An Environmental Ethic for the End of the World

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An Ecological Midrash on Romans 8:19-22

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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FOREWORD

In 2015, Pope Francis released a document entitled, *Laudato Si'* (meaning "blessed be" in Latin), a line taken from his namesake, Saint Francis' well-known poem, *Canticle of the Sun*. In releasing *Laudato Si',* the Catholic Church produced its first ever, full-length encyclical letter devoted almost exclusively to the care of the natural world. As a practicing Catholic who is also an academic, and a lover of nature, I noted with concern the variety of responses to the publication of that document.

On the one hand, some criticized the Pope, saying that he—and religious leaders in general—really have no business speaking on matters of ecology, something that is more properly the sphere of science and politics. On the other hand, others were far too quick to try and fit the Pope's words into political statements that equate too neatly within certain political environmental agendas, rather than the spheres of morality and ethics which are more proper to the Papal document. For still others, the document was simply a welcome addition to an ongoing human conversation.

This sometimes-ugly debate however, raised important issues about the validity of making religious contributions to what are often seen as scientific or political issues, and also about the nature of such contributions. At the end of the day, do religious traditions have something to add to contemporary ecological debates at all? Can religious understanding of morality, anthropology, and even eschatology help elucidate an ancient roadmap for what it means for humans to exist within the midst of a wider ecology? As a scholar who thinks that the Christian tradition and its inherited foundational texts and scriptures have a valid and useful part to play in wider—even secular—discussions about the environment, I offer this book as a resource for discussion, debate, and also as a demonstration that religious viewpoints really can address subjects of human existence and human instrumentality with regard to nature, in a direct and challenging manner.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Project

As noted in the foreword, this project is concerned with a Catholic approach to questions about the environment. At its heart though, it is really a study of the role of human beings in shaping the world for good or for ill. In order to speak into this vitally important issue, I will draw on a theological concept known as inaugurated eschatology—a concept which, I believe, is seen most clearly in the New Testament writings of Paul. Specifically, I will argue that precisely because the so-called "end times" (or *eschaton*) have already begun with the coming of Christ (at least according to the Christian tradition), there is now a profound need for a new, and careful reflection on human instrumentality with regard to the health of the planet.

The primary function of this introductory chapter is to introduce, describe, and begin to situate the specific topics and questions that will be explored in this project. While it is unfortunately downplayed in some realms of modern Christianity, I believe that the material world—and the world of nature—is fundamental to Paul's understanding of the salvation offered by Christ in light of the inaugurated eschatology. For him, the "end times" have now begun (or in other words, have been *inaugurated*), and believers in Christ are called to fulfill an important role—particularly with regard to their ability and vocation to bring both *blessing* and *healing* to the entire earth. Fundamental to this vocation, is the relationship between human beings and the *non-human* world. For Paul, all Christian relationships (even the relationship of humans with nature) are now governed by what Christ has done on Calvary and on Easter Sunday. Although the texts of the Bible have often been seen as either negative toward ecological issues, or simply inapplicable, this project will present a fresh exegesis of a particularly, and peculiarly ecological biblical passage—Romans 8:19-22 in order to show, from a theological and biblical point of view, that humans can and ought to have a positive role in bringing healing

to a world in ecological crisis. Although the ecological issues that concern modern scholars are vast, my own lens within this large and growing area of both scientific and ethical debate will limit itself to the question of human instrumentality as articulated by the Bible. In other words, I will look primarily at the Biblical principles which relate to human beings, and their capacity to bring both blessing and cursing to the natural world. I will also look at, what I believe, is Paul's *imperative* that believers are now *called* to bring blessing and healing to the natural world in light of the inaugurated eschatology. Let us turn first to an introduction of this project's central Pauline text.

If one were to go into any theological library, and open one of the many commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans, one of the things one might discover is a surprising starkness when it comes to one brief passage—and in particular, one verse. Romans 8:19-22 says this:

> [19] For the creation waits with eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God; [20] for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly but through him who subjected it in hope; [21] because the creation itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and obtain the glorious freedom of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation groans in travail together until now.[1]

One of the most important and respected commentaries on Romans—so called because of the vast number of papers, monographs and commentaries that cite him—is by Charles Cranfield.[2] In his seminal two-volume work[3], most verses get numerous pages of attention. 8:22 however—with its mysterious and unprecedented (at least in the Pauline canon) words about a creation, which he describes as groaning out with the pains of childbirth—receives only two small paragraphs. In them, quite frankly, Cranfield says very little about the verse other than to point out that Paul's audience probably knew what he was talking about.

Lest it seem that I am dismissing Cranfield, I point him out because his is, in my opinion, one of the best—most foundational, frequently cited, well respected (if a bit dated)—modern commentaries on Paul's Epistle to the Romans. It seems that for most of the history of modern biblical studies, no

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[1] Translation mine. All Bible translations from the RSV-CE unless otherwise noted.
[2] It would be difficult to find a major, full-length commentary or monograph on Romans produced within the last three decades that *does not* reference Cranfield.
[3] C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* vols. 1-2, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975).

scholar has been able to give a satisfactory answer to the questions, "What is Paul really saying in Romans 8:19-22?" and "How does this passage fit in with Paul's theology, not to mention the rest of the epistle?" Some have tried to explain the "groaning in travail" passage away as merely a foil for Christ's salvation offered to human beings; a trite analogy at best[4] or by saying that the created world is a mere stage on which the more important *human* drama is played, and that the actual role of nature is more or less unimportant to Paul.[5] But this seems to simply write the passage off. On the other hand, others—more recently—have tried to *overemphasize* Paul's use of creation language, reading this passage as something of an "environmental mantra", as if Paul were engaging with questions of environmental stewardship in the 21st century.[6] In my view, neither of these two extremes give satisfactory answers as to the purpose of this oblique passage.

