

Knowledge of God: The Relevance of Hosea 4:1-3 for a Theological Response to Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

Climate change presents one of the greatest challenges for Christianity today. If we adequately want to meet this challenge we need to develop a new vision of our human relationship to nature (Conradie). Can the Bible serve as a basis for such a new vision? Or is it part of the problem? This has been maintained by numerous critics particularly with regard to the Old Testament. Especially serious has been the claim that the fight against idolatry by the prophets has led to a “desacralisation” of nature, turning it into dead material to be used at will (Roszak). The main culprit in this regard is considered to be Hosea (Lang). Concentrating on Hosea 4:1-3, I will try to show in this article that Hosea, far from being a problem, can indeed present helpful tools for the theological response to climate change. Hosea 4:1-3 (not the marriage metaphor in chapters 1-3) is taken as the hermeneutical key to understanding the message of Hosea. Hosea’s critique is seen as being directed not against the Canaanite fertility cult, the dominant reading of most Hoseanic scholarship, (based on the assumed dichotomy between the pure Yahwist religion of the desert with Yahweh as God of history and the depraved Canaanite nature religion of Baal) but against the perverted Yahwist state cult. Corruption emanating from the priesthood, the monarchy and the ruling elite is undermining the moral fabric of society. The priesthood is responsible for the lack of knowledge of God and his commandments. This is leading not only to the downfall of the Northern Kingdom, but to ecological disaster as well. In conclusion, the paper will seek to draw some conclusions for a theological response to climate change.

A INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges for humankind in the 21st century. The message coming from the scientific community can no longer be ignored. Unless carbon emissions are drastically reduced the consequences for the planet will be very grave indeed.

How should Christians respond to this challenge? Can we retrieve a new vision from the biblical roots of Christianity (Conradie 2008:64), a vision of God and a new vision about ourselves that will help us to reposition ourselves as an integral part of God’s threatened creation?

One could very well be sceptical whether the biblical tradition, particularly that of the Old Testament is really helpful for finding a solution. Already in the sixties Lynn White (White 1967: 1203-1207) claimed that the roots of the ecological crisis are to be found in Christianity and can be traced ultimately to the Old Testament. The notion of “mastering” and “conquering” nature so central to the expansive industrial civilization of the West goes back, according to his view, to the creation narrative of Genesis 1 where God creates man and woman according to his image, elevates them and gives them dominion over all other creatures (cf. Wybrow 1991:3-4).

It is not necessary to go into the attempts by many biblical scholars over the years to counter this argument. More serious for the purposes of this paper has been the critique of Theodore Roszak (1973). Roszak claims that Christianity and ultimately the Bible are responsible for the loss of “sacramental consciousness”, the lack of capacity to perceive the divine through nature. Opposed to sacramental consciousness is “single vision” which is characteristic of modern Western culture and the peculiar mastering attitude that has led to the ruthless exploitation of the world. Roszak traces this “single vision” to Baconianism, which he sees as a product of the Protestant fight against paganism. In turn, he claims that this is ultimately rooted in the struggle of the Israelite prophets against false gods and the subsequent rejection of idolatry in Judaism (Wybrow 1991:29):

As a category of religious thought, idolatry unfolds peculiarly out of the Jewish religious sensibility. In no respect is Judaism more unique than in its uncompromising insistence on God’s unity, invisibility, and transcendence. It is the first commandment imposed upon the nation: that God should not be idolized, nor any idol (whether man-made or natural object) be deified. Christianity carries forward the same hot intolerance for nature worship and the pagan use of imagery. In Protestantism especially, hostility toward the slightest idolatrous inclination becomes obsessive.

The consequences have been far-reaching. They have nourished the scientific-materialistic outlook which treats nature merely as dead matter, resource for human consumption (Roszak 1973: 102, 114-115, 118):

Today, when “realistic” people look at nature around them— mountains, forests, lakes, rivers— what is it they see? Not divine epiphanies, but cash values, investments, potential contributions to the GNP, great glowing heaps of money.

