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# Christian Ecology in the Letter to the Hebrews

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## Abstract

This paper proceeds from a discourse analytical perspective and asks what we can learn from Hebrews 1-2 concerning the relationship of humanity to creation through Christ. First, the exordium is examined to reveal a descent–ascent motif for the incarnate Son who is the one through whom God creates (1:2) and who sustains everything by his powerful word (1:3). The paper then explains how the Son's sacrificial activity is subsumed within this theology as we look at the catena of scriptural citations found in the rest of chapter 1, where the catena deepens the theology of the exordium by presenting the same events in reverse order. However, towards the end of the catena, when we would expect a reference to the Son and his having inherited a name greater than the angels (1:4), we instead hear about how the angels are sent to serve humanity who inherit salvation. This enables the discourse to move on to chapter 2 and the purpose of Christ's descent to lead humanity heavenward to glory (2:10). This paper uncovers how that glory is the Son's own glory and posits a process of theosis by which humanity shares in the Son's sustaining role over creation.

**Keywords:** creation; discourse analysis; ecology; glory; Hebrews; theosis

We would usually think of 'ecology' as the area of biology that looks at how organisms relate to each other and to other organisms. However, Christians are aware that they have to be mindful not only of creation but also of the creator and these papers seek to deal with not only the relationships between organisms but also between people and God. In this paper, I shall posit that Hebrews intricately connects its creation theology and soteriology and that this can help us understand the theological depth of Christian stewardship. When we think of Hebrews, we usually think of its rich descriptions of Christ's priesthood, especially his entering behind the curtain (6:19, 9:3) as he offered a unique sacrifice for sin (10:1–18). These are the passages so familiar, especially because they are used in the liturgy. However, in the opening four chapters of the Epistle, we actually have very few references to Christ's high priestly activity. The term 'high priest' only occurs a total of four times, and we do not find it at all in the opening chapter, though there is a reference to Christ's sacrificial activity in 1:3. By contrast,

we have a cluster of references to the creation, beginning at the very opening of the Epistle:

**Heb 1:1** Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds/ages [*aiwnas* – *aeons*]. (New Revised Standard Version [NRSV], adapted to show variation in translation)

Most of the other references are found in 1:10–12; 2:5–9,10; 3:1–6, and 4:3–4, 9–10, and there are around eight in total, depending on how one divides them. Interestingly, they dissipate until 11:3, where we again have another reference to God's having created the ages/worlds, reiterating some of the vocabulary from 1:2, such as the word *aeons*. There is thus a certain prominence given to the topic of creation at the start of the Epistle and the topic of creation forms an *inclusio* around the priestly material, which is the focus mainly of chapters 5–10. Here, I focus on the first two chapters in particular. I draw much on my previous work, *Creation and Christ*, but also advance some of the ideas therein in order to argue that Hebrews' soteriology is characterised by a sharing in God's own glory and that it is by sharing in God's glory that Christians share in the Son's stewardship over creation. I then discuss the implications of this for a Christian perspective on ecology and propose that Hebrews offers a good biblical basis from which to assess the relationship of the created to the creator and the role of Christ in that relationship.

### 1. The Son and Hebrews' ecology

When Hebrews opens, we learn that, long ago, God spoke in many different ways by the prophets, but now we hear that he has spoken to us, definitively, by a son. What is striking here is that the author does not think that he needs to tell us who this son is by name. In fact, Jesus is not even named until 2:9, and thus it is presupposed in Hebrews that the audience already knows that this son and Jesus are one and the same.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the phrase 'through whom he made the worlds/ages' then extends the description of the one through whom God spoke to qualify him more specifically and thus emphasise his role in creation. 'Heir' and 'son' are from the same semantic field; to say someone is an heir is not too dissimilar from saying he is a son, especially in the ancient world where, generally, only males inherited, but to say this son is the one through whom God created is to give new and important information, which in some way focalises this description.<sup>2</sup> Instead of naming Jesus, the author prefers

