The 2nd Kreitler Environmental Lecture

"The Child of Adam and the Renewal of All"

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Virginia Theological Seminary

For so many reasons I am honored to give this the second Kreitler Environmental Lecture. The vision of the Kreitler family is one that I see with the eyes of my own heart. Not that I have always seen it. I could echo the verse of the converted slavership commander John Newton, "I once was blind but now I see". What I see is what the Kreitler Environmental Fund is hoping for, namely, that "stewardship of the environment (be) enhanced by informed theological belief". You may think it is hyperbole to quote John Newton on this subject given the appalling and disgusting degradation to which he stooped and from which he was rescued. But those with the eyes to see have begun to recognize that the enslavement of racism finds parallels in the unjust consequences of raping the earth that plunge and secure millions upon millions into powerless poverty in today's world as environmental refugees.

Yet just as it was a theological and in truth a Biblical vision that informed and shaped the Abolitionists so too it is a theological and Biblical vision of the earth that is beginning to inform our understanding of the ecological crisis that is breaking over the planet. But it is slow in coming. Jurgen Moltmann's Gifford Lectures, "God in Creation" (SCM Press), were published a quarter of a century ago! In them he expounded the ecological doctrine of creation knocking on the head that hoary old chestnut that "Dominion" in Genesis could ever be interpreted as giving humanity carte blanche to indulge themselves and exploit God’s creation abusively and selfishly. "A seizure of power over nature is not intended", he wrote, "'having dominion' is linked with the correspondence between human beings and God, the creator and preserver of the world - the correspondence which is meant when the human being is described as being the image of God........ The role which human beings are meant to play is the role of a 'justice of the peace". (Pp 29-30).

In other words, in my words, human dominion is to mirror the character of divine dominion, and not diabolical desecration. Yet twenty five years on debates about dominion are still raging in the academy and in the pew. I once heard it said that it takes a generation for ideas to travel from the university to the
street. According to the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change we do not have that amount of time left to us.

Indeed, following their recent conference in Honolulu the Prince of Wales in a speech in Brazil on March 12th declared that we have less than 100 months to act if we are to avoid irreversible and adverse ecological changes to the planet. There is therefore a degree of urgency to the Kreitler vision "to enable graduates of Virginia Seminary to help conserve and preserve the environment, thus empowering them to keep God’s creation from collapsing", (Peter Kreitler).

I said there were many reasons for being honored to give this lecture. These also include being the guest of the Dean whom I first met ten years ago when he was Professor of Public Theology at Liverpool Hope University and he chaired "The Theology of Friendship" working group that set a new and reconciling tone in my own Diocese on Human Sexuality. It was an idea that I gleaned first from Bishop Peter Lee whose friendship dates back to the Lambeth Conference of ‘98. I know his influence here in Virginia Theological Seminary has been immense but perhaps you would allow me to say from another province that, in my opinion, his wisdom, his generosity, his faith and his courage have for nearly three decades been one of the pearls of great price within the Anglican Communion. And it is precisely these qualities and virtues that we must covet again if we are to take forward effectively the Kreitler vision of caring for God’s creation into the pews and parishes and into the polity of our common life.

As I embark on the substance of this lecture I want to say also how honored I am to follow in the footsteps of the eminent Professor Ellen F. Davis. I loved her Inaugural lecture! For her insight that the ecological crisis is in the end a theological crisis; for her exposition of Peter Vitousek's challenge that "life on our planet may continue to be viable and to some degree lovely"; for her authoritative emphasis on the Old Testament as a unique guide to humanity’s relationship with the earth. Her essay was a paean of praise to the divinely ordained intimacy between the soil and the soul.

Professor Davis’ work demonstrates the relevance of the Old Testament to the modern world where that intimacy has been lost to many of us in the Northern Hemisphere. It is one of the reasons that for all its cultural challenges we must never lose the Old Testament scriptures from our liturgy and our common prayer. Not only is the New Testament meaningless bereft of these scriptures but the reading of the Old
Testament has the power to shift our paradigm of understanding when it comes to discovering our place in the earth.

(I use the preposition "in" deliberately as in the petition from the Lord’s Prayer out of the Book of Common Prayer “Thy will be done in earth as it is in Heaven”. The phrase "on earth" has a superficial sense. "In earth" suggests the deeper and sustaining ways of God’s providence.)

