



## **Sowers of Prophetic Hope for the Planet. The Responsibility of Religious Life: A Biblical Perspective**

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### **I. Introduction**

We are all aware of what is happening to our planet today. It is undeniable that devastating events concerning our planet are accelerating faster than imagined, marring the beauty and goodness of God's creation and hastening changes that threaten life-sustaining eco-systems.

Religious life has long taken on the responsibility of caring for our planet through our efforts in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. However we need to have a more concerted and unified effort to do our part in engaging in prophetic action on behalf of our planet.

In this paper, I would like to address the theme of this talk, which is the responsibility of religious life to be sowers of prophetic hope for the planet from a biblical perspective. In preparing for this talk, several questions came to mind: "What can we learn from the biblical prophets about hope and the contexts of their hoping?" "How do we understand this hope within the framework of the creation texts in the bible?" "What are the important elements and characteristics of prophetic hope?" As coming from the prophetic lineage, how can we as religious live our responsibility to be sowers of prophetic hope before the severity of today's planetary reality?"

I will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the religious concept of hope in prophetic literature and its development in Christian scriptures, connecting this concept with our human responsibility to care for God's creation and gift of life. We shall place this discussion within the framework of what Christian biblical scholars call the grand "inclusio" in the Christian scriptures which begin and end with stories of God and creation: the creation stories of Genesis 1-2, and the eschatological reflections on the new heaven and earth, and the river and tree of life in Revelations 21-22. In between these two "book-ends" are stories of faith experiences of God's people, their reflections on who God is based on their interactions with the Divine in the midst of creation. These stories and reflections place us in the

larger picture and give us metaphorical concepts of where we come from, where we are going, what is our calling and who we are in relation to all that is created.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. What does Scripture say of Prophetic Hope?**

First, we need to locate prophetic hope in the greater context of the biblical prophet's vocation and one's understanding of such a vocation.

### ***a. Prophetic Vocation.***

In the biblical tradition both in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, God appointed individuals—women and men—and poured out upon them the gift of prophecy to serve the purpose of interpreting the divine will and to speak with divine authority. It also involves acting on behalf of God to build up the community (1 Cor 14:3-5). They were also visionaries, worship-leaders, healers, miracle-workers, conscientizers, counselors, deliverers, etc. In the Christian tradition, the prophets have been regarded as visionaries of the future whose words pointed to the coming of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Let us then glean from the biblical literature some of the salient features of the prophetic vocation.

First, the true vision of Israel's prophets has permeated the manner of his thoughts so that he sees things from God's perspective. The Spirit of God enables the prophets to feel with God and to share God's attitudes, values, feelings and emotions. This enables them to see the events of their time as God sees them and to feel the same way about these events as God feels.

Second, the prophet is also the conscience of a community and a nation. The prophet is out there watching for what might happen to the community, issuing a warning, trying to alert everyone and seeing implications in what is going on if the community does not respond to the "signs of the times."

Third, the prophet announces darkness and gloom whenever the community is disobedient to God's word and unfaithful to God's covenant, but also prepares the community for the renewal of the covenant and to be open to a future full of hope. Thus, fundamental to the prophet's mission is obedience to God's word. The prophet always goes forth, albeit reluctantly, bearing a message that is not one's own. That message is always extended to our world with an urging to return to what is essential, to discover a relationship with God whose love is eternal.

The prophet holds in one's person the tension between present realities and future possibilities, between temptation to despair and fidelity to God's promise, between images of terror and glimpses of a new tomorrow. It is within this very tension that prophetic hope is located. What then is prophetic hope and what elements and characteristics can we draw from the insights about how it is perceived and lived by biblical prophets?