<sup>1</sup>Angela Costley, *Creation and Christ*, WUNT II:527 (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2020), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>New information is generally seen as having a certain prominence. An argument against such prominence here might be that the description comes at the end of the clause and therefore is not a point of departure, or *theme*, to use the linguistics term, for the sentence. However, according to Halliday, the given/new distinction is the property of the information unit, whereas *theme* and *rheme* belong more properly to the constituents of the clause, i.e., the central grammatical unit. Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday, 'Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English, Part 2', *Journal of Linguistics*, 3 (1967), 199–224, here 204. To some extent, it is possibly helpful to refer more to the Prague School of linguistics. Notably, in the Prague School, the term *theme* corresponds to the 'established' information in the clause, i.e., what is already known to the audience, whereas the *rheme* corresponds to the newly asserted or focal

instead to focus on his characteristic of being the heir *through whom God created* as his marker for the son's identification. This is significant because, immediately, we see that Christ's status as the agent of creation is a defining characteristic of the son, or perhaps better, "Son", not only for the author but also for his intended audience, who are clearly expected to understand who is meant.<sup>3</sup> Christological ecology is thus an important theme in the Letter from the very beginning, forming a link between author and audience and, as we shall see, between humanity and the creator.

At this point, we should make another important observation: the exordium tells a story that is later expanded as the Epistle continues. As the exordium goes on, the author builds on the initial point that God has spoken definitively through his agent of creation and we learn the method of his having spoken: this same Son has offered sacrifice for sin (v.3a) and then sat down at the right of God's glory (1:3b) and exalted above the angels (1:4). What is interesting is that this story is here a bit incomplete.<sup>4</sup> One might wonder how the Son, who has just been described in heavenly ways as the agent of creation, not to mention the 'radiance' of God's glory and the 'impress' of the divine substance (1:3), would have needed to be exalted above the angels, a tension only fully resolved in 2:5–9 where we read of his descent to earth only 'for a little while'. Furthermore, there is also no direct mention of the resurrection.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, according to the exordium, the Son has still been enthroned in heaven where he is now seated 'on high' (1:3).<sup>6</sup> Instead of telling the story in sequence, certain details are left until later in the Epistle, and the author tells us a basic *mythos* so as to draw attention to key points about the Son and his role. It was mentioned at the start of this paper that references to the high priesthood in the first four chapters of Hebrews were scant, but that there was a veiled reference to it in 1:3 where it says that the Son has made purification for sin. This now becomes important.

The exordium begins with a very heavenly depiction of the son as the agent of creation, and at the end of the exordium, he ascends back to heaven. In between his involvement in creation and his ascent back to heaven, it is implied that the son had to come to earth to offer sacrifice. One might argue that the purification offering is itself

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information. Here, 'through whom he made the ages' could be focalised new information. See Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), pp. 200–04. See also Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 4th edn, revised by and enl. Christian Matthiessen (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 115. On the concept of heir as connected to the idea of sonship, see Ceslas Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, vol. 2 (Paris: Lecoffre, 1952), pp. 2, 5. The connection of 'heir' and 'son' is usual in the New Testament (e. g. Gal 4:7). See also Costley, *Creation*, pp. 86, 93, on which I draw here.

<sup>3</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 86. I go on to say that: "The depiction of the Son as the "one through whom he [God] also made the aeons" stands out among the designations of the Son in the exordium since it is not connected to the depiction "Son" by a participle, as in those personal details given in vv. 3–4, which recall his nature, but rather by a prepositional phrase, "through whom". The phrase "through whom he made the aeons" modifies the description of the Son, but it does so specifically in respect of his relationship to God. The phrase "through whom he made the aeons" in fact extends the description of the one through whom God spoke, following on from the description of him as one "appointed heir", to qualify him more specifically, and thus emphasise and reiterate his close relationship to God still further". *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* See Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews*, Anchor Bible Commentaries 36 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 97.

heavenly, given that the Son enters behind the heavenly veil in 6:19 and 9:3. However, when it is considered that in other places, such as 2:14–17, the Son is said to take flesh for the purpose of offering that same sacrifice (compare 4:14–15, and 13:20) and that the blood he offers in chapter 9 is his own, one can recognise this sacrificial reference in 1:3, at least in part, to refer the Son's earthly activity.<sup>7</sup> Essentially, this is a descent-ascent motif. Interestingly, there is an *inclusio* on 'heir' (1:2) and 'inherited' (1:4). In the first instance, 1:2 refers to the Son's being appointed as heir protologically, 'given its juxtaposition to the description of the Son through whom God created the aeons, and in 1:4, the actual act of inheritance seems to take place after his return to heaven. This creates a tension between the protological aspect of his being appointed heir and his actually inheriting'.<sup>8</sup> However, what is interesting for our purposes is that the Son in 1:2 is specifically said to be appointed heir of 'everything' (*pantōn*) from the beginning.<sup>9</sup> When we include the earlier observations on the prominence given to the Son as agent of creation, it appears that, as a result of his descending to offer sacrifice and then ascending back to heaven, the Son actually inherits what he helps to create.<sup>10</sup> The Son's sacrificial activity is thus subsumed within the Son's role as an agent of creation.

