesian contribution to discussion on justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

When we look at some of the problems facing Melanesian people, we see how the various strands of Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation are intertwined. In Irian Jaya, the Indonesian government is following a policy of transmigration, in order that Indonesians should come to outnumber Melanesians in their own land. Already, the local Melanesian culture is being pushed down by the culture of the immigrants, and when the immigrants are in a majority, the Melanesian culture will probably be smothered. At the same time, the human rights of the Melanesians are being ignored, and the great natural resources of the country, both trees and minerals, are being destroyed, or removed, and taken away, for use by Indonesians. Where Indonesians have tried to settle, and use their own methods of agriculture, these have been found to be inappropriate. As a result, the environment has been laid waste, and even the Indonesian migrants have gone hungry. Any protest by the local Melanesians is dealt with harshly. The domination by Indonesia of Irian Jaya is a violation of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The situation is described in George Monbiot’s book,

*Poisoned Arrows*,<sup>8</sup> which includes a petition to the United Nations for justice, which is given as an appendix to this article.

On Bougainville, mining has led to destruction of the environment. Also, the local people have been given only a small share of the profits from the Panguna mine. Further, government troops killed and injured innocent people in their attempt to deal with the militants. Once more, there was a comprehensive violation of JPIC. The local people feel pain, from the damage to their land, as well as from the death of their people, and the unfair agreement over profits from the mine. Any settlement, that ignores the future of the environment, will fail to satisfy the people.

The destruction of rainforests, throughout the tropics, has consequences for the whole world, since it could lead to drastic global climate change. Also, it could lead to the loss of many species of plants and animals, which are not only valuable, in themselves, but offer untapped sources of food and medicine. In Papua New Guinea, logging has mainly been in the hands of large, foreign companies, who export the logs, and only pay the local people a small amount, about 2.75% of the final price of the logs, in return. Many local landowners have expressed concern over the loss of their children's heritage. Much of the logging is done by clear felling, with little attempt at reforestation. The Barnett Report found much evidence of corruption. It is possible to operate a policy of sustained management of the rainforest, by which only mature trees are removed, and younger trees are given time and space to replace them. If local landowners, whose future depends on the future of the environment, could be helped to operate a policy of sustained management, the result would be more just, and would sustain the environment.

Other issues, such as the rights of the Kanak people, on New Caledonia, could also be considered from the three-fold aspects of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

In seeking a Melanesian approach to these issues, we may note that the Melanesian sense of community includes community with the land. A student of Newton College, Gabriel Menai, has written of his Eilovoan people: "A person, in Eilovoan society, is always seen in relation to his or her community, a community of both living and dead. There is an awareness of the total environment, and the consciousness that people, and ancestors, animals, rivers, and mountains, are part of the whole of life, and are meant to live in harmony."

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<sup>8</sup> George Monbiot, *Poisoned Arrows*, London UK: Joseph, 1989.

Then Gabriel gives an example of a type of healing, which shows the link between relationships within the community and relationships with the land. The example is that of a sick child: “Meanwhile a process of discussion and divination had been started by the family, with the help of the traditional healer, who had encouraged the parents to take the child to the aid post. The conclusion was reached that the child’s father had broken a taboo, by cutting trees in an area, where he had no right to be, and that the nature spirits, *masalai*, from that place had afflicted the child, who happened to be with him at that time. In other words, the man had upset his relationship with the land. The land, as represented by the *masalai*, had retaliated, by causing someone related to the man to become ill. While the aid post orderly, and nurses, treated the external symptoms of the illness, the traditional healer helped the father to perform a ritual – the sharing of a meal of pig with the *masalai* – through which he restores his right relationship with the land. The *masalai* consumed their share of the meal, by enjoying, and absorbing, the smell of the cooking meat.”