It was in a conversation with the Chief Rabbi in Great Britain, Sir Jonathan Sacks, that I had my own eyes opened to the power of the Torah. When I asked him about Jewish ethics of the environment he took me not to Genesis or to the Psalms but to the verse in Deuteronomy (20 19-20) which forbade the destruction of fruit bearing trees by the incoming tribe of the children of Israel. Long before the science of deforestation was known the scriptures held this scared wisdom that prevented the inheritors of the promised land desecrating the forests.

"If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you? You may destroy only the trees that you know do not produce food; you may cut them down for use in building siege-works against the town that makes war with you, until it falls".

Forgive me an excursion into poetry but there’s a beautiful lament on fallen trees by Gerard Manley Hopkins called "Binsey Poplars". Hopkins, the great English poet who once served as a priest in Liverpool, is well known for his poem on creation, "God’s Grandeur”. Less well-known is this lament.

My aspens dear, whose airy cages quelled,
Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun,
All felled, felled, are all felled;
Of a fresh and following folded rank
Not spared, not one
That dandled a sandalled
Shadow that swam or sank
On meadow and river and wind-wandering
weed-winding bank.

O if we but knew what we do
When we delve or hew-
Hack and rack the growing green!
Since country is so tender
To touch, her being so slender,
That, like this sleek and seeing ball
But a prick will make no eye at all,
Where we, even where we mean
To mend her we end her,
When we hew or delve:
After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.
Ten or twelve, only ten or twelve
Strokes of havoc unselve
The sweet especial scene,
Rural scene, a rural scene,
Sweet especial rural scene.

I find those lines so evocative of remorse:

"O if we but knew what we do
When we delve or hew-
Hack and rack the growing green"

and

"Where we, even where we mean
To mend her we end her,
When we hew or delve"

I will not blunt the poet's pen with the latest statistics on deforestation but I will suggest that this poetic lament might sear our consciences with a prophetic challenge about what we are doing to the last
remaining rainforests, the destruction of which contributes over a fifth of our carbon emissions and gives momentum to the devastating changes of our climate. I have been to Honduras and flown over the remaining rainforests of Central America, 80% of which have been destroyed in the last fifty years. The meeting of the G20 this week in London and the Copenhagen Summit at the end of this year provide us with one of our last serious opportunities to save the rainforests, one of the earth's vital utilities. I cannot stress enough how strategically important it is to have the leadership of America in these fora. Climate change is a global problem that will lead to a global crisis. It cannot be solved by America, but it cannot be solved without America. Many are looking to your nation not just for political leadership but for moral leadership.

So why we are so slow to see and to act, especially when our future and that of our children's children are so jeopardized? The answer is that there is a complexity of reasons which accounts for the disconnection of our souls from the soil and the dislocation of our faith from the forests. There is, amongst other things, a failure of our cultural imagination, by that I mean what we as an English speaking people see ourselves to be. Let me give one but a singularly important example.

We describe ourselves in many different ways, for example, as citizens or voters. Many of us here might describe ourselves as believers. Yet there is one word in common parlance which I think people of future generations will be amazed that we use of ourselves with such equanimity. Just as we look back on previous times with incredulity and wonder how people especially believers could have not only condoned but succored the slave trade and slavery, so in later years I think subsequent generations, who will live consciously with the reality that the earth is not a limitless larder, will find it difficult to understand how we could have described ourselves so uncritically as: "consumers".

For, to consume is to eat, to devour, to destroy. And that is how we describe and define ourselves in the 21st Century! Eating, drinking, shopping, selling, buying, banking - "consumers". The failure of the imagination is that we fail to see the cruel irony of our self-designation. Devourers of our children's inheritance and consumers of their future. We are not just borrowing the present (and the future) from our children as the native proverb goes we are consuming it, devouring it and destroying it!

I imagine that future historians and social commentators will write long essays asking how in the light of so much scientific knowledge about the impact of human consumption on our environment we could
have continued to call ourselves with such equanimity and with such lack of self-awareness and self-criticism, "consumers".

It is why a theological and Biblical vision of humanity in, from and of the earth becomes important because it brings to bear upon our imagination dimensions of moral responsibility not least to God, to other creatures and to future generations for how we serve and preserve the earth.

In an article for "Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies" called "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story" Gordon Wenham explores the priestly role of Adam in the Garden of Eden. He expounds the verse in Genesis 2:15 "The Lord took the man (Adam) and put him in the garden to till it and keep it". The Hebrew words AVAD (to till) and SHAMAR (to keep) are variously and better translated as 'serve' and 'preserve'. What Wenham highlights is "that the only other passages in the Pentateuch where these two verbs are used together are to be found in Numbers 37-8, 826 and 185-6, of the Levites duties in guarding and ministering in the sanctuary".