Might it even be, then, that the Son's sacrificial role is actually *part of his role* in sustaining creation? If one examines 1:3 a bit more closely, there appears to be an intrinsic link between the Son's two roles. In v. 3, where we find mention of Christ's sacrifice, the reader is also told that he is the 'radiance of God's glory and impress of his substance', and not only this but that by being such the Son sustains everything by his powerful word.<sup>11</sup> Sat side by side, it would seem this act of sacrifice and the act of sustaining creation are indeed so related. The term used for sustaining is *pherōn* a present participle that tells us his action of 'sustaining' all things is ongoing and is governed by a nominative relative pronoun, whereby one might expect a coming finite verb, which only comes with 'he sat down', and we soon learn that 'having made a cleansing for sin, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high'. One might understand that the latter is thus intrinsically connected to the former ongoing action.

<sup>7</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 104. Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), p. 41. See also Ole Jakob Filtvedt, 'Creation and Salvation in Hebrews', *ZNW*, 106 (2015), 280–303.

<sup>9</sup>Costley, *Creation*, pp. 104–05. Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* See also Costley, *Creation*, p. 105, and Spicq, *L'Épître*, vols 2, 6, and 9 on the incarnational theme in the exordium, where he addresses the union of Father and Son. See also Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Der Brief and die Hebräer*, KEK 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), p. 142.

<sup>11</sup>Is it God's word or the Son's, though? On the one hand, God is the subject of the sentence, at least up until the end of v. 2, and some have argued that his being subject should be extended through to verse 3. Thus, perhaps God sustains the world through the Son, his Word, in the same way he created it (for instance, Lane reads the text this way, William Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A and 47B (Dallas, TX: Word Publishers, 1991), p. cxxxix; or, the description can be taken to suggest that the Son sustains the world through his own powerful word (e. g., Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 45). However, I suggest it is the Son's word. Hebrews 1:1–2 has God as the subject, but 1:3–4 has the Son as subject, as indicated by the nominative relative participle, which refers back to him. See Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 97; John P. Meier, 'Structure and Theology in Heb 1:1–14', *Biblica*, 66 (1985), 168–89, here, 171.

## 2. The catena of chapter 1 – furthering the link between Hebrews’ ecology and soteriology

The above sustaining of creation will continue until creation perishes, as demonstrated by the inclusion of a creation reference in 1:10–12, which deals with the end to which creation looks forward:

**Heb 1:10** And,  
 ‘In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,  
 and the heavens are the work of your hands;  
 11 they will perish, but you remain;  
 they will all wear out like clothing;  
 12 like a cloak you will roll them up,  
 and like clothing they will be changed.  
 But you are the same,  
 and your years will never end’.

(NRSV)

Interestingly, Hebrews 1:10–12, is actually the sixth quotation in a catena of seven in Heb 1:5–14. Here, the citation is from Ps LXX 101:25–27. There are some things to note about this catena. The first is that the number seven in gematria, Jewish mystical numerical speculation, usually pertains to creation, and so the fact that this next creation reference comes near the end of a catena of seven scriptural citations is probably not accidental.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, it is the sixth citation, which would correspond to the day on which God created humanity and placed it in dominion over all creation, to which this paper will return. Second, when the catena is examined closely, there is a re-emergence and expansion of all the elements of the basic *mythos* that we saw in the exordium, only in reverse order, and consideration of this will support the theology expounded above.<sup>13</sup>

The first citation comes in vv. 5 and refers back to 1:4 and Christ’s exaltation:

**Heb 1:5** For to which of the angels did God ever say,  
 ‘You are my Son;  
 today I have begotten you’?

(NRSV)

This is a reference to Ps 2:7. Historically speaking, it is important to note that the King of Israel became God’s Son at his enthronement, and in 1:4, the Son takes his place seated at the right of God’s majesty after his earthly activity.<sup>14</sup> In my book, I point out that even if one holds that the exordium sees the Son as son eternally, it appears that this filial vocabulary was ‘intended to evoke scriptural memories of kingly exaltation, about which a Jewish-Christian audience could reasonably be presumed to have known’.<sup>15</sup> To support this idea, similar comments can be made of the second citation

<sup>12</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup>See Costley, *Creation*, pp. 161–97 for a fuller exploration of the Catena, key points of which I summarise here.