We have to take this critique by Roszak very seriously, especially in this essay dealing with the prophet Hosea. According to Lang (1983:30), Hosea is the earliest prophet who shows intolerance of other gods. Hosea is the first representative of a movement which came into existence in the century after Elijah that Lang, following a suggestion by Morton Smith, calls the “Yahweh-alone party”. Initially this group centring on the prophet Hosea is insignificant but its influence is far-reaching and can be traced to Jeremiah and the deuteronomic and deuteronomistic movements. While the struggles of the 9th century were concentrated around the Phoenician god Baal Hosea extends the rejection to all other gods. Hosea demands that the Israelites should worship Yahweh, and Yahweh alone. His condemnation affects not only the official state cult but also the many deities at local shrines still worshiped by the Israelite rural

population (Lang 1983:31). In his theology Hosea speaks of Yahweh who brought Israel out of Egypt and led the Israelites through the wilderness into the Promised Land. This god has nothing to do with the widespread fertility religion of the gods of Canaan (Lang 1983:35f): “He is as much a foreigner as are his immigrant worshippers in the land, who are, or consider themselves to be, foreigners. The outsider in the world of the gods is the god of the outsiders.”

Lang, in his interpretation of Hosea is here following what Alice Keefe has called the “dominant reading” (Keefe 2001:37) of Hosea in biblical scholarship. While Hosea 4-14 show the prophet as an astute observer of the political scene (2001:32) “most commentators are united in the conclusion that it was not these social or political issues that drew attention of the prophet, but rather a distinct set of religious issues relating to rising popular participation in a syncretistic fertility cult”.

This exclusive focus on Canaanite fertility religion encapsulated in Hosea’s use of the metaphor of his marriage with a harlot in chapters 1-3, is what fundamentally distinguishes Hosea from his contemporary Amos. According to this view Canaan’s worship of the gods of fertility “who embody the seasonal repetitions and power of nature appears diametrically opposed to Israelite Yahwism, which imagines a singular deity who stands above nature’s rhythm as its creator and Lord” (Keefe 2001:43).

If we survey the interpretation of Hosea by a majority of scholars based on this dichotomy between fertility religion and ethical Yahwism we may very well ask whether the message of Hosea according to this interpretation can form the basis of a new vision that will be of any relevance for a theological response to climate change. Can such an idealised or spiritualised vision of Israelite religion really help us in a situation where we have to realise anew that humans are not unique but are part of the interrelatedness of all living beings, the web of life? Keefe (2001:77) makes the valid point that the opposition of the transcendence of God to a religion dealing with the fertility of the fields so important for any agricultural community

... depends on the presumption that the experience and expression of the sacred may be abstracted from the body of life, that is, from the human implication in the geographical, economic, social and political conditions within which a total mode of life and orientation takes shape.

It is not surprising that many feminist biblical scholars cannot see any relevance of the message of the prophet Hosea for modern readers. On the contrary, they are attracted to the putative Canaanite fertility religion that does not devalue but gives sacral significance to the body, sexuality and nature (Keefe 2001:62). The best exposition of this fertility religion as feminist religion is offered by Helgard Balz-Cochois (1982) who sees Gomer, the wife of Hosea, practising the popular fertility cult celebrated on the high places as a sign of her search for freedom and self-affirmation as a woman. But this reading, while reversing the valuation of the dominant reading, does not take us beyond the nature-history dichotomy nor does it offer any new theological insights for the theological challenges we have to face. Conradie (2008:66-67) makes the valid point that a new form of nature religion, the celebration of the divine presence and the re-enchantment of nature may be somewhat naïve. “The sacramental ap-

proach may ... mask the unequal relations of power within existing communities” (Conradie 2008:67).¹

In this article dealing specifically with Hosea 4:1-3 I want to focus on the neglected power relations in the exposition of Hosea. Following the very incisive critique by Alice Keefe (2001) of the dominant reading I wish to show that Hosea’s message, far from dealing with a popular fertility cult takes us right into the dynamics of socio-political conflict and deadly power games. As such the text displays a surprising relevance for our own theological response to climate change.

B HOSEA 4:1-3

1 Text, Composition and Structure

שמעו דבר־יהוה בני ישראל
 כי ריב ליהוה עם־יושבי
 הארץ כי אין־אמת ואין־חסד ואין־דעת אלהים בארץ:
 אלה וכחש ורצח ונאף
 פרצו ודמים בדם נגעו:
 על־כן תאבל הארץ ואמלל
 כל־יושב בה בחיית השדה
 ובעוף השמים וגם־דגי הים ואספוי:

Hear the word of Yahweh, O Israelites,
 for Yahweh has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land,
 for there is no integrity and no goodness and no knowledge of God in the land.
 Swearing and lying and murdering and stealing, and adultery,
 break out and bloodshed touches on bloodshed.
 Therefore the land mourns and all its inhabitants languish;
 including the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky;
 even the fish of the sea are swept away.