Wenham points out that if the Garden of Eden is seen as God’s sanctuary then perhaps "Adam should be described as an archetypal Levite" as a priest in God’s garden. The significance of Wenham’s point is that it gives a solid biblical foundation to an idea that is rich in the Orthodox tradition and eloquently expounded by Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon that humanity is the Priest of Creation and that "man was created to unite all nature to God" (Christian Dogmatics p.90 T+T Clark).

Serving and preserving the earth is humanity’s vocation as we exercise dominion after the likeness of God (see Moltmann). Adam is called to be the first Servant Lord. The poet George Herbert captures beautifully this priestly role of humanity in creation in a poem called "Providence" which, in effect, is the theological term for that modern concept known as "Sustainability". Herbert says: "Man is the world’s high priest". Let me quote but one of the thirty eight verses to give you a flavor of that sustainable world:

"Bees work for man; and yet they never bruise
Their master's flow'r, but leave it, having done,
As fair as ever and as fit to use;
So both the flow'r doth stay and hony run".
Admittedly George Herbert overlooks those forces within nature which Alfred Tennyson captured so vividly in his poem "In Memoriam" with that memorable line about nature being "red in tooth and claw".

Yet even Tennyson harmonizes with Herbert's vision of providence for he prefaces such a bleak account with, "Who trusted God was love indeed And love Creation's final law -"

It is out of love that God has made the world and sustains his creation. Humanity, the children of Adam, have a priestly role to serve and preserve it. Indeed, it is God's providence that provides humanity as the agent of that conservation. It is this theological and Biblical vision which must inform our attitude to the earth and to the whole of God's creation.

You may have noticed by now that I have not used the word "stewardship" except with reference to the mission statement of the Kreitler Environmental Fund. The reason for this is that to the surprise of many Christians who are comfortable with this concept there is unease among some eco-theologians and secular ecologists who fear the patriarchal and oppressive overtones of the word, suggestive of humanity being over and above or at least apart from nature and the rest of creation. These detractors wish to emphasize that humanity is a part of the created order and that our survival is predicated on our understanding and action that we must be in a mutual relationship with the rest of creation.

This debate is well explored in "Environmental Stewardship" edited by R.J. Berry who is a distinguished scientist and an evangelical Christian who together with Sir Ghillean Prance, formerly Director of Kew Gardens and leading expert on the Amazon and Sir John Houghton, formerly of the IPCC and winner of the Japan Prize and co-winner of the Nobel Prize, have been in the vanguard of scientists with Christian faith who have been challenging the church in Great Britain to think and act differently and biblically about the earth.

One of the interesting features of the burgeoning corpus of material in both academic and popular writing about Christian theology and the ethics of the environment is the disproportionate emphasis upon the Old Testament. This point is observed by Professor Celia Deane-Drummond in her comprehensive study "Eco-Theology" published last year (Darton, Longman and Todd). In particular she writes: "It is surprising, perhaps, that while literature on eco-theology has proliferated in the last half
century, there is a relative lack of sustained focus on the relationship between ecology ... and Christology" (Page 99).

I have made my own modest contribution at a popular level in a small book "Jesus and the Earth" which, in fact, originated here in America as the Galt Lectures hosted by the Rev. Jeffrey Fishwick in Charlottesville, Virginia. New Testament studies about Christ and his environment center on those primary chapters of Ephesians, Colossians and Hebrews. I remember at a conference in the University of Oxford Calvin De Witt of the Au Sable Institute here in America giving an enthralling exposition of Christ and Creation from Colossians 1. But although the prologue of John's Gospel receives some attention there is I believe still much more study to be done on the Gospels themselves. I hope very much that the Kreitler Environmental Fund might encourage this.

Before I develop this theme I ought to come clean about my own position. I am not a theologian. I hope that as with every Christian I seek to think and act theologically. As in the Kreitler vision I hope that my increasing understanding of our environmental responsibilities is "enhanced by informed theological belief". I am clear in my own mind that such understanding must issue in action. To be honest, there is much more talk about the environment than there is purposeful and life-changing activity.

I believe we need to take our knowledge forward at three levels: the personal, the parochial and the political. Permit me to give you a few examples from my own experience.