<sup>14</sup>See Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 53.

<sup>15</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 183. The Son is specifically designated as a king in his own right in 1:8 by the mention of the sceptre ‘of his kingdom’.

in v. 5, that it refers to Christ as seated with God. By process of *gezerah shavah*, a technique whereby the author connects two biblical passages together because they share key words and then exegetes them together, the quotation from Ps 2 is linked by the catchwords ‘son’ and ‘I’ to another citation, which is possibly from 2 Sam 7:14, but more likely 1 Chr 17:13:<sup>16</sup>

Or again,  
     ‘I will be his Father,  
         and he will be my Son’?  
   (NRSV)

This is again a royal passage, in which an everlasting dynasty is promised to King David through his son, Solomon, and equally refers back to the Son’s exaltation.

Furthermore, from here, we move onto verse 6:

<sup>6</sup> And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,  
     ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’.

(NRSV)

The word here in Greek for ‘world’ is *oikumenē*, and the citation is likely taken from Deut 32:43.<sup>17</sup> In English, it would be easy to mistake this for a reference to the incarnation. However, in the Greek, this term only otherwise occurs in Hebrews in 2:5–9, where it refers to the ‘world to come’, over which Christ rules, not the angels, having been exalted above them after tasting death.<sup>18</sup> This makes this citation another likely reference to the exaltation, especially given the contrast with the angels in our current section, which again echoes 1:4, setting the Son in contrast to them.

So far, we have been echoing and exaggerating the theology of 1:4 as it pertains to the exalted Son, but the next few lines deepen the theology of 1:3, and the move backwards through the exordium’s themes commences. Mention of angels in v.7, together with the next quotation, from Ps 2:7, allows us to move onto the another citation, taken from LXX Ps 103:4 (Hebrew Ps 104:4), but this should be considered with verses 8–9, which are a citation from LXX Ps 44:7 (Hebrew 45:7). In verse 9, we see that the reason for the Son’s being able to sit on the throne is a result of his having loved righteousness and hated wickedness. This is a reference to his earthly activity, which is, with v. 7, again set side by side to his role in sustaining creation with the mention of making angels winds and servants flames of fire, which designates the Son’s dominion over the elements and the beings that control them.<sup>19</sup> Together, these verses can thus be seen to refer back to the exaltation of 1:3, which, as we saw earlier, has the enthronement take place *after* the Son had descended. Although there be no direct reference to the sacrificial activity, it is clearly a reference to the Son’s earthly activity and the descent–ascent motif is again presented:

<sup>16</sup>For my reasoning, see Costley, *Creation*, pp. 184–85.

<sup>17</sup>Another possibility for the source of the citation is LXX Ps 96. See Costley, *Creation*, p. 185.

<sup>18</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 187.

<sup>19</sup>In this section, I summarise some of the key points from Costley, *Creation*, 188–195 and add some new remarks.

- Heb1:7** Of the angels he says,  
 'He makes his angels winds,  
 and his servants flames of fire'.  
<sup>8</sup> But of the Son he says,  
 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,  
 and the righteous sceptre is the sceptre of your kingdom.  
<sup>9</sup> **You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;  
 therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
 with the oil of gladness beyond your companions'**.  
 (NRSV, emphasis mine)

That this having loved righteousness involved the Son's sacrifice is perhaps more obvious when one considers that this passage is presenting a form of submission. The passage is presenting the Son in submission to God, who anoints him, and 5:4–10 directly links the Son's submission to God to his death. That one should connect the catena to this passage is confirmed by a second citation of Ps 2:7 in 5:5, which was quoted in 1:5. To return to the catena, interestingly, though, the passage in 1:8, taken from LXX Ps 45:7–8, also applies the title 'God' to the Son and extracts these verses to apply them to Jesus. Something similar happens in 1:5–6, where the 'Lord' of the original passage becomes the Son, and also in v. 10, where that same title is applied to the Son in another creation reference:

- Heb 1:10** And,  
 'In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,  
 and the heavens are the work of your hands;  
<sup>11</sup> they will perish, but you remain;  
 they will all wear out like clothing;  
<sup>12</sup> like a cloak you will roll them up,  
 and like clothing they will be changed.  
 But you are the same,  
 and your years will never end'.  
 (NRSV)

This returns us to the theology of Heb 1:2–3a, where there is a reference to the Son as the agent of creation and the one who sustains it. Here, the eternity of the Son contrasts with the finitude of that of which he is said to be the agent of creation in verse 2. Now, one might add that there is even more of an emphasis on the Son's role in creation because the psalm, LXX 102:26–28, originally applied to the Lord is made to apply to the Son himself, thus stressing the extreme intimacy of the Son in the role of creation with 'God' to the point of deification. This adds credence to the theory of a properly incarnational theology in the Epistle more generally, which sees the Son descend to earth as God, but for our purposes, it stresses the Son's eternity vis-à-vis the finitude of creation. It is worth returning, here, briefly to the description of the Son in 1:3 as the *apauqasma* of God's glory. This term can be understood passively or actively, and thus the Son might either be a reflection or possibly an emanation from the divine.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>See Costley, *Creation*, p. 135ff.

It probably seems at this point that we are digressing. However, let us bring these observations together. The major point here is that the descent–ascent motif is again present, but presented in reverse order. In it, Christ’s saving earthly activity is again connected to his creative role. Moreover, his exaltation is again contingent on his descent. Combined with the above observations on the exordium, the Son thus makes his descent as part of his role in sustaining creation and also continues that same role on account of the sacrifice. The descent–ascent motif marks the Son’s sacrificial activity as part of his cosmic role as the sustainer of creation, and here in the catena, the Son is then even presented as God himself. This supports the reading that the Son is the *emanation* of God’s glory in 1:3. In the next section, we shall see that these observations contribute to an understanding that participation in Christ results in the deification/*theosis* of humanity such that humans, too, participate in Christ’s sustaining of creation.

### 3. Hebrews’ soteriological ecology and humanity

Interestingly, the former creation citation is, strictly speaking, the last in the chain to reverse the pattern in the exordium, but, as we saw earlier, it is not the last citation in the catena. It is here that we start to see how the role of the Son and the role of humanity connect when it comes to ecology. One would expect the string of quotations to then move on to the heirship of the Son, as in v. 2. Instead, though, there is an assertion of a partially realised eschatology that sees the Son waiting to see his enemies put under his feet in a final citation from LXX Ps 109:1. The citation declares the Son’s greatness over the angels, recapitulating the idea of his exaltation, and then in v. 14, the verb ‘to inherit’ resumes the noun ‘heir’ in v. 2, but there is mention of the Christian community instead of the Son.<sup>21</sup> The angels are to serve this community because it will one day inherit salvation, and this is stated without a backup citation:

**Heb 1:13** But to which of the angels has he ever said,  
 ‘Sit at my right hand  
 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’?  
<sup>14</sup>Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of  
 those who are to inherit salvation?  
 (NRSV)

Just as it was the creator-Son who formed the main pivot point for understanding the exordium itself, we here return to the Son’s role in creation, but from the Son’s supremacy in virtue of his role in creation, we then move onto the *salvation of humanity*, and this theology is deepened in the chapter that follows. It is by examination of the next creation reference, in chapter 2, that the significance of Christ’s actions and role ecology becomes apparent.<sup>22</sup> In the original psalm for the last creation reference, LXX Ps 102, the promise of the new creation is held out to the future generations: ‘The children of your servants shall live secure; their offspring shall be established in your presence’ (Ps 102:28, NRSV), and Hebrews 2 claims that this time has come. Crucially,

<sup>21</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 190.

<sup>22</sup>For an explanation of how features of the psalm itself permit such a move, see Costley, *Creation*, p. 191ff.



it has come through participation in the activities of the Son, who leads his brothers and sisters heavenward (2:10–15) and to a share in his own sonship.

Our next creation reference comes in 2:5–9.

**Heb 2:5** Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. <sup>6</sup> But someone has testified somewhere,  
 ‘What are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
 or mortals, that you care for them?  
<sup>7</sup> You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;  
 you have crowned them with glory and honour,  
<sup>8</sup> subjecting all things under their feet’.

