

A proposal for a Season of Creation in the Liturgical Year

Charles Rue,SSC

Inserting a *Season of Creation* into the Catholic Liturgical Year during September is one way to structurally help implement the vision of Pope Francis given in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. As a pastoral initiative a new liturgical season would help believers face the 21st century ecological challenge. This article first looks at the liturgical reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) as an example of reform. The second part explores recent initiatives to express the creation dimension of theology in communal worship. In 1993 the Ecumenical Association Church and Environment (oeku) proposed a Creation Time running from 1 September – 4 October. In 2004 Rev Dr Norman Habel in Adelaide developed a set of Scriptural Readings and ecological themes on this timetable. It was adapted by some Protestant communities around the world. Catholic and Orthodox communities wanting to celebrate Creation during September have tended to focus on a particular day, often 1st September. Taking a more systematic approach, for the last three years the Columban Mission Institute in Sydney has prepared resources as an ecological reading of the existing Lectionary to celebrate a Catholic Season of Creation during September. Creating a new lectionary would be a more radical reform.

PART ONE: Pastoral Significance of Vatican II Liturgical Reform

Pastors know that taking part in Sunday worship is the common way ordinary Catholic communities are led to consciously know and experience God. As the Scriptures are broken open along with the bread, the faith of believers is both confirmed and challenged to grow. Experiencing the year-long rhythm of Sunday liturgical worship is the mainstay of parishioners' growth in the Christian life – a habit of God meeting humanity. In 1962 Pope John XXIII said, 'It is no accident that the first schema to be considered was the one dealing with the sacred liturgy'.

Liturgy which works pastorally in helping open believers to new horizons sets a litmus test for its value.¹ Liturgy is event, remembering story more than the objects which surround it. Pastoral liturgy opens worshippers to a Big God, helping them enter more deeply into the historical cultural flow and mystery of life, embracing the spiritual dimension of the human journey without fear as Pope Francis preached Easter 2015.² Johannes Metz wrote of the paschal mystery expressed in Christ as a dangerous memory - subversive of the ways in which humans might prefer to think of God and to order their ways of living. Worshippers enter into rhythms past and future, historical and eschatological as they celebrate challenging memories.

The Church's successive liturgical seasons evolved gradually. First, the Year draws loosely on the rhythms of nature. Nature's four seasons provide time frames, each with an emotional dimension linked to winter, spring, summer and autumn in western cultures. Second, onto these frames was grafted the commemoration of historical religious events, initially Jewish faith accounts of their history of salvation³ and then Christian remembrances of the life-death-resurrection of Jesus and sending of His Spirit. There is continuity in the flow from nature's seasons through to salvation expressed in Christ.

¹ Ernst H. Conradie, 'Liturgical Reorientation through an Emerging Horizon', *Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation*, (Conference, Serafino, McLaren Valley 10-12 March 2015).

² 'To enter into the mystery' means the ability to wonder, to contemplate; the ability to listen to the silence and to hear the tiny whisper amid great silence by which God speaks to us (cf 1 Kings 19:12). To enter into the mystery demands that we not be afraid of reality.'

³ Israel began this transition from nature to history with its great festivals - spring festival sacrificing a new born lamb (Passover); unleavened barley bread (Mazzoth Ex 12:34,39); wheat harvest (Shabuoth); wine and fruit harvest (Tabernacles Lev. 23:39-43). Canaanite festivals were given new meanings in Israel. Weekly and yearly cycles were created – Sabbath as a seventh day of rest (Ex 20:11) and rest for the land in the 7th year (Lev 25:4).

Over two millennia the Christian liturgical year cycles of prayer further evolved as local communities localised their commemorations. Varied selections of Scriptural readings created worship cycles to stimulate mind and feelings, nourishing and challenging. To capture a spectrum of culturally relevant emotions, prayers of thanksgiving, lament, petition and the like, often chanted, were added to embellish and give colour to local commemorations of God's ongoing action. The end result was that systematically over a year Christian communities in diverse cultures created cycles of remembrance. These varied Rites gave structure for leaders of worship.