The Book of Hosea can be subdivided into two main sections, chapters 1-3 and 4-14. The first three chapters are mainly concerned with Hosea’s marriage and use this as a metaphor for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Chapters 4-14 are a collection of Hosea’s oracles. According to Jeremias (1983:19-20) chapters 1-3 had a different transmission history from chapters 4-11 and

¹ Keefe (2001:63) refers to Jo Ann Hackett who criticises the way in which many feminists uncritically appropriate the fertility cult model. They think they are defying male-centred religion of Israel but in reality are not embracing ancient goddess’ religion but the fears and fantasies of modern Western scholars.

were joined with these at the earliest during the exilic period. The remaining three chapters contained additional material that was also added later.

The detailed main section 4-11 is introduced by chapter 4:1-3. Andersen and Freedman (1980:331) treat it as the preface to the following chapters, though they maintain that it is basically an oracle by Hosea. Jeremias (1983:59) sees in it the programmatic introduction to chapters 4-11 composed by Hosea's disciples from oracles by their master after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom with a clear structure and overriding theological purpose. Because chapters 4-11 were a literary work, 4:1-3 existed from the beginning only in written form. Peckham (1987) expresses a similar view. He (1987:33) believes that in Judah the book underwent a "detailed literary rewriting that consisted in changing some stanzas and adding others". An even more detailed analysis of the literary history of the book has been advanced by Rudnig-Zelt (2006). She claims a growth process that lasted several centuries.

As far as 4:1-3 is concerned signs of editorial revision are seen by Wolff (1974:66) only in verse 1a whereas, according to Jeremias (1983:59f), the whole of verse 3 is a later Judean addition. Andersen and Freedman (1980:333) recognise that there is an apparent discord in the text especially in the relation between verses 1bB-2 and verse 3, but they still assume deliberate planning by the prophet. On the other hand Rudnig-Zelt (2006:120-134) claims that 4:1-3 is a highly composite text displaying different strata from periods as late as the post-exilic period. Recognition of the composite character of the text supports Jeremias's (1983:60) basic contention that 4:1-3 was not meant by the editors of the book of Hosea merely to be understood as a single indictment, but rather as the hermeneutical key for the theological understanding of the whole book. According to Jeremias (1983:7) commentators have far too often tried to unlock the mysteries of the book of Hosea from the first three chapters using Hosea's marriage metaphor as the main interpretative tool, instead of beginning with Hosea's much clearer message in chapters 4-14. The transmission history of the first three chapters also underlines the necessity of recognising the importance of not interpreting 4:1-3 with the marriage metaphor in mind but as the very important key to the understanding of the remaining chapters of the book.

Most of the discussion about the composition and dating of Hosea 4:1-3 centres on 4:3 (Hayes 2002:40). Whereas some point to inconsistencies of style others highlight the internal logic of the argument that makes 4:3 part of a unified judgment speech, a *רִיב*, in which the indictment, introduced by *כִּי* (negatively in 1b and positively in 2) is followed by the judgment, introduced by *עַל־כֵּן* in verse 3 (Wolff 1974:65). Because the structure reflects the pattern of action and reaction we are justified in concluding that the editors composed 4:1-3 with a clear purpose in mind. Verse 3 cannot be excluded simply as a late addition. It is an integral part of the theological thrust of 4:1-3. In addition, as

Hayes (2002:41) rightly points out, the repetition of ארץ (“earth”) in verse 1a and in verse 3 reinforces the connection between the actors, those “who dwell in the land”, the people of Israel, and the respondents “all who dwell in it” which refers to the Israelites and to all other living creatures as well.

2 “Knowledge of God”

The indictment of Yahweh’s law suit, his ריב with “the inhabitants of the land”, is summarised in verse 1b. “There is no trustworthiness” (אמת) or “loyalty” (חסד) “no knowledge of God” (דעת אלהים) in the land. “Knowledge of God” does not refer to a second “religious” sphere in addition to the “ethical” of the first two concepts, but as the concept in final position of the phrase it is rather the root and the source which make אמת and חסד in Israel possible (Wolff 1974:67). We can therefore say that the phrase “[t]here is no knowledge of God in the land” is really the fundamental indictment of 4:1-3 and as such provides the key to the understanding of the main corpus of the Book of Hosea.