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, <sup>9</sup> but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control.

(NRSV)

We remarked earlier that the sixth creation reference in the catena represents the sixth day in creation, on which humanity was created and given dominion over the world. Chapter 2 picks up on this very theme, and just as in the catena, it moves forward into the notion of salvation through the Son for his followers.<sup>23</sup> The quotation used to support the author’s argumentation at this point is taken from Ps 8:5–7 (NRSV 8:4–6). Following a formal opening, the psalm proper begins, and will also close, with the praise of God, praise which is specifically related to his role as creator of all things.<sup>24</sup> Yet, within this, there is the statement that God has made humanity a little less than the angels. The Hebrew phrase *ma’at m’elohim*, which could mean ‘a little less than God’ or ‘a little less than the heavenly beings’, has been interpreted in the LXX to say that humanity is ‘a little less than the angels’, which enables Hebrews to use it here.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the Greek term used for ‘less than’ is *brachus*, and this can also have a temporal sense, meaning ‘a little while’.<sup>26</sup> What is interesting is that whereas in Ps 8, humanity has had everything under its feet from the beginning, Hebrews now reinterprets the psalm in terms of the Son’s incarnation, which entailed his descent

<sup>23</sup>Interestingly, in chapter 4, the salvific rest is likened to the rest at the end of creation in 4:3, which may again point back to the catena in chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup>The Masoretic Text has ‘how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens’ (Ps 8:1 NRSV). The LXX renders this with ‘how admirable is your name in all the earth, because your magnificence was raised beyond the heavens’ (v.2 New English Translation of the Septuagint). In the Hebrew, the merism, or all-encompassing contrast, of earth and heaven is intended to testify to God’s creation of all that exists. Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms, Berit Olam* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), p. 23. However, in the LXX, the Lord is glorified specifically because his magnificence has been lifted above the heavens. This might be significant for Hebrews’ interpretation, which links the psalm to Christ’s exaltation (2:9), and it may be that the author of Hebrews interprets the Lord of the psalm prophetically in respect of the Son in a case of *transdiegetization* whereby the text has been picked up and applied to a new situation. See Costley, *Creation*, p. 206.

<sup>25</sup>For a detailed discussion of this change in vocabulary, see Dale F. Leschert, *Hermeneutical Foundations of Hebrews: A Study in the Validity of the Epistle’s Interpretation of Some Core Citations from the Psalms*, NAPBR 10 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1994), pp. 88–91.

<sup>26</sup>See Small, *Characterization*, pp. 273–74.

from heaven for a short period of time, before his exaltation back above the angels, as explored in the exordium and catena. Hebrews does this by combining Ps 8 with LXX Ps 109 just quoted in Heb 1:13 and shifts the reference to the future (2:9), saying that we do not see humanity in such a position, but we do see Jesus, now named. He was made a lower than the angels for a 'little while' but is now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death on behalf of everyone. The implication is that this suffering makes it possible for humanity to achieve that almost angelic status in the future because the Son has been sent to suffer in order to lead them to glory (2:10), a point to which we return below.<sup>27</sup> It would appear that the author has linked the two by another use of *gezera shawa* on the concept of 'feet' and 'footstool'. This acts as a cohesive tie between the passages, and we can infer that the citation from Ps 8 is to be understood in the light of LXX Ps 109's partially realised eschatology as applied to the Son in the catena, in that Jesus is now seen to have accomplished the first stage in his mission, which will eventually see his enemies under his feet but which already sees creation as subject to him given he has returned to heaven and resumes his sustaining role.<sup>28</sup>

We mentioned that the catena switched focus in 1:13–14 from the Son to the salvation of his followers. A similar move is made from 2:10 onwards when the saving activity of the Son is further explored and expounded as the chapter continues. We

<sup>27</sup>In this paragraph, I summarise key points from Costley, *Creation*, p. 211. The phrase forms a 'distant hook', joining units of the same genre, here exposition, to each other, even though there is an intervening unit of another genre (2:1–4 being an exhortation). This suggests that there is some form of interrelationship between the sections in which the distant hook words are found. See Guthrie, *Structure*, p. 100 and Costley, *Creation*, pp. 209–12.