In light of this, I suggest a middle way. For Paul, the material world is crucial to Christ's work of salvation, the role of humans, and to the eschaton. Paul's understanding is not, however, what one might call an *environmental* one, at least not in the modern sense of the word. Paul obviously lived before modern science had begun to study human effects on the environment, so the term—as used today—would be unknown to him. Yet, Paul still seems to be well aware of the material world and its needs—particularly, its need

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[4] Most prominently, Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans,* trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976), and Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament,* Vol. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) pp. 227-232.

[5] See especially C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), p. 165, and G. W. H. Lampe, "The New Testament Doctrine of KTISIS", in *Scottish Journal of Theology,* 17 (1964) pp. 449-462:460.

[6] The term "environmental mantra" seems to have been coined by John Bolt, "The Relation Between Creation and Redemption in Romans 8:18-27", in *Calvin Theological Journal,* 30, 39 (1995) pp. 34-51:34. For an explanation of this point of view and for references, see Cherryl Hunt, David Horrell and Christopher Southgate, "An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation", in *Journal of Theological Studies* 59, 2, (October 2008), pp. 546-579. Steven Bouma-Prediger for example, sees "creation groaning" in Romans 8 as a description of the environmental crisis; *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001) p. 40. Margret Barker is somewhat more nuanced, but comes to a similar conclusion saying, "…the free market, democracy, consumer choice—they have produced what Paul called the creation going nowhere ('subjected to futility', Rom 8:20), and in 'bondage to decay'." *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment*, (London: T & T Clark, 2010) p. 6.

for proper human interaction. By trying to understand the role of the material world for Paul—who would have been formed by Jewish and Old Testament sensibilities, as well as the Hellenistic culture in which he was raised—one can attempt to apply his understanding to the current environmental situation. One of the pitfalls of this sort of exegesis is, of course, trying to place oneself inside the mind of a man who is almost 2,000 years removed from one's own time, place, and experience. Doing so will always lead to mistakes at best, and poor, misleading theology at worst. So, what *is* the twenty first century reader—who is engrossed in a world of both environmental and theological confusion—supposed to do with this passage? Moreover, can theologians, ecologists, academics, and even religious leaders, actually utilize this passage—which seems to pull the natural world into Paul's theology—to speak into the ecological issues of the modern world? Based on these questions, I believe the theme of inaugurated eschatology (which I will more properly define below) will help to bear faithful witness to the ancient text of Romans, and also provide a groundwork to build a theological understanding of human instrumentality as it relates to modern ecological concerns. For Paul, something *has happened* in history, which has forever changed the shape of the world. What the inaugurated eschatology essentially says, is this: with the crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the "end times", as it were, have now arrived—even though the world may not quite look like it yet.

In fact, Paul appears to be doing a kind of midrash in this passage—a Jewish practice of taking an ancient text (or texts), which explore ethical or theological questions, and attempting to apply those passages to contemporary circumstances. In this case, Paul is using the concept of inaugurated eschatology to re-cast the creation and fall stories of Genesis in a way that is meaningful to his audience in light of Christ. Taking this cue, modern readers can use this same technique in order to take Paul's interpretation of these ancient texts, and make them applicable to our contemporary circumstances.

This book is organized into five distinct chapters. Chapter 1 will discuss introductory matters, Catholic teaching on the environment, and assess background literature, including Pauline studies, a brief history of ecobiblical writings, and a limited assessment of some of the Second Temple literature that contain echoes of Paul's own theology. Chapter 2 will then analyze the two creation stories of Genesis 1-3 to set the stage for the textual tradition that Paul received. This chapter will also explore some of the parallel

traditions contemporary to Paul in an effort to find commonalities with Romans and a normative Second Temple period understanding of some of the key imagery of creation, Adam, Eve, blessing and curse.

Chapter 3 will then explore Paul's concept of an inaugurated eschatology. This will lay the groundwork to apply Paul's eschatalogical vision back onto Romans 8:19-22. This worldview of an eschaton which has *already broken into* the world, is one of the keys to unlocking Paul's theology in Romans, particularly with regard to an ecological reading. This inaugurated eschatology is also what makes Paul's understanding of human instrumentality in light of Christ possible. This chapter will also explore Paul's use of the concept of inaugurated eschatology in 1 Corinthians. Using this as a parallel text, one can see both Paul's understanding of the importance of a social aspect to what Christ has done on the cross and will aid in drawing parallels between his exhortations to the Corinthians with regard to their human relationships, and his imperative to the Roman community with regard to their relationship with the natural world. In other words, can Paul's vision of inaugurated eschatology in 1 Corinthians create an analogy for his vision of inaugurated eschatology in Romans? This section will allow the reading lens of inaugurated eschatology to be tested on another Pauline text.

In chapter 4, the project will arrive at its central textual analysis of Romans. Before the exegesis of Romans 8:19-22, the socio-historical context of the community in Rome to which Paul is writing will first be analyzed. Because the tradition of reception is the methodology this project is using to read Paul, an understanding of the community whom were the initial recipients of the Epistle to the Romans is necessary. Next, I will consider one of the major difficulties of the primary text, Romans 8:19-22, by studying the possible uses and meanings of κτίσις (creation). The meaning of this term is crucial to consider if Romans 8:19-22 is to be applied to an ecological discussion at all. Having then established an ecological meaning of κτίσις, the broader context of Romans 5-8 will be analyzed in order to establish a worldview and a textual home for Romans 8:19-22. Finally, Romans 8:19-22 itself will be analyzed, paying close attention to the themes drawn from Genesis and the possibilities for interpretation in light of ecological issues.