Re-creating Liturgical Practice post Vatican II

The liturgical year of the Roman tradition was recast after Vatican II (1962-65) to better serve the modern pastoral needs of faith communities - joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties. This evolution built on the past. From the 19th century scholars had searched the sources. In the 20th century Pius X led believers to better participate in the Eucharist and Pius XII authorised new Easter rites. The Pian Commission operated 1948-1960 and an International Congress on Pastoral Liturgy was held at Assisi in 1956. Annibale Bugnini has comprehensively documented the multitude of people and plans involved in Roman liturgical reform from 1948-1975.⁴ Father Bugnini was a Vincentian and it is of note that at Vatican II the role of missionary churches helped emphasise the pastoral tone of the liturgical reform - what spoke to their people. The value of localisation, now called 'inculturation' in theological language, was recognised.

Reforming the Roman Liturgy in the 1960s was a collaborative effort. Bugnini was chief organiser around the mandate of Vatican II but he involved hundreds of experts and pastors. The initial work was assigned to a Preparatory Committee when Vatican II was announced. Under Bugnini the committee of 65 members approached liturgical reform with military like organisation. The basic work was divided into small subcommittees taking up 13 general areas and members were experts drawn from pastoral activists, academics, varying nationalities and spiritual traditions. After just fourteen months the Committee handed over its proposed liturgical Schema to be discussed by the bishops. Their initial vote was 2215 in favour and only 46 against. After minor changes, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* was promulgated November 1963. Vision, organisation and competence had combined well.

Implementation of the *Constitution's* reform was given to a group called Concilium. It operated from 1964-69. Not unlike the way multiple subcommittees carried the pre-Vatican II preparation, 12 groups with 39 sub-groups worked 'under the flag of mutual trust, fraternal harmony, good will and the shared ideal of reaching unwavering and well-defined goals', wrote Bugnini.⁵ Concilium kept episcopal conferences in touch with developments and asked them to present their particular questions in a process of mutual learning. National liturgical commissions, publishers of liturgical journals and information periodicals such as *Notitiae* were part of the conversation. Some Protestant churches were also reorganising their forms of worship so having their observers at Vatican II was a public way of showing mutual respect and learning.

Bugnini identified six pastoral principles essential to the reform. Liturgy has to:

- Be prayer experienced by believers to immerse themselves in God's mystery.
- Act as the summit and font of church community life.
- Embody full, conscious and active participation.
- Manifest the church as a sign of communion and basis of all its action.

⁴ Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948-1975*, ed. M. J. O'Connell, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990).

⁵ Bugnini, 185.

Show substantial unity but not rigid uniformity.
Follow sound tradition but allowing for legitimate progress.

Pastoral relevance demanded that the liturgy be loosed from the encrustations of time so that rites could speak in the spirit and language of modern times - regain its power to communicate and better become the literature and art of the people. The reform exemplified the tone of Vatican II which called for a new mobilisation of the church as a work of the Spirit, an ongoing process sensitive to every cultural development. Pope John XXIII said, 'The liturgy must not become a relic in a museum but remain the living prayer of the church'. This call grows more relevant in an ecologically aware age.

Liturgical Calendar and Three Year Cycle

The first major task of the Concilium teams was to reform the liturgical calendar. The liturgical year works with a type of counterpoint - every Sunday acts as the primary day of the Lord while the whole mystery of Christ is recalled during the course of the liturgical year.⁶ Concilium worked within the traditional liturgical seasons.

One significant decision of Concilium was to move the feast of Christ the King to the end of the liturgical year. In that place it marked the end to the liturgical year but also helped highlight the eschatological aspect of Salvation History – the ongoing and cosmic nature of the human journey in Christ to the end of time. This decision was largely theological but structurally better linked the three years in the new liturgical cycle.

Feast days were rationalised. Marian feast days focused questions because of Mary's special importance within the life of the whole Church and practices of local churches. Two criteria were identified to test the place of a feast - does it enhance a close relationship with Christ? Does it help advance the mission of church life?

Special celebrations caused concern. Rogation and Ember days originally marked the natural seasons but had grown pastorally difficult to observe so the Australian bishops all but abolished them.⁷ A September *Season of Creation* may be a way to recapture the spirit of this ancient tradition but be pastorally palatable.