On a personal level we need to communicate a vision that changes hearts and minds. The religious word for this phrase is repentance! To this end in the Diocese of Liverpool three years ago in Lent we launched the Carbon Fast. Instead of giving up alcohol and chocolate we invited people to give up carbon and to shrink their carbon footprint. These different daily acts of self denial not only caused people to reconsider their lifestyle before God but also reduced their carbon emissions and assisted the poor who are most affected by climate change. Last year the Carbon Fast went nationwide enlisting over 300,000 participants. This year it was launched internationally.

But acting individually is not sufficient if we want to effect real change which is why we need to work at the parochial and community level. I know that President Obama has set up an Advisory Council on
Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to encourage faith groups to engage in the transformation of their neighborhoods, doing the sort of work which he did as a Community Organizer in Chicago which he narrates so vividly in "Dreams from my Father". In Liverpool then throughout the North West of England we have with Government money launched "Faiths4Change" (www.faiths4change.org.uk). It's an environmental project that engages churches, synagogues, mosques and temples in the holistic transformation of their local environment.

Together with our sister Catholic Diocese we are also building in deprived areas two Church High Schools called City Academies that have the environment and sustainability as their specialty. One was opened by Tony Blair three years ago and is called the Academy of St. Francis of Assisi; the second, Hope Academy, will be opened next year.

Solar panels, rainwater harvesting, sedum roofs are just some of the features of the buildings that together with a curriculum in which every subject reflects the environmental specialty shape and form a new understanding in these inner-city kids. Being connected with and caring for their local environment as God’s creation is the Christian ethos of the schools.

What happens at personal and parochial levels needs to be reflected in new policies at the level of Government. I know the following example will be rather challenging for this audience when I tell you that the senior Bishops in the Church of England have a seat in the House of Lords, the equivalent of your Senate. It gives us the opportunity to amend legislation as it goes through Parliament. The Bishop of London and I were able to secure important changes to the Climate Bill as it went through the House of Lords. Previously there were no references to international agreements or to the needs of the millions of environmental refugees in other parts of the world.

In typical parliamentary language the Government agreed to insert consideration of "the social impacts" (of climate change) "at an international level". In other words, environmental refugees and the poor now feature in UK legislation on the changing climate and the future of the earth.

These few examples from my own Diocese illustrate how we must turn our environmental awareness informed by theological belief into action. In other words, ‘faith without works is dead’ which is as true in the field of ecology as it is in the realm of personal faith and morality.
I am sure that members of the Kreitler family and the trustees of the Environmental Fund will agree that the measure of the effectiveness of the endowment will be the actions that ensue from the faith of its alumni.

But let me now turn back from practice to theory, from action to word and, in particular, to the Word. In the Harvard University reader "Christianity and Ecology" (edited by Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether) there’s an essay by Sally McFague called "An Ecological Christology : Does Christianity Have It?" She reflects on Jesus' enigmatic question to Peter "Who do you say that I am?" and Sally McFague pointedly asks "Is there an ecological answer?" She insists that it's a question that cannot be avoided and adds "To be a Christian is to deal with Jesus : Jesus is, for Christians, Emmanuel, God with us.

Hence, current issues of oppression needing God’s saving grace provide contexts for Christological interpretation. In our time ecology is one such important context" (Page 30).

Amen to that!

In my book "Jesus and the Earth" I argue that we should review the "Son of Man" passages in the Gospels in the light of the current ecological crisis. The truth is that with some notable exceptions such as Walter Wink's "Human Being" most of the classical studies on the meaning and significance of the title "Son of Man" were done at a time when the Church and the Academy were not aware of or concerned with the environmental degradation into which the earth is being swallowed up. The cultural context of the translator and the interpreter inevitably affects the understanding and especially the application of a biblical passage. I am not suggesting that we should add a meaning that is not there in the original context but I am open to the possibility that cultural preoccupations might blind us to some hidden meanings as surely as they can open our eyes to others.