### ***b. Prophetic Hope.***

Inherent in the prophetic vocation is to be a sower of hope, to be engaged in prophetic action that will eventually bring about a restoration of faith and life. The biblical prophets holds together both critique of their present time and hope for the larger meaning and purposes of God. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the prophet is not only an apocalyptic doomsayer, but also a hope-giver.<sup>3</sup> The characteristic atmosphere all throughout the Hebrew Scriptures is that of hope even if there is no Hebrew word which corresponds exactly to "hope," and no precise concept of hope in the sense of "desire accompanied by expectation."<sup>4</sup> The motive of hope remains the same in the prophetic literature: only Yahweh can give Israel a future and a hope (Jer 29:11; 31:17); each prophet may differ from one another in the way the

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<sup>1</sup> Cherice Bock, "Climatologists, Theologians, and Prophets: Toward an Ecotheology of Critical Hope", *Crosscurrents*, March 2016, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Gen. Ed., *Harper's Biblical Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), p. 826.

<sup>3</sup> See Bock, pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> John McKenzie, SJ, *Dictionary of the Bible*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1998. Originally published in UK: Geoffrey Chapman: 1976, pp.368-9.

message is presented depending on the historical period and context of the prophetic message.<sup>5</sup> It is almost commonplace that the living has hope, but when death becomes certain, hope ceases. Hope and life are held in one breath. However, Hebrew prophetic literature shows flashes of hope that the power and covenant love of Yahweh will find a way to exhibit themselves even beyond the grave (Pss 16:16; 73:25), but this hope takes no definite form.<sup>6</sup>

Let us glean from this general description of prophetic hope elements and characteristics that distinguishes it from the hope that people are more familiar with, which is a more passive experience of wishing, desiring, or even optimism.

### ***c. Elements and Characteristics of Prophetic Hope.***

1. *Prophetic hope is rooted in contemplation and mysticism.* One thing is clear at the outset: prophetic hope is rooted in the prophetic experience of mysticism, which aligns the prophet with God's plan and vision. The prophets describe their experience in imagery and symbolism accompanied by an acknowledgement that the Word comes from Yahweh.<sup>7</sup> This element is principally a compulsion by a personal external will, which the prophet cannot overcome in spite of his own unwillingness to speak the word of Yahweh, an unwillingness which is manifest in Jeremiah (Je 1:7; 6:11; 20:9; Am 3:8).<sup>8</sup> The prophet's closeness to God enables him to see the entire creation—the universe, the planet and everything in it from God's perspective.

2. *Prophetic hope is critical hope.* It critiques the internal and external human structures of domination that destroy the original beauty and meaning of God's creation. It is based on the discipline of critical thinking that leads to a discerned action-oriented response to despair and negativism. Unfortunately, many of us still find ourselves longing for the restoration of the old world and its standard modes of operation, however such inclinations do not bode well for what our planet needs today. There is a urgent need for Christians in general and religious in particular to move from a space of uncritical hopefulness into critical hope, where one spurs into action from the place of discernment.

Critical hope involves letting go of the old structures, and old ways of thinking. Critical hope “subverts long-held beliefs, dismantles trusted social structures, and exposes illusions and trivialities.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, it demands wholehearted obedience—a deep listening to God's voice saying to Jeremiah, “Look, today I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant” (Je 1:10). It involves telling the present to lament environmental destruction and evoking the memory of God's dream for creation, raising consciousness of the global ecocide that threatens humanity and the entire planet in the here and now.<sup>10</sup>

3. *Prophetic hope exists on the margins and is rooted in solidarity with the sufferings of those in the margins.* It is prophetic hope which gives people courage to act faithfully, even in the face of oppression and suffering. The prophets spoke words of hope to God's people when they were in exile and as they returned to their destroyed homeland.

Biblical scholars have contended that prophetic literature may be full of fractures, tensions, and contradictions, but it is firm in the conviction that conventional power structures, settled religious categories, and robust geopolitical systems are the wrong places to look for hope and God's blessings.<sup>11</sup> For instance, by the end of the book of the Prophet Jeremiah, it becomes clear that God's place in the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Stulman, Louis, Kim, Hyun Chul Paul.; *You Are My People : An Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, EBSCO : eBook Collection Account: ns101917.main.ed.s. (EBSCOhost) - printed on 1/25/2019 2:08 AM via USJ UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, p.95.