Creating a new Lectionary was integral to forming a new liturgical year.⁸ Contrasting markedly with the former one year cycle, Concilium introduced a new three year liturgical cycle to implement the Council's mandate to nourish communities with a wider range of Scripture (SC nos. 35.1 and 51), a fuller story of the mystery of salvation. Lectionaries from different Rites were consulted. In 1965 it tasked 35 biblical scholars to select from Hebrew and New Testaments according to a set framework. A three year cycle for the Sundays was chosen primarily so that one of the Synoptic Gospels could be the focus over a year. Continuous reading of the Scripture was favoured for the Gospel and Second Reading which was to be taken from the New Testament. The First Reading usually drew from the Old Testament but themed according to the Gospel. The Psalm often set the tone and grace to be remembered in each celebration. Some argued that the new three year Lectionary cycle be made optional to better work ecumenically. In fact, many reformed churches concurred with the change. Catholic leadership decided to make the three year cycle the standard church practice, not optional.

The new liturgical Calendar and Lectionary was promulgated Pentecost 1969, and the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship established to oversee further reform.

⁶ *The Sacramentary*, 1969, 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar', 1 and 17.

⁷ Tom Elich, 'Ember Days' *Liturgy News* (Brisbane Australia) December 37/4.

⁸ Bugnini, 406.

Criticisms

The Vatican II liturgical reforms were not perfect. In the selection of Scripture for the Lectionary the voice of women, and the earth, was often overlooked and even suppressed.⁹ Seeing the Scripture through the eyes of modern movements was a challenge. Mistakes were made in implementation by some liturgical leaders in trying to become relevant, but working with a limited understanding of liturgical history and the dynamics of liturgical structure. Good will and pastoral concern were not enough by themselves but Church leadership often left 'creative' people without guidance, remaining silent or issuing insensitive rulings.

The reform was not without controversy. The Congregation had members who wanted a return to the past and the liturgical wars began.¹⁰ Una Voce promoted the continued use of Latin; some called the 1969 Missal of Paul VI heretical. Bugnini pushed to counter this trend but found himself 'promoted' to a foreign diplomatic post as Archbishop. The rise to power of Vox Clara led to replacing the proposed 1998 English translation with a 'clunky' version.¹¹ Pastoral relevance was often bypassed forgetting that ... 'rites and symbols are to be the entry point to the mystery of the revealed God rather than mere obfuscations and even obstacles'.¹²

However, attempts at backsliding were paltry compared to the great work Bugnini and his many teams achieved. The new Roman liturgy had been forged in hard work and pain but was a win for the faithful. Bugnini's detailed account of the Vatican II liturgical reform reads like a novel – proposals, experiments, preliminary schema, condemnations, opposition, negotiations, debates in journals and the media, factional fights, scapegoating, local interests, successes and failures. The Vatican II liturgical reform stands as a model of what can evolve in the Church if there is the unwavering will to carry through on well-defined goals.

PART TWO: Re-structuring the Liturgical Year

A 21st century reform of the Vatican II liturgy aims to insert a four week long *Season of Creation* within the liturgical year during September. It would challenge believers to embrace all creation in their spiritual journey while helping address pastoral relevance for modern Church mission. Catholics in all nations are caught up in an environmental crisis so celebrating such a season is one way to help believers find God in this crisis. This reform would embrace an expanded new story of a Creator God, a cosmic story of salvation, opening believers to both appreciate the modern insights of the ecological sciences and better find the voice of earth in the Scriptures. It would help believers give knowing and active witness to an awareness of the thirteen billion years unfolding Reign of God and mystery of God present in creation.¹³

The 2015 encyclical letter of Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* develops Catholic social teaching on the environment as part of Church mission.¹⁴ The Pope's vision is spiritual and goes deeper than ethical demands to present a comprehensive vision of the human journey which he terms 'integral ecology'. It forms a package. It has the worlds of science, economics,

⁹ <http://futurechurch.org/women-in-church-leadership/women-and-word/women-in-bible-and-lectionary>

¹⁰ Bugnini, 257-301.

¹¹ Paul Collins, *And also with you: Is the New English Translation of the Mass a Betrayal of the Vatican II Council?* (Manuka: Catholics for Ministry, 2009).

¹² Gerard Moore, *Australian Journal of Liturgy* (Fremantle: Notre Dame), 14.3.2015, 109.

¹³ Norman Habel, *Discerning Wisdom in God's Creation*, (Northcote, VIC: Morning Star Publishing, 2015), 59-72.