The story shows an attitude of respect towards the land, and a discipline in its use. Trees should only be chopped down when the community permits. It shows that the land has a “life” of its own, an integrity that should not be violated, for fear of unforeseen consequences for the human violator. It shows a need for reparation to be made for damage to the land. Even if some of the assumptions and customs, by which these attitudes may need to be expressed, would be changed by European influences, the underlying concern for disciplined respect for the life of the land, and the desire for harmony with that life, is in accord with modern European ecological thinking, and may be reconciled with Christian teaching about the value of creation. The aim would not be to replace Melanesian culture with European, but to interpret Melanesian culture in a Christian way, and in a way that could engage with the challenge of European culture.

Another way, in which Papua New Guineans express their relationships with each other, and with other creatures, is in the dance. As they dance, the dancers move with intricate, regular footsteps to a rhythmic beat, and form circles, lines, squares, and crosses that meet the human need for order. Yet, within that order, there is an exuberant dignity, that uplifts all who watch the dance. Many of the dances are based on the close study of the behaviour of birds or animals, and, by copying the creatures’ antics, the dancers seek to share in their life, and to harness it, within the organised activity of the human community. The result is a blend of reason and feeling, which can give shape and enthusiasm to the everyday life of the people. In this way, attentive and reflective contact with the natural world is a

source of emotional and spiritual well-being for human beings. Such an approach could be interpreted in a Christian way, as rejoicing in the wonder of God's creation, and not dismissed as superstitious dependence on spirits. Dance is an important instrument, and a sign of healing of individual and communal ills, and of distortions in the relationships between human beings and the environment, because it is a union of order and energy. The dance is therefore a fit symbol of the integrity of creation, which we seek. If the dance is done in honour and praise of God, who gives both law, and spirit, order, and energy, then it can remind us that the integrity of creation comes from its union with God.

Another illustration of the attentiveness to nature of Papua New Guineans, and their search for meaning, in the behaviour of non-human creatures, is in their readiness to see animals as messengers of blessing, or disaster, in the human world. In this journal, Fr Spencer Kombega gives an example of this, in his article on fireflies. All over the world, animals have been seen as omens of good or ill. It may go back to the way that, when we hear a rustle in the bush, we are alerted to danger on the natural level, but, from that, our minds keep on working to think of possible threats we face on a human level. So, by association of ideas, animals, including fireflies, act as an effective alarm signal for our human problems. As T. S. Eliot wrote: "Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children: hidden excitedly, containing laughter. Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind cannot bear very much reality".<sup>9</sup> Even at a more-down-to-earth-level, it is good to be attentive to the presence and absence of animals, both for their own sake, and ours. Canaries used to be taken down the mines, because, when they died, the air was no longer safe for humans to breathe. A silent spring, where no birds sing, is a world unsafe for humans. For reasons of poetry, and of science, it is well that Papua New Guineans should continue their habit of attentiveness to the behaviour of animals. Sensitivity to the behaviour of God's creatures, and reflection on that behaviour, in the light of the human condition, can provide us with parables of God's care for His creation.

It is hoped that these suggestions may provoke further thought on distinctively Melanesian instincts on the issue of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

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<sup>9</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, London UK: Faber & Faber, 1941.



*Questions:*

1. Is Indonesian treatment of Irian Jaya just and peaceful, and in accord with the integrity of creation? If not, what can be done?
2. To whom does Bougainville finally belong? To the people, or to God? Should any settlement include restoration of, and care for, the land?
3. Is what happens to the rainforest the business of the present landowners alone? Is it also a matter for future generations? Is it a matter for the rest of the world, who might be affected by climate change, or loss of species?
4. What is the link between human health and the wholeness of the land?
5. What are the benefits for human beings of an appreciation of the beauty and harmony of nature, especially in art forms, such as PNG dance?
6. What messages are there to be gained by human beings, from close study of the behaviour of animals, especially when the animals are interpreted as signs?
7. What other bases are there in Papua New Guinean culture for a theology of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation?

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