Chapter 5 will then conclude the project by seeking to apply the textual analyses back onto the contemporary ecological situation, to see if this interpretation of Paul does indeed produce a novel ethical contribution to the question of human instrumentality and the environment.

1.2 Contemporary Religious Teaching on the Environment

Drawing on the debate mentioned in the forward, I will now examine some of the current religious teachings about the environment—particularly, the Catholic understanding about human instrumentality with regard to nature. For this, I turn to the writings the three most recent Popes: John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. These three prominent religious leaders have all spoken at some length about what they themselves have called an "environmental crisis." The following material will provide an important perspective on attitudes regarding ecological issues from contemporary Church leaders, thus building a bridge from modern issues back into the Biblical texts. Having contextualized the religio-ethical aspect of the environmental debates, I will then turn to the ancient texts in order to find resources for taking these conversations further.

In 1990, during his annual "World Day of Peace" address, then Pope John Paul II said that, "Faced with widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past."[7] He went on to call the current state of ecological affairs an "ecological crisis". As mentioned above, this was a point that was reiterated by both of the following Popes.[8] Here, the Catholic Church looks across the common destiny of humanity and calls for an urgent response. It does this in a manner, which I believe focuses attention on the *interdependence* of humans upon the natural world, and in turn, the natural world upon humans. This concept is foundational for understanding what Paul is saying in Romans 8:19-22 and how one might interpret those words as a springboard into a contemporary understanding of the environment. This concept of interdependence is also, I believe, the key to a true Catholic environmental ethos. Both of these, I will explain below. Just as Paul appears to do in Romans, Pope John Paul II traced the ecological crisis all the way back to Adam and Eve, who, the Pope said, chose to reject their creator's plan.[9]

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[7] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace" (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

[8] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace" (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

[9] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

This, he said, "resulted not only in man's alienation from himself, in death and fratricide, but also in the earth's 'rebellion' against him."[10] Echoing Romans 8, John Paul II said that, "All of creation became subject to futility, waiting in a mysterious way to be set free and to obtain a glorious liberty together with all the children of God (cf. Romans 8:20-21)."[11]

Here, John Paul II is clearly linking humans to the created world—suggesting a firm interdependence of one on the other. In other words, human beings, in the Christian worldview, have both a responsibility to the world of nature, as well as a necessary dependence upon it. He went on to say that, "The fact that many challenges facing the world today are interdependent confirms the need for carefully coordinated solutions based on a morally coherent worldview." [12] In other words, the ecological problems the world faces cannot be separated from the human problems that the world faces (namely in the Pope's view, poverty, war, and economic inequality). In this way, Pope John Paul II seemed to be echoing Paul's words in Romans 8, which also suggest an interdependence of humans with nature. In fact, John Paul II's successor, Pope Benedict XVI expressed this even more clearly, saying, "Disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence and vice versa."[13]

In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI addressed his predecessor's highlighting of an "ecological crisis" and said that,

> "[Pope John Paul II's] appeal is all the more pressing today, in the face of signs of a growing crisis which it would be irresponsible to not take seriously. Can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes, and the

[10] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html
[11] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html
[12] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html
[13] Pope Benedict XVI, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 2007), https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace.html

> deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions? Can we disregard the phenomenon of 'environmental refugees', people who are forced by the degradation of their natural habitat to forsake it—and often their possessions as well—in order to face the dangers and uncertainties of forced displacement? Can we remain passive in the face of actual and potential conflicts involving access to natural resources?"[14]

Again, what we see from this lengthy passage is an example of a religious leader stressing an interdependence of humankind with the natural world. What the Pope seems to be saying is that the numerous environmental ills that he listed, including "climate change, desertification, the deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of natural catastrophes, and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions" cannot be separated from the many social ills humanity faces, including environmental refugees and international conflicts. Even the title, which Pope Benedict XVI chose to give this address—*If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation*—speaks to this theme of interdependence. Pope John Paul II likewise, stressed that the biblical worldview helps "us to understand better *the relationship between human activity and the whole of creation*."[15] He said "When man turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder that has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. If man is not at peace with God, then the earth itself cannot be at peace."[16]

As we will see below, this view echoes what biblical scholar Brendan Byrne calls the "common fate principle," that is, just as the world of nature became broken because human beings disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in Genesis,[17] so too, the believer's new identity in Jesus Christ will be the means through which the world of nature will now be restored.[18] This concept will be more fully

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[14] Pope Benedict XVI, address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 2010), https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html

[15] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

[16] Pope John Paul II, Address for the "World Day of Peace," (January 1, 1990), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

[17] Genesis 2:17. This passage and command will be discussed more in Chapter 2.

[18] Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996) p. 257.

explored in the exegesis of Romans 8:19-22. Stressing this point however, in his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas et Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI said that "The way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa." He continued, saying,

> "The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others. It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society."[19]

What Pope Benedict XVI stresses here, is the concept of *relationship*—namely, the relationships of persons to themselves, to each other, to the environment, and ultimately, to God. For Paul too, the role of the natural world in the scheme of salvation is intimately tied up with, and in fact, dependent, on these relationships in the lives of redeemed Christians. To this point, I will turn more fully below.

More recently, in the summer of 2015, Pope Francis released his greatly anticipated Encyclical letter, entitled, *Laudato Si'*. In releasing *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis produced a major, innovative, full length, encyclical letter devoted to the care of the natural world. As mentioned in the forward, when it was released, many questioned why the Church needed a document devoted to the environment, particularly when it seemed that there were many more pressing moral and cultural issues to be dealt with. [20]

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[19] Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas et Veritate,* (2009), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, Paragraph 51.