<sup>28</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 213. On p. 218, I discuss how some scholars do not see Hebrews as having a Christological reading of the psalm. Blomberg disagrees with the suggestion in 2:5–9, does not support 2:1–4, and refers directly back to 1:13–14. He argues that this would cause tension for the reader because 1:13 indicated that this promise of 'submission under feet' remained unfulfilled. If God did not subject the coming world to angels, he argues, it means God did subject it originally to someone else. The obvious suggestion is Adam and Eve, as per Gen 1:26–30. Part of the controversy surrounds the use of the phrase 'Son of Man' and whether it might be Christological, but this title is not used elsewhere in Hebrews, leaving arguments either way. Koester also comments on the ambiguity over the 'him' in verse 8 and says it need not necessarily be understood as referring to Christ as in v.9 and could still refer to humanity, 'man' in the psalm. See Craig Blomberg, "'But we see Jesus": The Relationship Between the Son of Man in Hebrews 2:6 and 2:9 And the Implications for English Translations' in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. by Richard Bauckham et al., LNTS 387 (London: T&T Clark, 2008), pp. 88–99, here, p. 90, and Koester, *Hebrews*, p. 215. For my own position, see Costley, *Creation*, p. 219, where I argue that it is unlikely to be Adam and Eve as the psalm references Gen 1. In v. 8 with the birds of the air and fish. In this creation story, animals are created before humanity, and thus humanity is not born into a world to come, but one that has already been filled. I also point out that uses of the word *mellō* in Hebrews, or derivatives thereof, are otherwise eschatological:

Verse	Phrase
6:5	aeon to come
10:1	good things to come
10:27	a fury of fire about to consume the adversaries
13:14	we seek for the city to come

return here to the fact humanity is said to also enter *glory* by virtue of the Son's sacrificial activity in 2:9–10:<sup>29</sup>

**Heb 2:9** but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.<sup>10</sup> It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.  
(NRSV)

The word 'glory' is especially important in verse 10 because it links back to the glory of the Son in 2:9, which was the fulfilment of the glory promised to humanity at the beginning – thus, it is through the saving activity of the Son that humanity does, in fact, achieve that glory which was originally promised to it. However, at this point we would do well to return to the exordium, where the Son was described as the agent of creation. It was noted above that in 2:10, the Son is said to gain glory on account of his saving activity, but we saw earlier that in 1:3, by his very being, the Son is a reflection, or, as was preferred, emanation, of God's very own glory, who sustains the world by his powerful word. Were it not for the description in 1:3, one might think that the Son has his own glory distinct from that of God. However, because we, as readers, already know the Son is *himself* the radiance of God's glory, we can now go on to understand the true implication of what is being said in chapter 2, that the Son in fact *returns* to his glorious state where he continues to sustain the universe (1:3) and takes humanity with him so that humans can enter glory (2:10): humanity, too, shares in the glory that is God's own through the Son. By moving to say that humanity can enter into the Son's glory, chapter 2 arguably reveals there is a certain deification/theosis of humanity that takes place because of Christ's saving work. In chapter 2, when read in the light of 1:3, Hebrews implies that humans truly become participators not only in the glory of the Son but also in the glory that *is* the Son who is the radiance God's own glory.<sup>30</sup> What is described is effectively, a union of sonship that raises up humanity to share in the life of God. The union of the Son with humanity is indeed further expressed by the use of kinship language throughout the latter parts of chapter 2. A chain of vocabulary pertaining to kinship relations is initiated in 2:10 where God brings his 'children', literally and significantly 'sons' in the Greek, to glory, and this continues as the chapter progresses and Hebrews speaks of those sanctified by the Son as 'siblings' (*adelphoi*) in 2:11 and 'children' (*paidia*) in 2:13.<sup>31</sup> This emphasis on the earthly Jesus' solidarity with humanity actually lasts until 2:18, where we return to sonship in particular, and they are said to be 'sons' akin to the Son. And if they share in His glory, they also share in his dominion over creation, since it is by virtue of that same glory that the Son sustains *everything* in 1:3.

<sup>29</sup>What is more, this same glory is now held out to humanity, who become partakers in a heavenly calling in 3:1, which is part of another creation reference in 3:1–6.

<sup>30</sup>'God's glory' was itself frequently used as a Jewish expression of an emanation of his being in the Old Testament and Second Temple writings.

<sup>31</sup>Costley, *Creation*, p. 123.