¹⁴ Pope Francis. *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2015).

solidarity in justice and compassion intersect as believers encounter the living Christ in this age. Denis Edwards writes that humanity is part of an evolutionary emergence of God's love where God humbly embraces the unfolding cosmos, suffers with it, leading to a transformation of humanity.¹⁵

A September *Season of Creation* would offer a structured liturgical way to help implement the call of Pope Francis. In 2013 he exhorted pastors to better promote mission by addressing real life issues in the Eucharistic assembly.¹⁶ In 2015 he explicitly asks that pastors be prepared from their seminary days to address ecological conversion; and he asks that this be done in a systematic way.¹⁷ Pastors would benefit from a framework to nurture Catholic communities in the ecological dimension faith.

The Vatican II liturgical reform as outlined in the first part of this article offers a guide on how to proceed with further reform. However, such a further reform will need the will of church leadership to move it forward.

Developing Theologies of God as Creator

Some promoters of a *Season of Creation* argue that Christian communities need to better acknowledge the first article of the creed, God as Creator, and integrate this belief within the History of Salvation.¹⁸ The current liturgy has many prayers that begin by recalling creation and God as Creator, however, no special season is set aside to contemplate God's ongoing deeds in creation.

New scriptural, theological and environmental insights suggest a deepening theology of Creation linked to Salvation and Redemption. Commentators on Franciscan theology are among those who argue that creation itself is at the very beginning of Redemption and intimately linked to Salvation in Christ.¹⁹ They focus on humanity's right relationship to the Creator and all creation as one creature among other creatures. This vein was often neglected under Neo-Thomistic influences.

Experiences of God in all creation over millennia have been variously expressed as eco-rituals, eco-spirituality, eco-poetry and ecological science. Denis Edwards writes, 'we human beings experience grace, the wonder and mystery of God, in the encounter with the world around us ... [a] human experience of the Spirit'.²⁰ Humanity is part of an evolutionary emergence of God's love where God humbly embraces the unfolding cosmic, suffers with it, leading to a transformation of humanity. Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection are not unlike an altar tryptic. On God's initiative, humanity is empowered to transform itself and the rest of creation. In Christ it grows to share in God's own self and is forever in God (Rm 8:18; Col 1:15; Eph 1:10; Rev 5:13). This trajectory of transformation becomes a new way to see, feel, act, live and ultimately celebrate and pray.²¹

¹⁵ Denis Edwards, 'Experience of Word and Spirit in the Natural World', (Conference, Serafino, McLaren Valley 10-12 March 2015). He cites the pastoral concerns shown in Karl Rahner's *Theological Investigations*.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium*, 2013. *It is worth remembering that "the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the Eucharistic assembly ... surpasses all forms of catechesis"*, 137. "The preacher also needs to keep his ear to the people and to discover what it is that the faithful need to hear.", 154

¹⁷ *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis asks for new liturgical *habits* as well as behavioural ones, 209; hopes for integral environmental education in seminaries and houses of formation, 214.

¹⁸ Isolde Schonstein and Likas Vischer eds, *Time for God's Creation: An Appeal to the Churches in Europe*, (Geneva: European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN), 2006) Geneva.

¹⁹ *Laudato Si'*, St Francis 10-12, St Boneventure 239; Ilia Delio <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781576592892> ; Kennan Osborne, 1997 http://www.franciscanpublications.com/?page_id=1147

²⁰ Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God: trinity, evolution and ecology*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), 151.

²¹ Edwards, McLaren Valley, 2015.

Ecological insights about cycles of death and new life have led some believers to a deeper appreciation of the Cross. When Robert Daly writes about an ecologically sensitive Eucharistic Prayer he says it must not fixate on the language and imagery of so-called 'nice creation' and quotes Gail Ramshaw,

'... God created a world in which from its beginning life contended with death. Such a worldview suggests a theology in which Christ's death and Resurrection do not deny God's natural order but rather epitomize and sanctify it'.