[20] Some Catholics—particularly very traditional and politically conservative ones—voiced strong negative reactions to the Pope's encyclical upon, and even before its release. See for example, Chris Jackson, "Why I'm Disregarding Laudato Si and You Should Too", in *Fetzen Fliegen; A Remnant Newspaper Blog* (June 19, 2015), http://remnantnewspaper.com/web/index.php/fetzen-fliegen/item/1819-why-i-m-disregarding-laudato-si-and-you-should-too; and Maureen Mullarkey, "Where Did Pope Francis' Extravagant Rant Come From?" in *The Federalist* (June 24, 2015), http://thefederalist.com/2015/06/24/where-did-pope-franciss-extravagant-rant-come-from/. A number of American Catholic politicians also reacted against the Pope's encyclical including Republican presidential candidates, Jeb Bush (See Suzanne Goldenberg, "Jeb Bush Joins Republican Backlash Against Pope on Climate Change", in *The Guardian Newspaper* (June 17, 2015),

Nevertheless, the release of *Laudato Si'* signaled to the world that a major global religious community—or at least its current leader—saw the natural world as having a particular moral and theological importance. One of the most striking statements in Pope Francis' document included a reference back to Pope Paul VI, who in 1971 "referred to the ecological concern as 'a tragic consequence' of unchecked human activity: Due to an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation."[21] The Pope also stressed that the key to solving the environmental crises of our day hinge on spiritual, moral and ethical solutions; not merely scientific ones.[22] Certainly, this was meant as a call to all of Christendom to take a stronger role in solving the world's environmental ills.

Again, one of the major themes that came out of the writings of these Popes is the concept of *relationship*. In *Laudato Si',* Pope Francis emphasized four human relationships in particular, with regard to his imperative for believers to care for the natural world. Speaking of his own patron, Saint Francis of Assisi, the Pope said, "He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful *harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself*. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" [emphasis mine].[23] These four relationships (also found elsewhere in Catholic teaching)[24] stem from the creation stories

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http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/17/jeb-bush-joins-republican-backlash-pope-climate-change), and Rick Santorum, (See Alison Walter, "Picking a Fight With Francis? Rick Santorum Misses the Point of Pope's Encyclical", in *Busted Halo* (June 17, 2015), http://bustedhalo.com/blogs/picking-a-fight-with-francis-santorum-misses-the-point-of-popes-encyclical).

[21] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, paragraph 5.

[22] Pope Francis, Laudato Si, (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html, paragraph 9.

[23] Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, (May 24, 2015), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

[24] The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks about what it calls "Original Holiness and Justice", a fourfold model of blessing and curse found in Genesis 1-3, and another way of articulating what I believe is the heart of Paul's inaugurated eschatology. Paragraphs 375-376 say that when God created humanity, humans existed in a state of harmony with God. This is what the Church calls "Original

of Genesis 1-3. According to this tradition, Adam, in the Garden of Eden, found himself in a harmonious relationship with God, with himself, with his fellow humans (namely, Eve, at least at the commencement of their relationship in Genesis 2), and with the rest of creation. Similarly, it is precisely these four relationships that are cursed as the Genesis narrative continues. Because human beings disobeyed God, thus breaking the first relationship (Genesis 3:6), Adam and Eve discover themselves to be naked and ashamed, suggesting an internal brokenness (3:7), they blame one another for the act of disobedience (3:12), and finally, Adam is told subsequently that the earth itself will henceforth oppose his labors (3:17-19).

These same themes of holiness, brokenness, blessing, and cursing find a particular resonance in the Pauline thought world of Romans. In essence, I believe that Paul's understanding of inaugurated eschatology consists in the fact that, through Christ, all four of these relationships have now been reconciled, and that the job of believers is to try and live them out; particularly for Romans 8, in a way that brings healing back to the earth, which was cursed by Adam and Eve's disobedience. In this way, the inaugurated eschatology infuses these four relationships with new possibilities and enables them to be a lived reality for believers.

Interestingly, Romans 5-8—the section which, I believe, Romans 8:19-22 inhabits as a capstone—fits these four categories well. To begin with, Paul spends Romans 5-6 describing how Christ has bridged the gap between human beings and God—as a sort of "new Adam" (here we see Paul already taking us back to the Genesis narratives). Then, in chapter 7, Paul will shift much of his language from the "we" of chapters 5-6, to the more frequent "I" of chapter 7, climaxing in his well-known discourse about why "I do not do the good that I want to do." Here, Paul seems to be describing an internal conflict.[25] Add to this the likely theory that the overall purpose of the Epistle

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Holiness". Because of this holiness, they were able to exist in a harmony with themselves, with the people around them and with the rest of creation. These subsequent three relationships are what the Catechism calls, "Original Justice". Later, in Paragraph 400 the Catechism defines the original human sin as letting "trust in his creator die in his heart". In other words, Original Holiness is broken. Because of this, all three subsequent relationships now find themselves broken as well.

[25] While many interpreters classically assumed Paul's statements in Romans 7 to be the normative understanding of the human condition and the reality of sin (particularly Augustine and Luther), some in more recent years (notably Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", in *Paul*

to the Romans was to address a growing strife between factions of Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome,[26] and one sees that the third relationship—that of humans with each other undergirds the entire epistle. Finally, in chapter 8, Paul comes to a kind of climax in his thought, tying the entirety of creation into his theology—an imperative as it were—for Christians who have been reconciled back to God (as described in chapters 5-6) to bring that reconciliation to the rest of creation. Through this lens, a four-fold pattern begins to emerge in Paul's thought and theology in this central section of Romans. The fact that Christ has "inaugurated" the last days (or the eschaton) with his death and resurrection means that his followers can now live out this four-fold reconciliation.