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Scott, “Greening the Vows: *Laudato Si'* and Religious Life, *The Way*, 54/4 (October 2015), p. 85.

<sup>11</sup> See Louis Stulman and Hyum Chul Paul Kim, p.95.

world is not in the settled religious and political structures and among the powerful, but among the broken and dispossessed, the captured and conquered, among the vulnerable and innocent victims, thus unmasking for us today's illusions of power and reveals God's solidarity with the exiles of old and the exiles of today.<sup>12</sup>

4. *Prophetic hope encompasses meaning-making in communities of faith.* The biblical prophet urges the community of faith to move forward into a future full of hope by enabling them to make meaning of the situation in order to transcend their suffering. The prophet does this by engaging people's imaginations so they can adjust the way they look at the present in order to have a broader view of a future beyond their situation of suffering.

According to theologian Cherice Bock, in the biblical books, especially those of prophecy and wisdom, one finds two major types of hope: (1) the relatively easy hope of Proverbs, which is the hope for living faithfully within one's own lifetime and providing a safe and livable future for one's children, and (2) a long-term hope of participating in the community of promise.<sup>13</sup>

I agree with her that it is the second kind of hope, which requires a much broader story, that will make sense of one's life. For instance, during the time of the Israelites' exile from the Promised Land, one would endure exile knowing the deeper meaning of their suffering based on the hope of God's promise of faithfulness to the community. The paschal mystery of Christ's life invites us to hope in the story of suffering, redemption, and liberation God enacted through him. The hope that the paschal mystery carries draws us to participate in that story, making meaning of one's life through the lens of that past, present, and future hope.<sup>14</sup>

5. *Prophetic hope is textual.*<sup>15</sup> The written prophecy takes on a life of its own, often independent of the spoken word of the prophet. The text serves as a lasting reminder for future generations that God alone is the "source of our hope" (Ps 62:5). We need to return constantly to God's word and contemplate it lest we forget to hope in times of trial and difficulty.

### **III. Prophetic Hope within the Framework of the Biblical Texts on Creation**

We simply cannot discuss our responsibility towards our planet without considering the biblical texts on creation. These texts serve as a framework in understanding our call as religious to be sowers of prophetic hope for our planet. Within this framework, the message is clear that from the abundance of God's wisdom and love, everything is created, and creation invites us into a covenant, calling forth from us a commitment to and responsibility for creation similar to God's own.

#### ***a. The Grand "Inclusio" of Genesis 1-3 and Revelations 20-22.***

The theme of creation at the beginning and at the end of the Bible is highlighted as an important element in interpreting everything that falls within.<sup>16</sup> Interpreted this way, the story of creation, sin and the Fall in Gen 1-3 and the cosmic, embodied redemption in Revelation 20-22, as well as the cosmic redemption of creation in Romans 8:18-23, present convincing evidence for the Christian expectation that the redemption offered in Christ will entail a transformation, but not destruction, of the physical and material existence of the universe.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See Bock, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See Louis Stulman and Hyum Chul Paul Kim, p. 95. They assert that hope is enshrined textually in the Bible.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Bushlack, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: Creation in the New Testament" in Tobias Winright, editor. *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, Christian Brothers Publications, 2011, p.106. These texts, according to the author, are referred to as an "inclusio," a literary tool used by the authors of Scripture, in which an important theme occurs at the introduction and then again at the end of a text and highlights the theme as an important element in interpreting everything that falls between.