#### 4. Implications of Hebrews' soteriological ecology for present-day ecology

The result of this theology is that humans, too, by faith, may share the glory that is Christ's as the sustainer of creation, making them, too, stewards over the same as participators in the Son's own stewardship. Christ's salvific activity lifts humanity up to a heavenly position where humans regain their rightful position as stewards over creation, which they were supposed to have been from 'the beginning' (2:5-9) and even goes further because he makes people participators in his divine glory and subsequently in his godly sustaining activity, making incumbent upon them the duty and obligation to guard the resources of the planet.

However, in promoting such a high Christology and combining this with its soteriology, Hebrews also puts ecology in its rightful perspective. Ecology, in the truly Christian sense, is not, in fact, about caring for the world by picking up plastic or eating less meat, although care for the earth's resources is certainly part of it. Ecology is rather about the relationship between earth and heaven. Humans become heavenly sustainers of creation only by participation in the Christ event, and when we look after the planet, we then do so not merely as human custodians but rather as agents of God. Unless we pursue our salvation and relationship with the Lord first, then, we cannot hope to be good stewards of creation and all attempts to be good stewards done apart from God in fact diminish the dignity that is ours as human beings. Salvation does not come through saving the planet; rather the ability to care for the planet must be put in its rightful perspective as an outworking of having been redeemed, for it is also true that by failing in this duty, the Christian fails to live up to their renewed dignity – the dignity which was supposed to have been humanity's 'in the beginning', but which through Christ is now even more glorious.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, we should also be mindful that this world is not eternal as we saw in Heb 1:10-12, and it will eventually wear out and be changed (1:11-12). Christ's role as creation's sustainer was connected to this section from 1:2-3, and his role upholding creation would last until creation's end. So, too, will humanity's, but in union with Christ. We also saw how the catena in which it was found was connected to chapter 2 and would do well to draw out the implications of this. Interestingly, both the sections from chapters 1 and 2 are both connected to a passage in Hebrews 12, again on the hookword 'perfect' and on the use of sibling terminology, but also on a reference to the end of creation in 12:27. Here it is in context:

**Heb 12:22** ... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.<sup>25</sup> See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!<sup>26</sup> At that time

<sup>32</sup>It might be possible that Hebrews conceives of some kind of 'fall', even though this is not explicitly stated in the text. See Costley, *Creation*, p. 224ff. for a discussion of possible Second Adam theology in Hebrews.

his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven'.<sup>27</sup> This phrase, 'Yet once more', indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;<sup>29</sup> for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

(NRSV)

In this passage, there is a stark warning. Like the heir of 1:2, the faithful are also as firstborn children enrolled in heaven but there, they will stand before the Judge who will shake not only the earth but also heaven. There is an onus, then, on humanity to heed the word of the Lord. Given that it is the Son through whom God spoke in 1:2, it should be assumed that this Word is none other than the Word, Jesus. Humanity's destiny in Christ is, in fact, to outlast this world, but here, it is only by listening to his teachings that it might outlast this creation and live eternally. As much as we should care for this planet, the Christian's heart must therefore be fixed on an eternal destiny and doing the will of God in all things. According to Hebrews, humanity is above all other creations in that it will, through participation in the life of the Divine through the saving activity of the Son, outlast it. However, this is conditional on obedience beyond the realm of recycling. It includes right worship, due reverence, and awe for the creator and the fulfilment of all he teaches.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a rich theology of Creation in the letter to the Hebrews, especially in terms of humanity's participation in the life of the Divine and the responsibility for creation that entails. However, the implication of its combination of creation theology and soteriology is that one should not isolate ecology from the rest of the Christian life. I am very aware that this paper was originally intended to be the opening paper for a Catholic conference on ecology. When we hear this term, we often think in terms of what humanity can do for the planet. We think of practical things like creating less waste. These things are generally good things. It is, of course, a Christian duty to look after what we have been given and to till, care, and protect the precious gift that is the world in which we live, a key focus of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*. If one has achieved one's originally intended status over creation and even something more elevated through the Son, one should not neglect the command given to the first Adam, to till the ground from which he was taken (Gen. 3:23). However, in these collected essays, we hereby invite the reader to consider ecology in a much deeper sense. We invite the reader to consider how creation relates to the creator and especially to consider how humanity relates to both, through Christ, placing ecology within an overall view of the Christian life that puts God's will at the forefront of all action.

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