Did Paul have a systematic four-fold paradigm in mind when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans? There is of course no firm evidence to suggest that Paul himself had such a clear-cut idea in mind. However, the text of Romans allows for a consideration of the interface between the possible social background of the letter and its bearing on Paul's comparison of Adam and Christ. Looking at the letter within this four-fold paradigm provides a new lens and a fresh, necessary perspective to a much-studied text. It also supplies a fresh and holistic view as to the purpose of Romans 8:19-22, addressing the question of what, after all, is it doing there. In this four-fold light, the passage serves to round out Paul's cosmology; a theology of redemption for the whole world; and one in which human beings are now called to play a vital and instrumental role.

1.3 An Introduction to Inaugurated Eschatology

As mentioned at the outset, the guiding principle for our examination of Romans 8:19-22 and its possible applications to contemporary ecological

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Among Jews and Gentiles (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), pp. 78-96) have argued against this understanding, suggesting that the "I" is not necessarily Paul, but perhaps rather a literary "representation of human self-consciousness" (Emma Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), p. 2.

[26] While still much debated, I believe that the context for the Epistle to the Romans to be the period shortly after the Jewish people (and by implication, Jewish Christians) had been expelled from the city under the Emperor Claudius and subsequently returned under the new Emperor Nero. This would have left the local Christian community under the control of gentiles, thus creating a tension upon the return of the Jewish believers. This context is discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.2: *Social Strife in the Roman Community*.

thought will be the concept of inaugurated eschatology. Romans 8:19-22 (and really, all of Paul's Christology) only makes sense if the reconciliation brought by Christ in his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, has already broken into the "here and now", even if it has not yet been fully realized. After all, how can Paul challenge his followers to live out a particular ethic toward God, the people around them, and even the non-human world, unless Christ's work of salvation has actually changed something in them and in the world, and unless that ethic will bear as yet unseen fruit? Paul is not simply calling his audiences to go through the motions. He clearly believes that the power of Jesus has actually changed the structure of the cosmos; and particularly, the identity of believers, even if the world—on its surface at least—does not yet look like it. If this is true, then the only way to make sense of Paul's imperative toward believers to interact with the created world as God's children, is through the lens of a world that is already redeemed, but has not yet fully experienced the full fruit of that redemption.[27] Paul is compelling believers to trust that there is more to their world than meets the eye—from their understanding of God, of themselves, of their relationships with others, and even of the world of nature. The issue for us then, is to tie all of these pieces together for the purpose of demonstrating a theological symbiosis between God, human beings, and ultimately, the rest of creation.

In short, this project offers new lenses for viewing Romans 8:19-22. The first is through the lens of the four blessings and curses of Genesis: specifically, human beings, and their relationships with God, with themselves, with other human beings, and with the natural world. This lens must be considered however, through the concept of an inaugurated eschatology, which will be discussed more fully below. Paul's understanding of the four relationships (although not articulated explicitly in Romans) only makes sense in light of an eschaton, which has already arrived (though not in its fullness) and has empowered believers to live out those relationships in a way that was not possible before. Chapter 3 will also apply the concept of inaugurated eschatology to another Pauline text of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul seems to use the theme of inaugurated eschatology to inform his readers' relationships with one another, this being the third relationship of the four-fold paradigm. The reason for this textual comparison is a practical one. If Paul's overarching theological argument is that believers who are "in

[27] This "already, but not yet" schema was first developed by Geerhardus Vos in the early part of the twentieth century. His views are best laid out Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1930).

Christ" have a new identity, then that identity requires a response; it should inform a lived reality. In 1 Corinthians, Paul seems to be using this paradigm to encourage his readers to live a new ethic toward *each other*. In Romans, he will encourage them in a new ethic toward the natural world. Therefore reading 1 Corinthians in this way gives credence and analogy to the use of the inaugurated eschatology lens in Romans.

In sum, what the idea of an inaugurated eschatology suggests is that with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, the long awaited "end times" or eschaton, anticipated by the Hebrew prophets, has now broken into human history, although its fullness is yet to be seen. What this means for Paul, is that if Christ's salvation has broken into history and has changed the identity of believers—even though they might not experience it in its fullness yet—then the way in which they interact with themselves, with the people around them, and even with the world of nature should be markedly different than if this work of Christ had not taken place. If Romans 8:19-22 is viewed in light of the story of human disobedience, first laid out in Genesis, then this passage becomes not only a kind of midrash, but also an imperative for believers to interact with the created world in a way befitting not only the Adam of Genesis, but indeed, of God himself. In this light then, Romans 8:19-22 is the climactic statement Paul has been headed toward throughout all of Romans 5-8.

In Romans, Paul spends much of chapters 5-7 demonstrating that through Christ, believers are now heirs—and children of God again—just as Adam was originally meant to be. The curses of Genesis 3 have now been reversed, and humanity is restored back to the designs that God originally intended—and even more. What are these designs? The book of Wisdom states, "for God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it" (Wisdom 2:23-24).[28] One can see

[28] The history of scholarship on the Wisdom of Solomon is problematic. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out the at least seeming inconsistencies of both genre categorization and content. While by and large, the field of exegesis has agreed in recent years to categorize the book in terms of Wisdom literature (as its title suggests), it seems to have done so only tacitly. As Shannon Burkes points out (Shannon Burkes, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Wisdom of Solomon", in *The Harvard Theological Review*, 95, 1 (January, 2002), pp. 21-44), there seem to be at least three categories of thinking on where the book finds its home. While Lester Grabbe states that it is "clearly a wisdom book" (Lester L. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 25) others, like Maurice

then, at least according to some of the Jewish wisdom literature, the original identity of human beings was one of "incorruption". What is remarkable though, as Brendan Byrne points out, is that Paul's inclusion of the non-human world within "the sweep of salvation" is unprecedented in the rest of the Pauline canon.[29] To make some sense of this seemingly unprecedented sweep, I turn to what Byrne calls the "common fate principle." Byrne says that "On the 'common fate' principle…when human beings, in the person of Adam, fell from favor with God, creation also took a 'fall': the earth was cursed because of Adam's sin and transformed from being a garden to being an object of hard, unremitting toil (Gen 3:17-19)."[30] Byrne adds that in this sense, creation was "subjected to futility" meaning "the frustration of its original purpose, which was to be a vehicle of human glorification of God."[31] This "common fate principle" will be foundational for understanding Paul's meaning in Romans 8:19-22.