Daly proposes that prayer can be ecologically, socially, psychological and spiritually sensitive when Cross and Resurrection are a continuum.²² Orthodox theologian John Chryssavgis calls for a new asceticism in Christian living.²³

Archbishop Mark Coleridge speaking at the 2014 Wollongong Liturgical Conference said that the four constitutions of Vatican II should be read as complimentary – *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁴ The Church has a 21st century ecological vocation in the world to cast the light of faith on a major issue of our times, the environmental crisis (GS 10). Celebrating a *Season of Creation* could be a source and summit of this vocation (SC 10). John Coleman sees the connection between the Church as sacrament of the world, climate change and creation care as a call to a united mission for this age.²⁵ A *Season of Creation* would open believers to the future with hope, capable of witnessing in an age of increasing pessimism and self-centred survival.

Every Sunday and the whole liturgical year ranges back and forward from cosmic creation to the Second Coming, but, placing the feast day of Christ the King at the end of the year elicits a sense of unfinished reform, a gap yet to be filled. A period of structured worship focused on creation would fit without strain into the relatively 'dead' period called Ordinary Time. Theologically it would act as a precursor to celebrating Christ the King, Alpha and Omega, enhancing the eschatological dimension of salvation. Liturgical celebration takes the participant beyond the literal and every day to connect with a transforming reality as big as God. David Tacey argues that to give any lesser role to religion (and by implication its liturgical expression) turns it into superstition as regards God and materialism as regards the earth.²⁶

Pope Francis' 2015 *Laudato Si'* challenged followers of Christ to love all creation. Ecological conversion is primarily a spiritual experience of love.²⁷ Nature is the first book of revelation so the Pope asks for respectful dialogue with scientists and campaigners who embraced creation in their local place, knowing that humans are meant to belong on earth as a common home. Pope Francis puts justice and compassion for the poor centre stage as he challenges perceived opposition between care for humanity and care for the environment often suggested by economists and their political acolytes. The poor are the first to suffer from environmental pollution and the impact of climate change. Many environmental refugees are the victims of First World greed. Love of earth can free people from the tyranny of economics and from a life style that demands consuming more and more.

²² Robert Daly, "Ecological Eucharology" *Worship* 2015 (89) 166. Daly draws on writers such as Cynthia Crysdale and Neil Ormerod *Creator God, Evolving World*, (Minn: Fortress Press, 2013); Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Denis Edwards, *Partaking of God: Trinity, Evolution and Ecology*, (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

²³ Rev Dr John Chryssavgis 'On Earth as in Heaven', *The Earth is the Lord's: Environmental Theology and Ethics*, St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Symposium, Redfern, October 2015.

²⁴ *The Church in the Modern World: fifty years after Gaudium et Spes*, Erin Brigham ed. (London: Lexington Books, 2015).

²⁵ John A. Coleman 'The Church, Climate Change and Creation Care', *The Church in the Modern world – fifty years after Gaudium et Spes*, ed. Erin Brigham, (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), 127.

²⁶ David Tacey *Metaphor God: Beyond literal belief* (2015).

²⁷ James Martin SJ, "['Laudato Si'](#) has put spirituality into debate on the environment", (*America*, 19 June 2015).

However, the theological and ethical aspects of the Pope's 'integral ecology' teaching have been contested. Theologically, many downplay the place of the physical world itself as the locus for believers' experiences of divine presence. They fail to embrace the saving actions of a triune God within the history of cosmic expansion and evolution as explained by science. It is sobering to recall that over two millennia most Christian heresies sprang from a denial of God presence in the material world leading often to flight from this world and even hate for the physical (body as evil).²⁸ Ethically, the policies of many first world governments and international banking systems deny responsibility towards the suffering south. The Pope's 2014 Mission Exhortation asks pastors to proclaim a different message which carries the *smell of the sheep*.

Historical Development and Models of a Liturgical Season of Creation

In 1989 when Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Dimitrios 1 suggested that all churches observe September 1 as, 'the day of the protection of the natural environment with prayers and supplications for all creation'. He goes on to write that the environment must, '... be protected in the Last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ and offered to the Father as an eternal Eucharistic anaphora and offering. Creation groans and is in travail (Rm 8:22) caused in our day by extreme rationalism and self-centeredness ... encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of a consumer society ... In view of this situation the Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved'.