To correct the traditional narrow Christian understanding of eternal life spent where the “soul” goes in a disembodied existence, there is a greater need to reread creation texts in the Bible in order to appreciate the wisdom of God’s plan in gifting us with a created world and to restore our relationship with our planet.<sup>17</sup> This has become more urgent as we are living in an age when the threat of ecological and nuclear destruction is real and pervasive. Theologians cite the irony that it is our very technological creativity and sophistication that have apparently given us the ability to destroy our planet and humanity as well.<sup>18</sup> The consequences of these advances are making an increasing number of people view the profound holistic sensibility of our biblical ancestors and of the more “primitive” peoples with greater respect, and thus in this context we ought to listen to the biblical stories and texts to get a sense of their vision of our planet.<sup>19</sup>

Christian hope is prophetic hope for the future of our world and of our planet which is based on God’s faithful, sustaining, creative power. God’s powerful Word, which brought the world into being is powerful enough to accomplish God’s desire for what God has created.<sup>20</sup> God has called us humans to be in partnership in this divine endeavor and creativity. As Christians, we are part of a biblical tradition that asserts this explicitly of God. The world has a future because in Jesus Christ it has been chosen intentionally, labored and sacrificed for by God, as expressed powerfully in John 3:16: “For God so loves the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). The key word here is world,<sup>21</sup> not just me, certainly not just my soul, not even us or our collective souls. The Christian understanding of salvation must recover its inherent universality and inclusiveness. It is something which involves not just human beings, but the whole of creation.

#### ***b. Cosmic Redemption of Creation in Romans 8:18-25***

Paul in his Letter to the Romans writes that “The whole creation is groaning in labor pains until now” (Rom 8:19). In bondage to decay, creation waits to be set free in order to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God, who are themselves groaning while waiting in hope for the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:18-25). These words from Romans speak to us of prophetic hope that inspires and sustains the Christian on the journey to God.

Why would creation itself wait with eager longing for redemption? How can we imagine the gracious, compassionate love of God for the created world? Biblical scholars in answering these questions suggest that perhaps creation itself has been affected by human sinfulness as Paul suggests in these following two verses “creation was subjected to futility” (verse 20) and that “creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (verse 21).<sup>22</sup> In this section, the text refers to the curse placed upon Adam and Eve as a result of their sin in Genesis 3:17 when God proclaims, “cursed is the ground because of you,” which indicates a curse has been placed upon creation as well.<sup>23</sup> In Paul’s thought, there is no radical separation of the body from the soul, neither of the body and the flesh from the rest of created existence; all of these elements will participate in the redemption offered through Christ.<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the world is not as it should be. In prophetic hope, we reread the passage from Romans with critical minds where we look at the reality of our world and realize that things need to change.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>18</sup> John R. Sachs. *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 21. The author cites Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> The word “world,” as doctrinally defined in the Bible, is NOT referring to other planets in outer space but to defined ages and prevailing conditions during those ages on planet Earth, be they past, present, or future.

<sup>22</sup> See Bushlack, p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Suffering and hope are contrasted. We see the system that causes us to suffer anxiety and fear, while at the same time we hold on to hope because we can envision the world as it should be.<sup>25</sup> The whole creation participates in this lament as in “groaning” while simultaneously critiquing, suffering, and hoping.<sup>26</sup> When we participate with creation in this “groaning and longing” with prophetic and critical hope which is continuous, active and expectant kind of hoping, we receive the benefit of this action in that our act helps us become conscious of our place in this process of hoping.<sup>27</sup> Hope engenders hope.

The Book of Revelation states that “the curse of destruction will be abolished” (22:3) as proclaimed in the cosmic redemption in Romans 8 and the undoing of the curse upon creation in Gen 3.