It seems then, that what Paul is describing in Romans 8:19-22 is a *reversal* of the breakdown of relationships in Genesis 3. As he established in Romans 5 and 6, sinful Adam damaged his relationship with God, thus causing an internal rupture (as described in Romans 7, e.g.: "why do I do the things I do not want"). Now (and in the context of a fractured ecclesial community in Rome), Paul will bring the offered redemption of Christ into its natural conclusion—the natural world. Just as the sin of Adam and Eve ushered in a cursing of the earth itself (Genesis 3:17-18), it is logical for Paul that human beings can now help to usher in a kind of salvation for that same creation. This also makes sense in Paul's political milieu. Popular Roman propaganda regularly envisioned *Caesar* as the one who would usher in an era in which the created world would be transformed and put into harmony with itself and human beings. In this light, for Paul, followers

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Gilbert (Maurice Gilbert, "Wisdom Literature", in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Michael E. Stone, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 307) says that there is no literary genre in the Bible into which Wisdom of Solomon as a whole fits. Others, like John Barclay, simply call it "elusive" (John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 B.C.E.-117 B.C.E),* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 181). While it is safe to say that the book eludes most simple distinctions, our intention here is not to go into depth regarding the Wisdom of Solomon. While it is unclear whether Paul would have been familiar with the book, it is clear that much of the Jewish world by the time of Paul would have. This makes the quoted passage useful in at least an anecdotal way.

[29] Byrne, *Romans*, p. 255.

[30] Byrne, *Romans*, p. 257-258.

[31] Byrne, *Romans*, p. 258.

of King Jesus actually usurp the role of Caesar himself.[32] This would have been a provocative suggestion for a letter written to the heart of imperial Rome. In this case however, the redemption of creation would not be the sort of redemption that was imagined by the Roman imperial cult. Rather it will be a redeemed people of God who understand what it is to interact with the created world—and have been given the necessary grace—through Christ—to do so. What Paul seems to envision first and foremost, is a properly ordered humanity, who know how to discern what God wants for the rest of the created order; what it means to interact harmoniously with it, and to care for it as a gardener (drawing on the garden imagery of Genesis). Just as there was something of a hierarchy and an order to the fall of the world in Genesis 3, (Adam fell first, and creation followed thereafter) so too for Paul, is there a human primacy to the redemption of creation. In other words, it will be redeemed through human hands just as it was broken through human disobedience. This is, it seems, what creation is "groaning out for" as it awaits a humanity who know how to live out their redemption.

Paul necessarily uses the image of "birth pangs."[33] There is much in the Jewish tradition, which suggests a time of increased cosmic suffering and distress leading up to the Messianic period.[34] This imagery was also used among contemporary Greek philosophers "who often compared the vernal rebirth of nature to a woman's labor."[35] In this way, Paul may see the new identity of the children of God like a springtime for the rest of creation—now set to come out of the long fall and winter of exile, sin, and ultimately, the inheritance of Adam. As to when this moment of springtime will come, Paul makes the bold statement, ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν—an emphatic "*now*"—suggesting that the time for creation's freedom coincides with the time for redeemed humanity to live out that redemption. Once again, using Byrne's common fate principle, if humanity has been offered redemption, then

[32] For more on this imagery, see David Castriota, *The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial Art* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 125.

[33] Not all are convinced of this interpretation, specifically that this passage should be read through the lenses of the fall of creation and of birth pangs. See for example, L. J. Braaten, "All Creation Groans: Romans 8:22 in Light of the Biblical Sources", in *Horizons in Biblical Theology,* 28, 2 (October, 2006), pp. 131-159:133.

[34] See for instance, 4 Ezra 5:1-13; 6:13-24; 9:1-3; 2 Apocalypse of Baruch 25:2-3; 27:1-15; 48:30-41; 70:2-10; Sibylline Oracles 1:162-65; 2:154-73; 3:632-56, 796-806; as well as Daniel 7:21-27; 12:1-3. We also see this imagery in Revelation 6:12-17.

[35] For more, see Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*; The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p. 509.

creation is waiting for its share to be poured out. As Psalm 8:6 says, "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands, thou hast put all things under his feet." In order to understand the full weight of Paul's argument in Romans 5-8, and his culminating thought in chapter 8, we must first understand Paul's underlying theology of what redeemed human beings are meant to be in God's divine plan. N. T. Wright says that, "the tragedy of Adam is not just that he introduced sin and hence death into the world, but that humans were made to be the creator's wise agents over creation, and if they worship and serve the creature rather than the creator, this purpose goes unfulfilled."[36]

The concept of an "end time" (*eschaton* in Greek) is, of course, a much wider topic than can be found in Paul alone; and the meaning of this term can vary greatly according to individual texts and time periods. I will note some of the range of that meaning below. Throughout the Scriptures however—in both Old and New Testaments, from Isaiah to Revelation, to the Gospel references of the second coming of Christ, to the *parousia* of 2 Thessalonians—the common movement of the eschaton is rarely one of human beings "going" up somewhere (i.e., floating off to the clouds, as is often portrayed in Christian art and tradition) [37] but rather one of God/Jesus/heaven *coming* down.[38] Although this idea will be revisited in

[36] N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 249.