In particular I call for a study of the collection of sayings in the Gospels which Jesus calls himself "The Son of Man" and in the same context refers to "the earth". Allow me to recall them.

i) "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"
(Matthew 9 v2-8)

ii) "The Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth"
(Matthew 12 v38-42)

iii) "The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven and then all the tribes on earth will mourn".
(Matthew 24 v 27-30)

iv) "(God) will quickly grant justice to them. And yet when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?"
(Luke 18 v8)

v) "For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times praying that you may have the strength........to stand before the Son of Man".
(Luke 21 v35-36)

vi) "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain...."
(John 12 v23-24)

vii) "When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all to myself .... How can you say the Son of Man must be lifted up".
(John 12 v32-34)

(See also Matthew 16 v13-19, Mark 14 v35-41, Luke 12 v39-51 and John 3 v 11-15)

Whatever meaning attaches to the title "Son of Man" the fact is that it's etymological roots are in Adam and Adamah, meaning the "earth". If I were thirty years younger I would be applying myself to the
Kreitler Fund to study this unique collection of sayings! One of the reasons I leapt at the chance to give this lecture in this distinguished seminary is that some aspiring PhD student looking for an original course of study away from the well worn tracks of doctoral research might pick up this crumb from the lecturer’s table! At the very least I think there is a strong case to be made that given the crisis now facing the earth there is a need to look afresh at Jesus' own teaching about the earth and especially in the light of his role as the Son of Man.

In Matthew 1928 Jesus refers prophetically to his cataclysmic role as Son of Man and explicitly links it to "the renewal of all things" – the PALINGENESIA. "Truly I tell you" (says Our Lord) "at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory" (Matthew 1928). This unique use of "Palingenesia" raises many questions not least because it is a Stoic concept. However, Philo used it to speak of the constitution of the world after the flood, and Josephus used it to describe the restoration of the homeland to the Jews after the exile (G.R. Beasley Murray Jesus and the Kingdom of God : Eerdmans/Paternoster). The fact that Matthew associates the Son of Man with restoration and renewal, as well as linking the Son of man to the earth, seems to me to merit study especially when theologians are now asking whether there is an ecological answer to Jesus’ question to Peter: "Who do you say that I am?"

Interestingly, neither Kenneth Bailey (“Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes”) nor William Herzog (“Prophet and Teacher”) whose remarkable books unpack the earthy roots of Jesus in the agrarian culture of a middle eastern village remarks on these earth passages. And when it comes to the Son of Man Herzog simply rehearses the four traditional interpretations of the meaning of the “Son of Man” (Page 86). I have to confess that my friend Bishop Tom Wright of Durham, the great New Testament scholar, has urged me to be cautious about any link between the Son of Man and the earth. But given the unique collection of seven Son of Man/earth sayings and given the earth-etymology of Adam/Adamah I believe it is not unreasonable for the church to turn to the Academy and ask them in the face of the new ecological crisis to look again at our understanding of the role of the Son of Man in the future of the earth.

But there’s another reason that I would encourage such a study.

It was in the conversation with the Chief Rabbi that I first became aware of the potential of the meaning of "the Son of Man" for my study of the relationship between Jesus and the earth. Subsequent to writing
about it I have found that talking with Muslims about Jesus as the Son of Man in the context of our common concern for the earth has yielded a surprisingly fruitful dialogue. This has happened in two particular contexts.

Firstly with Akbar Ali the Chairman of the Council of the Mosque (we have in Liverpool the oldest Mosque in the UK which was established by a Muslim convert Abdullah Quilliam in the late nineteenth century). And secondly at an international symposium on the Amazon River hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople with a Muslim scholar Nariman Gasimoglu from Azerbyjan. As within the Christian community where there is a discovery of an ecological narrative in the Bible hitherto unearthed so also some Muslims are recognizing the importance and the relevance of the environmental imperatives in the Koran to the crisis facing the earth. According to Professor Mohammed Ali Shomali, Head of Religious Studies at Qum in an article for the Journal of British Jesuits, “there are more than 750 verses in the Qur’an that are related to nature” with special attention given to water, the earth, plants, trees and animals. The Koran underlines humanity’s role as vice-regent of God’s creation. Professor Shomali identifies the governing rules in Islamic environmental ethics as benefiting from natural resources in a responsible way, behaving towards nature as a guardian, recognizing humanity’s role as a trustee, maintaining moderation and avoiding wasteful consumption and corruption.

Nariman Gasimoglu, who has translated the Koran into Azeri told the Patriarch’s consultation on the Amazon that the Muslim believers are called on “to reflect on nature, to study the relationship between living creatures and their environment and to maintain the balance and proportion God has built into his creation”.

The Koran says “Get painted with the paint of God, and who is better than God in painting? And him do we serve” (2.138) and "Do you not observe that God sends down rain from the sky, so that in the morning the earth becomes green" (22.63). Nariman comments, “The color green is the most blessed of all colors for Muslims and provides a profound sense of the value of nature as God’s perfect and most fruitful plan”.