Further recognition of the environmental crisis came when Pope John Paul II in his 1990 New Year Message wrote that the natural world has its own integrity which humans must respect.²⁹ He nominated Francis of Assisi as the Patron Saint of the environment. As a follow through in Australia 1991-2 Caritas Australia and ACSJC produced resources with an ecological focus. Following teachings about 'ecological conversion', in 2002-3 the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference set up Catholic Earthcare Australia (CEA). Catholic education offices and Religious Orders began promoting eco-theology and eco-spirituality. Around the world many Catholic churches took tentative steps towards celebrating creation.³⁰

However, Protestant churches in central Europe took the lead in the 1990s to work on new liturgical expressions.³¹ Many English speaking ecumenical groups developed eco-resources specifically for Sunday worship.³² The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) in 2006 stated:

'We urge Churches to designate the period from September 1 to the second Sunday in October as an opportunity to reflect together on God the creator and on the gift of life... a time to renew our sense of dependence on the Creator, the awareness that

²⁸ Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*.

²⁹ http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html Patriarch and Pope's joint statement at the 2002 Adriatic Sea Ecological Symposium. *Laudato Si'* refers often to the Orthodox Patriarch.

³⁰ In 1999 the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Belgium created a Commission on Care for Creation and in 2000 suggested 3 years of annual themes and a Creation Sunday during September but without changes to the Lectionary. In 2003 the Catholic Bishops Conference of the *Philippines* published a statement introducing Creation Day/Time.

³¹ Schonstein and Vischer. The First European Ecumenical Assembly Basel in 1989 suggested a week on creation similar to Unity Week. The Ecumenical Association Church and Environment (oeku) was founded in Switzerland in 1986 and in 1993 proposed a Creation Time from 1 September – 4 October. In 1998 the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) was founded.

³² Christian Ecology Link UK <http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/harvest.htm> Churches together UK and Ireland <https://ctbi.org.uk/creation-time-2014-god-whose-farm-is-all-creation/> <https://ctbi.org.uk/?s=creation+time> Operation Noah UK <http://operationnoah.org/resources/sermon-notes-creation-time-climate-change-purposes-god/> USA 2006 Resources <http://www.webofcreation.org/SeasonofCreation/liturgies.html> and <http://www.letallcreationpraise.org/season-of-creation> Southern Africa <http://www.neccsa.org.za/Season%20of%20creation.htm>

we are creatures among creatures, called to serve and care for God's creation, a time of praise, of repentance and renewal'.

A seminal model for liturgical celebration of a *Season of Creation* was developed by Australian Lutheran pastor and scripture scholar Norman Habel informed by an Adelaide based ecumenical *Earth Bible* initiative. The model had worldwide influence after its 2004-06 schema and special lectionary were published. It covers the four Sundays of September as a *Season of Creation* concluding with the feast of St Francis 4 October.³³ The schema has the same format as the Catholic three year ABC Gospel cycle.³⁴ To grow its theological focus, the Scriptural selections over three years focused successively on Spirit, Wisdom and Word. The four Sundays in each year were theologically themed to successively address creation, alienation, passion and new creation. To ground these beliefs within reality, images from the domains of the natural world were chosen such as trees and water, ocean and air systems. Communities celebrated all creation reconciled in Christ - wonder and wounds.

The Adelaide model has many positive aspects - is systematic, aims to engage the Bible in a new key, covers the central Christian dogmas, directly addresses the ecological crisis, shows sensitivity to the local Australian physical and cultural context by way of examples, and honours the Creator. However, the model causes some misgivings. First, searching to find the voice of nature in the Scriptures may be pushing the texts too far in a quest for direct teaching. Second, its focus on particular nature issues each Sunday could lead to an over emphasis on themes of ethics and moral responsibility. While this emphasis may help in preaching, appeal to the ecologically minded and promote action, the tone given may ultimately detract from seeking an experience of God as Creator and grow weak on creation theology.

A focus on 'themes' in liturgy often has social justice roots. An unofficial ethically orientated liturgical year has emerged recently as Sundays have variously been designated for refugees, the homeless and the like. Such an emphasis on ethics and morals could be a distortion of church mission and its liturgy even in an ecological age.³⁵ Further pressure for an ethical focus comes from the secular world nominating 'care for the earth' type days.³⁶ Even the 2015 Catholic initiative nominating April as 'Care 4 Creation Month' is in this vein. It may prove a mistake, creation care becoming just another fringe effort isolated from the mainstream liturgical life of faith communities.³⁷ This cartoon gives a warning: The Little King asks, What is this earth day? Rodney replies, You know sire, the day we all take to honour mother earth by planting a tree or something. The Little King replies, Kind of like an abusive partner sending flowers once a year.