[37] One may note the "Passage of Souls", by Louis Janmot (1814-1892), and "A Soul in Heaven" by William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905) as two examples of this sort of imagery.

[38] Imagery of heaven coming down to earth is ample in both the Old and New Testaments. While there is some imagery of individuals being taken up to heaven (Enoch, Elijah, Jesus himself), the more eschatological passages of Scripture—those which give readers an idea of God's future for the space-time world—more often portray heaven coming down to earth. One sees for example, Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Even the well-known passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 about Jesus' *parousia* and believers being "caught up" to meet him in the clouds (one of the main reference points for the popular concept of the "rapture") does not necessarily suggest believers are being swept away into heaven. In fact, this passage seems to leave the participants in the clouds with no mention of where they go from there. N.T. Wright suggests that in this passage, "Paul conjures up images of an emperor visiting a colony or province. The citizens go out to meet him in open country and then escort him into the city. Paul's image of the people "meeting the Lord in the air" should be read with the assumption that the people will immediately turn around and lead the Lord back to the newly remade world." (N. T. Wright, "Farewell to the Rapture", in *Bible Review* (August 2001)). Likewise, one sees in the book of Revelation

Chapter 5, suffice it to say that repeatedly, the biblical theme of the eschaton is never one of a simple obliteration of the created order, but one of God, and heaven itself, *breaking into* the created order—like a childbirth. In essence, what this project aims to show is that in Paul's view of both cosmology and eschatology, the material world is crucial. If this is indeed the case, Christians today cannot ignore this fundamental aspect of Christ's reconciliation—the fourth relationship of the four-part schema of blessing and curse. Far from the popular Christian visions of a world that will be simply obliterated at the Second Coming of Christ, it seems that Paul's theology of the material world, informed by the Genesis narratives, and seen in light of the four relationships and the inaugurated eschatology, helps the words of the religious leaders mentioned earlier to make sense. The material world, as we know it, will not simply cease to exist at the *parousia*. Rather the material world is fundamental to Christ's work of salvation. In this light, Paul's insight in Romans 8:19-22 begins to create a framework for why humanity in general, and Christians in particular, should care deeply about the fate of the natural world.

1.4 Literature Review

Because this project explores Romans from an eco-theological point of view and aligns that task with a consideration of Paul's own intention and perspective, it finds its home in both Pauline studies, as well as the realm of what I would call "ecobiblical exegesis"; in other words, an interpretation of biblical texts from an ecological point of view. In order to highlight the contribution which I hope this project will make to these areas, it is first necessary to explore two specific areas of Pauline scholarship: that of Paul's Hellenistic, Jewish background, as well as current ecobiblical readings of Paul's Epistles. For the first point, I will draw on the so-called New Perspective on Paul, and for the second, on the relatively small field of scholars doing ecological readings of Paul.

Although Paul's writings have been the source of much of Christian theology and biblical scholarship since the first centuries CE,[39] the so-called New Perspective on Paul created something of a revolution in the field. The

(chapters 21-22) and image not of believers *going up* to heaven, but rather, the new heavenly Jerusalem *coming down* to the earth.

[39] One of the major contributions to interpreting Paul is found within the ancient world itself. Charles Kannengiesser is one of the most important scholars for analyzing the starting point for Pauline interpretation. See his seminal, two-volume, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis. Vols. 1 and 2*. (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

key thinkers of this perspective at its inception in the 1970's and 80's were James Dunn and E. P. Sanders,[40] whose work was notably carried on by scholars like N. T. Wright.[41] These same names have tended to dominate the conversation since the beginning of the New Perspective until today.[42] While a number of new, important commentaries were produced from the New Perspective point of view in the 1990's and early 2000's,[43] with the exception of Wright, Dunn, and a scattering of others, almost no, new, full-length commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans have been produced in recent years. Some of the most recent work in the field includes Wright's recently published magnum opus on Paul (Paul and the Faithfulness of God, Parts I-IV, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013)), which has been challenged by a similarly massive volume taking issue with his justification-centered theology, by Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird, in, *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N.T. Wright.*[44] Outside of these however, there have been few

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[40] In a now-famous speech delivered at the University of Manchester in 1982, Dunn, leaning on the works of E.P. Sanders, coined the term "The New Perspective on Paul". Dunn himself describes the initial New Perspective this way: "The point is that Protestant exegesis has for too long allowed a typically Lutheran emphasis on justification by faith to impose a hermeneutical grid on the text of Romans…The emphasis is important, that God is the one who justifies the ungodly (4:5), and understandably this insight has become an integrating focus in Lutheran theology with tremendous power. The problem, however, lay in what that emphasis was set in opposition to. The antithesis "justification by faith"—what Paul speaks of as "justification by works"—was understood in terms of a system whereby salvation is *earned* through the *merit of good works*", (James Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul: Paul and the Law", in Karl P. Donfried ed., *The Romans Debate,* pp. 299-308:299).

[41] Some take issue with the perhaps inordinate prominence of scholars like Wright. See Bruce Worthington, "Alternative Perspectives beyond the Perspectives: A Summary of Pauline Studies that has Nothing to Do with Piper or Wright", in *Currents in Biblical Research,* 3, 11 (2013), pp. 366-387).

[42] Karl Donfried did an excellent job chronicling the early debates and challenges of this movement in his, *The Romans Debate* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991).

[43] This book specifically utilizes the works of Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), Paul Achtemier, *Romans* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), and Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans*; The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1992), among others.

[44] Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird, (eds.), *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology of N.T. Wright,* (Tuebingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2016).

commentaries devoted strictly to Paul, Romans, or the classical justification issues in recent years.