What is clear is that across the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam there is a convergence of understanding about seeing humanity integrated into the created order and calling upon the human family to act responsibly. This surely must be a hopeful sign. At a time when some might
wish to polarize attitudes between Muslims, Christians and Jews the recognition of common ground upon which we might all stand could offer hope. Indeed, the future stability of the world depends upon the fostering of good relationships between the faith communities internationally and locally as has been recognized by Tony Blair in the setting up of the Faith Foundation.

Yet it was in conversation and correspondence with the Muslim Scholar Nariman Gasimoglu about Jesus as the Son of Man that I found particular interest. I quote from his letter in which he comments on my book "Jesus and the Earth".

"I remember I told you when we were in Brazil at the Amazon how reverently Jesus Christ is mentioned in Koran verses ..... It looks similar to what the New Testament describes Him at many parts as the Son of Man. Reading your book with a great deal of interest I found again many parallels and similarities in Holy Texts. Just in regard to Jesus Christ as the second Adam that you refer to focusing on the New Testament I can't help to bring to your attention the Koran confirmation of this in a verse that reads: "The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam" (Koran 3:59).

This response echoed that of my friend Akbar Ali from the Mosque in Liverpool. "According to our belief, Jesus (peace be on him) was well aware of being a "Son of Man - Bani Adam in Arabic". It makes me wonder whether a renewed emphasis by Christians on Jesus as the Son of Man might not open up new avenues of interfaith conversation especially amongst Christians, Muslims and Jews. Just as the Gospel of John finds the emphasis on Jesus as the Logos as a means of engaging with a Hellenistic culture and just as some modern theologians are re-emphasizing the motif of Jesus as the Wisdom of God as a means of engaging with the ecological debates (see Celia Deane-Drummond’s 'Eco-theology') could it be that a fresh examination of Jesus’ exclusive self-designation as the Son of Man, especially in the context of the ecological crisis, might provide new bridges between the faiths at a time when each is becoming more aware from their own sacred texts of the responsibilities that all the children of Adam have for the earth?

Tarif Khalidi, Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, at the American University in Beirut in his book "The Muslim Jesus" (Harvard University Press 2001) has assembled the largest collection of sayings and stories of Jesus in Arabic/Islamic literature. He identifies four different categories, the first of which is the collection of sayings about Jesus with an eschatological import he writes, "The first group may be said
to reflect and expand the role of Jesus at the end of time, a role already hinted at in the Qu’ran” (p.32)

And he quotes one of the earliest sayings by Abdallah Ibn al-Mubarak: "Whenever the Hour was mentioned in the presence of Jesus, he would cry out and say, 'It is not fitting that the son of Mary should remain silent when the Hour is mentioned in his presence' " This Islamic emphasis on the eschatological role of Jesus echoes the emphasis in the Gospels on the role the Son of Man has at the eschaton. It suggests that Jesus and the future of the earth could well prove to be a profitable area of study between Muslims and Christians.

Professor David Ford of Cambridge has in Britain been one of the leading voices in the dialogue between Islam, Christianity and Judaism pioneering a method of conversation between the Abrahamic sacred texts called "scriptural reasoning". In his book "Christian Wisdom : Desiring God and Learning in Love" he lays out the ten maxims of interpreting scripture including "Seek first the plain sense of scripture in all its literal and metaphysical richness and also be alert for other senses" (Maxim4). It is precisely according to that maxim that I believe a fresh study of the Son of Man is called for because we are cognisant of the crisis now facing the earth which provides a new hermeneutical context for interpretation and application and because we are aware of new possibilities of dialogue about Jesus and the earth with Islam and Judaism where the concept Son of Man (Ben Adam and Bani Adam) is neither strange nor aggressive.

Professor Ford in the same book has a chapter devoted to "An inter-faith wisdom: scriptural reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims”. Here he argues that "Christians need to read the Bible in dialogue with diverse others outside the church .... Let conversations around scripture be open to all people, religions, culture, arts, disciplines, media and spheres of life. Let us read for the sake of friendship with all!" I would like to add "and for the sake of the future of the earth".