The phrase דעת אלהים occurs twice in the Book of Hosea, in 4:1 and in 6:6. In both cases it is a succinct formulation of what Yahweh demands of the Israelite worshipers (Wolff 1964:182). Considering the text of 4:1 with chapters 1-3 in mind scholars have interpreted “knowledge of God” against the background of the marriage metaphor in 2:21 (Vos 2008:93), but Wolff (1964:186) points out that wherever Hosea speaks of the intimate relationship between marriage partners in chapters 1-3 he uses the word אהב and not the word ידע. The real setting of the term דעת אלהים is the priestly office. It is the task of the priest to teach the “knowledge of God” (1964:187-192; Jeremias 1983:61). It follows therefore that, although 4:1 speaks of the controversy of Yahweh with the inhabitants of the land, the new unit 4:4-6 aims the judgment immediately at those who bear primary responsibility for the people’s lamentable state, the priests (Lundblom 1986:59).

My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge;
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I reject you from being a priest to me. (Hosea 4:6)

In this context another important concept is introduced which is the opposite of ידע, the verb שכח “to forget”. Forgetting the knowledge demanded by Yahweh is the ultimate reason for the announcement of judgment against the priests (Wolff 1964:189).

And since *you have forgotten the law of your God*,
I also will forget your children. (4:6)

Forgetting the תורה of Yahweh means rejection of the דעת אלהים the knowledge of God, and this, according to Wolff (1964:191), is the original sin (*die Ursünde*).

What is the material content of this knowledge that the priests have to impart? It is basically threefold:

- It has to teach who Yahweh is in order to distinguish him from Baal and the other Canaanite gods.
- It has to teach to whom Israel owes its existence and all the gifts of the land.
- It has to teach Yahweh's torah, not only the torah concerning the difference of sacred and profane but also his will for the daily living of the Israelites as summarised by the two words אמת and טוֹב.

In the following I want to analyse these three different dimensions of the knowledge of God in order to understand the indictment against “the people of the land” in 4:1-3.

3 The Different Dimensions of the Knowledge of God

3a Forgetting Yahweh the Creator in Favour of Baal

The דָּעַת of the priests contains as one of its fundamentals a teaching concerning the marks that distinguish Yahweh from Baal (Wolff 1964:195). This is shown by Hosea 5:4

Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.
For a spirit of whoredom (רוּחַ זְנוּנִים) is within them,
And they do not know (יָדְעוּ) Yahweh.

The priests have replaced the דָּעַת אֱלֹהִים, “the true object of their careful observance and cultic practice, with זְנוּנִים, that is, with Canaanite sex rites” (Wolff 1974:82).

Wolff here interprets the term זְנוּנִים “fornication, promiscuity” as referring to cultic prostitution associated with fertility rites typical of Canaanite fertility religion. Many scholars have followed him in this. They see the main indictment of chapters 4 and 5 against the priests as having led the people away from Yahweh to a “worship without God” (Hos 4:16-19; Jeremias 1983: 63-73), a “guilty entanglement” in an idolatrous cult (5:1-7) (1983:75-77). Scholars are not clear “whether Hosea is condemning a false (idolatrous) worship of Yahweh, or an apostate worship of Baal, or even whether the two are identified in the official state cult” but are agreed that in Hosea's time the religion of Moses had been distorted (Andersen and Freedman 1980:49). No matter whether the Israelites thought of themselves as Yahwists “their worship was a fertility cult” (Mays 1969: 125), dealing mainly with the issues of the fertility of fields and livestock.

This “dominant reading” (Keefe) of Hosea rests on two main assumptions.

First, it assumes that Yahwism was the religion of “outsiders” (Lang 1983: 36; see above in the Introduction), the religion of desert nomads with whom their God, Yahweh, had made a covenant at Mount Sinai. After their desert wanderings they entered Canaan and had to adapt to the new agrarian environment. This brought about a “crisis” of their faith (Von Rad: 1962). Because they had difficulty in believing that their God could provide for the fertility of their fields, they turned to Canaan’s fertility religions (Keefe 2001:66f), primarily to the worship of Baal. The contrast between Yahweh and Baal could not be more pronounced. The desert deity Yahweh is not bound to the cycles of nature, but rather is the creator who transcends nature. Thus the key distinction between Yahweh and Baal is that Yahweh the Lord of History acts in history, while Baal is primarily a fertility God who acts in nature (2001:68).

Scholars have in the main tended to accept this biblical presentation of Israel’s early history but the advance of scholarship in the last thirty years has systematically demolished this version of the events (Levin 2008:125). Detailed analysis of biblical texts has demonstrated the fictitious character of the traditional presentation of Israel’s early history given by the deuteronomistic historians. Archaeology has supplied additional materials. It has shown that the distinction between the two sections of the population (Canaanite and Israelite) cannot explain the development of the Late Bronze Age. The deuteronomistic version of the Settlement has therefore been undermined. The Israelites did not encounter the Canaanite culture as outsiders but were always part of it.