In the final vision in Revelations, the author ends his description of the revelation given to him by leaving his readers with a compelling image of a redeemed world in which the natural elements of creation (light, earth, water) all maintain a significant role within the new and heavenly Jerusalem, established by God. This image is beautifully portrayed in the tree of life, whose leaves “are for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2).<sup>28</sup>

It is clear from our rereading of biblical texts that creation has an intrinsic value to God; it is not merely instrumental. The entire creation, not just humans have roles to play in God’s plan of salvation; the two cannot be separated.<sup>29</sup> Neither can God’s justice be conceived of without incorporating a healing care for, and transformation of, creation along with the transformation and redemption of God’s people.<sup>30</sup> Therefore because of this interdependence, any harm inflicted upon creation is ultimately harm inflicted upon humans, and a real affront to the plan for all of creation that God has revealed in Christ.<sup>31</sup>

If the reality of the world and our planet as a living, active intentional and self-constituting whole is what God wishes to save, then God’s saving activity is not something that happens outside of the world’s activity, especially in and through human action.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the necessity that salvation comes from God and the necessity that human beings take responsibility for the well-being of the world and the planet are directly proportional—the greater our belief in God’s salvation, the greater is our obedience of faith in acknowledging our active responsibility for the whole of creation.<sup>33</sup>

#### **IV. The Responsibility of Religious Life in Sowing Prophetic Hope for our Planet**

The impetus to reclaim the prophetic dimensions of biblical narratives arises from the fact that God calls us to think and act in relation to all spheres of human experience—social, geopolitical, economic, technological, ecological and religious. Religious life is precisely situated today where there is tremendous challenge to live out the call to be sowers of prophetic hope.

Paul, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, affirms that God appointed in the church first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers (1 Cor 12:28). These three branches make up the structure of the church as we know now—with the bishops belonging to the apostles’ branch, consecrated life to the prophets, and theologians to the teachers. Although the three branches are not totally exclusive to one another in certain positions, what is essential to the consecrated vocation is its prophetic functions—discerning God’s will for the church, presenting new models of following Christ, and playing a corrective role in the church whenever the values of the gospel are forgotten or compromised.<sup>34</sup> If one of the primary goals of the prophets was to bring about the repentance of Israel—or, in some cases, the

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<sup>25</sup> See Bock, pp. 26-7.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> See Bushlack, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>32</sup> See Sachs, p. 24

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Based on the lecture notes of John Fuellenbach, S.V.D. on the Church, East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1999.

surrounding nations, it therefore implies that religious today must act as the prophets did: to usher people to repentance over the sins humans have committed against the goodness and beauty of God's creation.

Religious congregations all through the ages have given witness to their prophetic vocation in the service of the church and of the world. However, our prophetic vocation is a calling that needs continual renewal lest it becomes rigid, stale and irrelevant before the challenges of our rapidly changing times. This continual renewal involves the following movements:

### ***Movements of Ongoing Renewal***

1. *From Repentance to Conversion.* To be sowers of prophetic hope, we need to undergo continual conversion, especially conversion to the planet Earth as God's beloved creation. Repentance precedes conversion: a healthy realization that I have contributed somehow to the rapid devastation of the planet by my complacency or unmindful action. This type of awareness leading to repentance can only happen if we have a contemplative stance before God's creation and can see the beauty and goodness of God's creation from God's vision.

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson is increasingly convinced that the conversion needed today is "a turning that will impact our whole lives."<sup>35</sup> She describes this kind of conversion in the following way:

*"It will expand our understanding of the God we are called to love with all our heart and soul, mind and strength, making clear that the Creator is also the Redeemer who accompanies the whole natural world with saving compassion. It will also expand the neighbor we are called to love as ourselves, since the beaten-up traveler left by the side of the road whose wounds we must tend to, includes needy and poor human beings along with natural ecosystems and all their creatures. Doctrine, ethics, and spirituality now become ecological as we deal with pressing human concerns in a broader planetary perspective."*<sup>36</sup>

Pope Francis in his exhortation, *Laudato Si*, has given us ample motivation and guidance in allowing God's creation to awaken in us the mystic spirit so that we can see through God's perspective his plans and intentions by inviting us to contemplate on creation. This "contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us," since "for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice"[LS 57]; and we can understand better the "meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God's plan: ...Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other"[LS 63].