It was Hans Kung who warned us that we need a Global ethic that is truly comprehensive of all the world’s religions. The ecological crisis even more so than the present economic crisis, is a global problem which can be solved only globally. As Kung challenged us we can find such a global solution only through the great religions of the world co-operating and discerning a global ethic that is consonant with each of our own religious traditions. I sense that in Jesus as the Son of Man, the Son of the One Hewn from the Earth, we have possibly a new paradigm for inter-faith dialogue, a man for all faiths, the child of
Adam and wisdom for the earth. This is exactly what Professor Ford seems to aspire to when he calls attention to: "One of the critical things lacking in relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims is such center of long-term collegiality where ways of study, understanding and application can be worked at and passed on across generations".

I have had some experience of this here in America when last year at the instigation of the British Consul General in Miami I was invited by the Rev. Joel Hunter, Pastor of Northlands Church, Orlando, to address an interfaith seminar on Faith and the Environment together with the local Imam, the local Rabbi and the local Catholic Bishop. Here was Muslim, Jew and Christian, both evangelical and catholic, speaking from their own sacred texts and without any compromising of their own convictions standing on common ground and finding common cause in the face of a common threat.

Again, I found a sympathetic reception from the Imam and the Rabbi of the idea of Jesus in relation to the earth as the Son of Man and a willingness to engage in constructive conversation about a common ethic on the environment. In order for me to avoid any misunderstanding in this Christian Seminary let me say that my convictions about the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus are in no way diminished. I believe that Jesus is uniquely the Son of God and that the One True God reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But it may just be that these are not the first things to be discussed as we enter into a dialogue of friendship with our Jewish and Muslim neighbors and seek an ethical consensus on the current ecological crisis. Indeed, it could be that the example of scriptural reasoning could open up Jew, Muslim and even Christian to new insights on the significance of the mission of Jesus in the modern world.

I know that it was a controversial decision of President Obama to invite the evangelical Rick Warren to offer the Invocation Prayer at the Inauguration. As he began his prayer I wondered how he would end it, pondering if in front of a global and diverse audience he would pray in and through the name of Jesus Christ. I thought his conclusion was inspired. By referring to Yeshua, to Isa and to Jesus in the way that he did made the Saviour accessible to and inclusive of all. It is this same embrace that I am groping for as in this Christian Seminary and in this Kreitler Lecture I invite further study on Jesus, the Son of Man, the child of Adam and his relationship to the future of the earth.

Many years ago when our eldest daughter started High School she was given along with all the other 11 year old pupils a copy of the Gideon Bible. After she got home she went to her room and spent about
half an hour with the book looking up some of those verses recommended at the front for when you're lonely, depressed and suicidal. Just the sort of thing for beginning High School!

She then came downstairs and said to me rather wistfully "Daddy, is there nothing in the Bible for when you're happy?!" Of course, there is but it was a lesson to me about how we as Christians seem always to relate to the world in its negativity! Have we nothing to say to the world, to those who love life! Sadly, talk about the earth is dominated by the doom and gloom merchants. Little wonder that some give us and the earth imperatives a wide berth! I fear that this lecture may have added to the pessimism. Two years ago I participated in another consultation the first hosted by the Vatican and its Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace on Climate Change and Development. By the end we had ground ourselves into the slough of despondency only to be rescued by the ever-hopeful Catholic Bishop Christopher Toohey from Australia who treated us to any essay of what Bill McKibben once described as a "convivial environmentalism". As people of faith we must not lose sight of God's grandeur and of that truth captured by Hopkins in the poem of that name that "nature is never spent" in spite of humanity's worst efforts because as he concludes "the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings".

And finally when I read of Mr. & Mrs. Kreitler Senior whom their sons honor in this Foundation and their delight in the natural sanctuaries of God's creation I was reminded of another elderly couple who feature in the opening scenes of the Gospel of Luke - Anna and Simeon. One of the occupational hazards of growing old is that we are constantly looking backwards lamenting that the present is not as good as the past and resenting the future.

Billie and Jack Kreitler seemed to have avoided such pitfalls and shared Anna and Simeon's positive and forward-facing outlook. Simeon took Jesus in his arms and instead of looking backwards saw in him the future. Luke gives us a scenario of an old couple welcoming a child whose lineage goes back to the "Son of Adam, Son of God" (338). They saw in him the future salvation of the world, not just for Jews but for Gentiles too. May the Kreitler Environmental Fund hold before us equally hopefully the Child of Adam whose mission is nothing less than "the renewal of all things".

The Rt. Rev. James Jones
Bishop of Liverpool