At a pastoral level, constant use of the word 'theme' in liturgy poses the ever present danger of setting a mistaken tone. It has an educational ring or even that of a campaign slogan. Rather than 'about' creation, a new liturgical season would better seen as a time 'for'

³³ <http://seasonofcreation.com/calendar/> USA-Canada churches Nashville consultation
<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php> *The Season of Creation: a preaching commentary* eds. Norman C Habel, David Rhoads and H Paul Santmire, (Fortress Press 2011).

³⁴ Year A - forests Jn 3:1-16 (born of the spirit); land Mt 12:38-40 (sign of Jonah); river Mt 28:1-10 (risen, women tell); wilderness Mt 3:13-4:2 (baptism and wilderness experience); Year B - earth Jn 1:1-14 (prologue); humanity Mk 10:41-45 (leader serves); sky Mk 15:33-39 (death and sky darkens); mountains Mk 16:14-18 (go to nations); Year C - oceans Lk 5:1-11 (call disciples); fauna Lk 12:22-31 (providence); storm Lk 8:22-25 (calm storm); cosmos Jn 6:41-51 (living bread from heaven).

³⁵ Charles Rue, *Catholics and Nature*, Catholic Social Justice Series No.57, (ACSJC, 2006). After the first social justice encyclical of Leo XIII in 1891, the Catholic communion in particular increased its focus on human concerns but the natural world was often ignored or just regarded as a given.

³⁶ These include: Earth Day 21 March (launched in 1970 for the spring equinox); Environment Day 5 June (introduced in 1972 by the UN). Churches in South Africa nominated almost twenty such days. The Canadian United Church provides another array <http://www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons>.

³⁷ <http://catholicearthcare.org.au/2015/04/care-4-creation-month/>

creation - celebration, not education. First remembering a 'grace' and then giving thanks is a better liturgical approach - the style of Eucharistic prayers themselves. Specific moral imperatives would follow but not lead. Many believers argue that the main reason for a call to celebrate a liturgical *Season of Creation* is because the earth is in ecological crisis.³⁸ However, Pope Francis issues a warning against a narrow focus. What he terms 'integral ecology' focuses firstly on spirituality and the human journey of relating to God present in all creation. Only then does it flow through to confront specific issues. Recognising the problem European churches held consultations on Creation Theology and Spirituality.³⁹

Only one attempt by has been made by a Catholic agency in Australia to develop a Catholic Creation Season Resource.⁴⁰ However, that tentative attempt used the readings from the Vatican II Lectionary. A more radical approach could adopt the liturgical reform of Vatican II which opted for a new three year cycle with a new lectionary.

Once the liturgical framework for a four week long September *Season of Creation* has been accepted and included in the liturgical year, the Lectionary for the whole liturgical year would need to be re-written. The re-design will pose difficulties – selecting readings for the new Season of Creation, reallocation of some readings and filling blanks left for some Sundays. Gaining consensus for reform in the Roman Rite, where uniformity is seen as a strong value, will need the reminder of the Pope that care for 'earth as our common home crosses' all borders. Some may even ask, why bother? The modern cultural trend towards individualism can be sceptical of a structural answer to anything. Will enough church goers even be interested?

Opportunity to address related issues

The proposal for a 21st renewal of Catholic liturgy by including a *Season of Creation* within a revised liturgical year together with a new lectionary gives the opportunity to help address related Church challenges. To name five: giving better voice to women in the church; reinvigorating dialogue with the world of science; deepening dialogue ecumenically and with other faiths; giving scope for greater church 'inculturation'; correcting 'clunky' liturgical language.