2. *From the Center to the Periphery.* This is a movement from the security of our established institutions to the vulnerability of being in the periphery. Prophecy necessarily leads religious to the periphery, which for Pope Francis constitutes the privileged setting for religious life. Prophetic hope therefore exists in the margins and is rooted in solidarity with the sufferings of those in the margins. By standing at the margins and not at the center of the church, religious are able to challenge the hierarchy and the entire church to respond to the "signs of the times." For instance, even before the publication of Pope Francis' Exhortation, *Laudato Si*, religious women, have already been in the forefront of the ecological issue, raising people's consciousness in front of devastations brought about by global warming and other forms of manipulation of nature. This prophetic action was a fruit not only of many discussions but also of periods of prayerful consideration on how religious must respond to the challenges of our times.<sup>37</sup> This was a way of awakening the people to be more sensitive to the ecological problems of our

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<sup>35</sup> See Johnson, p. 195.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 195-6.

<sup>37</sup> UCANews.com, Tuesday, Oct. 20, 2009, <http://www.ucanews.com/2009/10/05/religious-add-green-vow-to-consecrated-life/>. Retrieved 2009-10-18.

planet by leading through example and raising people's consciousness about their responsibility towards the environment.

3. From critical thinking to discerned prophetic action. In order to engage in prophetic action, we must engage in critical thinking and discernment, and allow ourselves, as a fruit of contemplation, to be personally transformed. The process of prophetic hope is not easy or comfortable. It is bound up in the essence of what it means to be human and all the capacities God endowed us in our humanity. We have the ability to choose to live with a sense of meaning sustained by hope. Theological reflection must be well-equipped to uncover narratives that advance our critical powers, our capacity to use our knowledge, imagination, intuition to distinguish what leads to death and destruction or to life and wholeness.<sup>38</sup> Such reflection offers hope in the midst of fear. Standing between the tension of hope and fear is the location of the biblical prophet who speaks truth in the midst of fear like in the case of the prophet Jeremiah who from the outset names and breaks a surplus of denials and deceptions, and dares to critique social structures, domain assumptions, and prevailing values that anesthetize the community to its true condition.<sup>39</sup>

Critical thinking must be embodied, spurring us to speak and act against the system of worldly domination that tends to destroy by interpreting the term domination as human appetite for power and wealth, rather than as the providential care God displays in creation and in salvation history. Critical thinking that leads to discerned prophetic action has the audacity to not just envision but also to move toward liberation of the entire community of creation still longing and groaning for redemption.<sup>40</sup>

4. *From an exclusive human community to an inclusive planetary community of creation.* Constructing a prophetic environment cannot be the work of one individual but of a community of faith where everyone is involved in a communitarian prophetic response. By prophetic response, it means an intentional call to engage in passionate and courageous action to help uplift the plight of and stand in solidarity with those rendered most vulnerable in our planet.<sup>41</sup> We need a vision of consecrated life as something much bigger than ourselves, something that reaches out beyond the here and now. We are about the anticipation of the new heaven and the new earth, of a universal and cosmic communion of a kingdom where "God will be all in all."<sup>42</sup> With communities of faith moving towards revisiting the meaning of community, there is an urgent need for religious life to enter into this ongoing reflection and glean insights from biblical exploration into the relationship between human beings and the rest of creation.

A careful rereading of biblical texts on creation will provide a broader context within which to situate the special and distinctive roles of humans in creation, recognizing these without lifting humans out of creation as above God's other creatures.<sup>43</sup> Although biblical writers were not able to plot such interconnections based on the insights of modern science, they offer much more than science can offer in matters of value, ethics, responsibility and, especially creation's relation with God.<sup>44</sup>

All earthly creatures share the same planet and participate in an interdependent community, orientated above all to God our common Creator. Our prophetic vocation must open us up to others and to the world, to offer ourselves, our communities and our planet earth as a place of inclusive hospitality for humanity and the whole of creation.