Nevertheless, the work of these scholars continues to be critical for Pauline studies today, even as the New Perspective has now given way to many new *perspectives*, and the field has opened up for many new interpretive possibilities. These new interpretive areas have spanned many diverse and sometimes-divergent views into Paul's elusive thought. Some of the most significant include post-holocaust issues and Jewish-Christian relations[45]; issues about gender and sexuality[46]; political readings of Paul[47], and of course, my chosen field of ecological readings of Paul. It is here that I hope to build on the important work of the New Perspective scholars and add a contemporary application of Pauline interpretation.

The New Perspective movement certainly prepared the way for the fledgling field of Pauline ecobiblical exegesis. However, although there has been much written on the topics of Christianity and the environment in general,[48] serious works engaging the Bible and the environment (and Paul

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[45] See Krister Stendahl's now-famous lecture, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", pp. 119-215, and Amy-Jill Levine, "Speaking of the Middle East: Jews and Christians in Dialogue and Dispute", in Alan L. Berger, *Post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Dialogue: After the Flood, Before the Rainbow* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), pp. 57-76). Of particular importance is Daniel Boyarin's *A Radical Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), which called for a Jewish revisiting of Pauline studies "as an important, even an integral part of the study of Judaism in the Roman period and late antiquity", pp. 1-2.

[46] See Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Paul on Women and Gender", in Ross Shepard Kraemer and D'Angelo, Mary Rose, eds., *Women and Christian Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 221-235; Gillian Beattie, *Women and Marriage in Paul and His Early Interpreters* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother, Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), and John T. Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women: The Apostle's Liberating Views on Equality in Marriage, Leadership, and Love* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011)

[47] See Christof Heilig, *Hidden Criticism? The Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), and Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistence in Early Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), and Neil Elliot, "Creation, Cosmos, and Conflict in Romans 8-9" in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, ed., *Apocalyptic Paul; Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013) pp. 131-156).

[48] Some notable, recent examples include, Brian Treanor, Bruce Ellis Benson, and Norman Wirzba, *Being-in-Creation; Human Responsibility in an Endangered*

specifically) are far fewer. Nevertheless, when Paul does appear in eco-theological thought, Romans 8:19-22 is almost sure to be present as one of the most popular, disputed, and frequently cited passages used by scholars.[49] Although the study of ecology and the Bible and ecology and Paul is still a fledgling, yet growing field, some key players stand out. Some of the most important work on the Bible and ecology has been done by a group of scholars at the University of Exeter. A team headed by David Horrell have been involved in what is perhaps the only full-fledged research project at a major, publicly funded university specifically devoted to a study of the Bible and the environment.[50] Some of their most important publications include, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis*, and *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives.* Outside of Exeter, some of the other major figures include Norman Habel and the creators of The Earth Bible Project,[51] and Richard Bauckham.[52] Other important voices, who do not necessarily address Paul, but have nevertheless made important contributions to the field of Bible and

World (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015); Fred Van Dyke, *Between Heaven and Earth: Christian Perpectives on Environmental Protection* (Oxford: Praeger, 2010); and Kathryn D. Blanchard and Kevin J. O'Brien, *An Introduction to Christian Environmentalism* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014).

[49] Romans 8:19-22 has been used and misused in various ways, and has become a particular favorite of some Christians engaging with the environmental movement. See See Cherryl, Hunt, David Horrell and Christopher Southgate, "An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8:19-23 and a Modest Proposal for its Narrative Interpretation."

[50] The Exeter project was called, Beyond Stewardship? Biblical Texts and Environmental Ethics. The group's website can be found here: http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/research/projects/beyondstewardship/

[51] As described by the Society for Biblical Literature: http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=291

[52] Whose major writings on the subject include, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), and *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).

ecology include Hilary Marlow,[53] Ellen Davis,[54] Mark Bredin,[55] Dianne Bergant,[56] and Niel Elliot.[57]

I hope to add to the important work of these scholars by drawing on Paul as a teacher and guide with regard to the inherited traditions of Jewish texts and thought. In this context, the lens of inaugurated eschatology demonstrates Paul's capacity to produce innovative, yet socially relevant commentary on older materials in a community made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, thus producing a vehicle for mutual understanding between these two groups which made up his audience in Rome. While this aspect of my work addresses historical and cultural issues, the theme of inaugurated eschatology, with a view toward the four-fold blessing and curse, seeks to enhance the argument for the vital importance of human instrumentality in understanding the world of nature.

Since the beginning of the New Perspective, readings of Romans have been splintered at best and scholars have struggled to come up with a "big picture" view of the letter as a whole. From its talk about faith versus works of the law, to its discussion of an "old" and "new" Adam, to our focal text—the seemingly haphazard passage about the "groaning" of creation—all the way to its assessment of the status of Israel in chapters 9-11, scholars have consistently chosen which of Paul's themes to expound upon, but often to the determent or exclusion of others. Certain Pauline passages are often read in isolation from other Pauline passages. What is needed is a more holistic reading of Romans. Might Paul have been trying to create a worldview in which Christians could look out at a broken world—even the ecological world—in light of the work of Christ and begin to make sense of it? This is where a reading informed by the four blessings and curses of Genesis, as

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[53] Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[54] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[55] Mark Bredin, *The Ecology of the New Testament: Creation, Re-Creation, and the Environment* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010).
[56] Dianne Bergant, *A New Heaven, A New Earth: The Bible and Catholicity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016).
[57] Although Elliot primarily deals in matters of Paul and Empire, his recent paper at a Princeton University conference on Romans 5-8 is a significant contribution to the understanding of the natural world in the New Testament. See Neil Elliot, "Creation, Cosmos, and Conflict in Romans 8-9" in Beverly Roberts Gaventa, (ed.), *Apocalyptic Paul; Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8*, pp. 131-156.