Firstly, the feminist movement's expanded definitions of humanity must be taken seriously. Neglect of women by the church has led to alienation. In 1980 Carol Merchant paralleled the failure to recognise woman in society and its failure to acknowledge the natural world.⁴¹ It is of note that in the selection of Scripture for the Vatican II Lectionary often the prophetic voice of both women and the earth was overlooked and even suppressed.⁴²

³⁸ Climate change is the very public face of this crisis leading to a complexity of problems to do with biodiversity, resource limitations, pollution, health and the like. Humans have chosen to experiment with the Earth as if it was in a laboratory. <http://www.columban.org.au/assets/files/jpic/LTSS%202013%20version.pdf>

³⁹ Schonstein and Vischer: A warning was issued at Graz Germany in 1997, *commitment to preservation of the creation is not an issue among many others, but an essential dimension of church life*. Many churches strained to express natural world themes in Scriptural language. The focus of ECEN themes widened (eg. 2005, Rhythm of Creation and Rhythm of Life). International consultation 2006, *Creation Spirituality: Relationship of Eucharist to Creation*. http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/euro_christian/

⁴⁰ <http://www.columban.org.au/resources/a-catholic-season-of-creation-sundays-of-september>

⁴¹ Caroline Merchant *The Death of Nature* 1980

⁴² There is no Sunday Reading about Deborah, a mother of Israel, and her song (Judges 5:1- 31) and even the Magnificat is not proclaimed on a Sunday (Luke 1:46 – 56). Verses 15-19 about Huldah the Prophet are omitted from the Lectionary passage (2 Kings 22:8-13; 23:1-3). Omitted are stories of nurturing women in the Scriptures as teachers, prophets and midwives. Shiphrah and Puah defied the pharaoh's law (Ex 1:8-22). Esther bravely pleaded to save her people from annihilation (Esther 4:16). Judith was another heroine (Judith 8:2- 8). None of these passages are in the Sunday Lectionary. In the continuous reading from Romans, Phoebe as deaconess is omitted. During the Easter Sundays the sending of Mary Magdalene as a messenger to the disciples is left out (John 20:17). <http://futurechurch.org/women-in-church-leadership/women-and-word/women-in-bible-and-lectionary>

Secondly, one way to facilitate dialogue with ecological scientists will be to learn from the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion to recall the hidden voice of the earth in the Bible.⁴³ One example is to hear the voice of earth in the great debate between God as Creator and Job (chs 38-42). It tells of human arrogance and God is not happy. Christians can learn from the empirical method of scientists in observing natural systems and cosmic cycles just how earth embraces and nurtures. A creation season would coincide with many secular festivals.

Thirdly, ecology already provides a common language in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. In Australia, the National Council of Churches (NCC) promotes ecumenical Eco-Mission in each State, and interfaith groups focus on ecology such as the Faith and Ecology Network (FEN).⁴⁴ Internationally many eco-faith groups work out of universities such as Yale.⁴⁵

Fourthly, 'inculturation' means local churches celebrate the Roman Rite with their own creativity. The Adelaide model has an Australian flavour but Canadian and US churches have adapted it. Hemisphere differences matter. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway in 2003 identified mid-summer as the prime environmental time in the Arctic. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* recognises the writings of local churches so they can feel encouraged to select eco-sensitive readings from local literature to amplify a revised universal calendar.

Fifth, the English translation of the Roman Rite approved in Australia is anti-pastoral, both hard to proclaim and hard to listen to. A 21st revision of the liturgy would give the chance to correct a pastoral mistake. Bugnini's Scriptural team wrote that to be the true voice of the Church, translations had to respect the content of the message, accurate but agreeable to the hearer.

Conclusion

Developing a four week long *Season of Creation* would better serve Christian communities spiritually and pastorally to find God. It would structurally recognise the magnitude of the ecological crisis while preparing believers to give better witness and service to all creation. Church communities would be in a better position to dialogue with people of other churches and faiths, scientists and people of good will about earth as our common home, leading to new commitments as congregations and individuals.

The work done by liturgists in consultation with bishops of the world to create and implement the Vatican II Catholic liturgical reform is a powerful sign of hope. The reform showed vision and pastoral sensitivity as it marshalled the competence of thousands of scholars. It showed that major cooperative work between liturgists, scripture scholars and bishops is possible if there is the will. The end result was the opportunity for believers in the parishes to bathe more fully in the riches of the Christian tradition and add their local church colour. The Vatican II liturgical reform is a powerful story of the possible and gives hope for further reform in creating a liturgical *Season of Creation*.

⁴³ <http://www.flinders.edu.au/ehl/theology/ctsc/projects/earthbible/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.faihtecology.net.au/>

⁴⁵ <http://fore.yale.edu/>