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<sup>38</sup> Clingerman, Forrest, "Theologians as Interpreters—Not Prophets—in a Changing Climate," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83.2 (2015), p. 346.

<sup>39</sup> See Stulman, Louis, Kim, Hyun Chul Paul, p. 95.

<sup>40</sup> See Bock, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Angela D. Sims, Douglas Powe Jr., and J. Bernard Hill, "Reclaiming the Prophetic: Toward a Theology of Hope and Justice in a Fragmented World," *Religio-Political Narratives in the United States*, p. 95.

<sup>42</sup> See Scott, p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> See Bauckham, p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



In the Christian scriptures, relationships and community are important in finding and maintaining hope. In the community of creation, we need an interdependent network of care. Caring for our planet is becoming an imperative in expressing our love of neighbor. We sow prophetic hope for our planet when our communities understand and live the commandment of “love of neighbor” in the wider context of caring for our vulnerable planet. Loving our neighbors must include doing what we can to enable our planet to sustain the flourishing of our fellow human beings. It requires us to assess our lifestyles and priorities in light of the sustainable life of all our “neighbors”—those who live next door and those on the other side our planet.<sup>45</sup>

## **V. Conclusions and Implications**

Having explored the various biblical dimensions of our prophetic vocation against the background of our planet’s vulnerable condition, we return to the question of what is the responsibility of religious life as sowers of prophetic hope for our vulnerable planet.

Here are some salient points based on our rereading of biblical texts:

1. Like the biblical prophets, religious life must provide encouragement for the people of faith to move forward into a hoped-for future by assisting them to make meaning out of the devastating situations our planet is going through and to challenge them to discern prophetic action. This cannot happen without forming religious develop a capacity for contemplation and critical thinking that leads to discern prophetic actions for the sake of our planet.

2. We saw in the Christian scriptures that relationships and community are important in finding and maintaining prophetic hope. Beginning with ourselves and our institutions as communities of faith we go through the process of repentance towards ecological conversion. We lament for the sins of omission and commission towards God’s creation as we move from repentance to conversion. Each individual religious is invited to begin with one’s own inner ecological conversion as part of ongoing formation. In fact, we are challenged to integrate the process of ecological conversion in all levels of formation.

3. We are challenged to revision our understanding of consecrated life and the vows within the context of our relationship to all of God’s creation. This requires rereading the biblical references in coming to a renewed understanding of our consecrated vocation. This must be integrated into all levels of formation.

4. We are called to enter into greater solidarity with those in the periphery as this is the location of our prophetic vocation. To speak and act on behalf of our suffering brothers and sisters due to the many devastations happening in our planet.

5. Our prophetic vocation calls us to be agents of healing in the broken relationships of humanity and of our vulnerable planet.

Thus, to be true to our prophetic vocation, we can only be sowers of prophetic hope for the planet if we are rooted and immersed in God’s word, contemplating it as Jesus did who was deeply connected with everything that came into being as spoken by his Father. With poor, chaste, and obedient Jesus, our prophetic vocation calls us to situate ourselves in the periphery. It demands that we live our vows as a public commitment to remain open to the God of surprises who disrupts our established lifestyles and mindsets, and invites us to ecological conversion in order to help bring wholeness and healing to our broken and vulnerable planet. Like the biblical prophets, we are called to give counter-cultural witness to the pervading culture of domination that is spiraling our planet towards destruction. It is through prophetic hope that we groan with the whole of God’s creation as we await the redeeming power of God’s love restoring the original goodness and beauty of all there is.

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<sup>45</sup> Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo. *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan. ePub Edition©February 2018: ISBN 978-0-3204-1655-5.

**Reflection Question:**

Given the particular charism and mission of your Congregation, what do you discern as God's specific invitation(s) for you to live out the call to be "sowers of prophetic hope" in the different insertions in the world where your Congregation is found?