The second assumption of the dominant reading of Hosea is that the rain God Baal with his consorts was primarily the god of sex and fecundity, who represented the life-giving forces of procreation and regeneration. The *hierogamos* (sacred marriage) between Baal and his consort as the source of fertility appears in this version diametrically opposed to Israelite Yahwism, which imagines a singular deity who stands above nature’s rhythm as its creator and Lord (Keefe 2001:43). But if Hosea’s main purpose was to challenge a syncretistic cult, Keefe (2001:47) asks, why is it that Hosea’s language about Yahweh is so richly intertwined with sexual and fertility motifs? Yahweh, like Baal, is married to the land and is the source of its fertility (Hos 2.8-9; 4:5-7). Israel’s god is certainly not only a god of history, but a god of fertility as well (2001:75). The real point of Hosea’s attack cannot therefore be his opposition to fertility religion.

The extensive scholarly investigation of the Ras Shamra texts has furthermore shown that Baal was no simple nature deity, but “Lord of the Earth” and specifically, lord of the city-state of Ugarit (Keefe 2001:71). The same applied to the Phoenician god Baal of the city of Tyre. Already King Hiram, the friend of Solomon had decided that the ancient Canaanite agricultural religion

was no longer sufficient for his people; the empire needed a new state cult (Wittenberg 2007:7). He therefore built two new temples, the one to Baal-Hadad, the god of storms of earlier, Tyrian agricultural religion, who became “Baal Shamem”, the “Lord of Heaven”, and the other to Melcarth, the “King of the City State” (Morgenstern 1960:141).

Hiram’s temples became the models not only of Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem but later also of the temple to Baal² which Ahab built in the new Omride capital of the Northern Kingdom, Samaria. Canaanite architecture was an integral part of state ideology, the temple being “the visual communicator of the divine component of and support for the political realm” (Meyers 1983:118ff). Canaanite temple ideology symbolised the two most important themes of the Baal mythology - the foundation of the temple and the establishment of kingship, both mythically identified with creation (Cross 1973:318ff). In the complex societies of the ancient Near East, religion was a national and territorial phenomenon (Ahlström 1982) and religion was integrally related to the meaning of the nation and the structures of its power (Keefe 2001: 84). The contrast between Yahweh and Baal is therefore not between history and nature, ethics and fertility, but it is a contestation about power. This is shown quite clearly in 8:14 where the crucial term *שכח* is again used.

*Israel has forgotten his Maker,
and built palaces.*

Keefe (2001:86) points to the central and critical role of the priests in the establishment and maintenance of the social order and the symbiotic relationship between the king and the priestly class. The priesthood controlled power not only at the major state sanctuaries but they also controlled the numerous shrines, the “high places” at the traditional worship sites (2001:87). “Rather than attacking supposed fertility cult practices, Hosea’s polemic is squarely directed at the official state cult and at the structures of royal power of which the cult is a primary sign. Hardly any of the major shrines of the northern kingdom escapes Hosea’s condemnation” (2001:95). The indictment that “Israel has forgotten its Maker” has therefore to be seen in the wider context of chapter 8:1-14 where the rulers and the calf of Samaria (8:4-5.6b) are condemned in the same breath. “The ‘calf of Samaria’ is false not simply because it is an idol, but because of what it stands for: ‘the structures of power which are seated in Samaria’” (2001:97); it is the corruption of Samaria’s government which has tainted the priesthood that has roused the ire of Hosea and led to his polemic against the state cult. The “spirit of fornication” (*רוח זנונים*) in 5:4 could then preferably be rendered “spirit of corruption” emanating from the

² According to 1 Kings 16:31-33 Ahab built his temple for “the Baal”, probably the city god of Tyre, Melqart (Donner 1977:403).

state cult, rather than referring to “Canaanite sex rites”.³ This general condemnation of the state cult then throws light on the other important text highlighting the lack of the “knowledge of God”, Hos 6:6.

For I desire steadfast love (דָּוָה) and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God (דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים) rather than burnt offerings.

3b Forgetting where the Gifts of the Land Come from

Forgetting Yahweh and identifying him with state power of necessity leads to the forgetting where the land, the gifts of the land and all its resources come from. This is very well illustrated by another text which comes from the chapters 1-3 of the Book of Hosea, but expresses similar sentiments, Hos 2:13 (BHS verse 15).

I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals,
when she offered incense to them and decked herself with her ring
and jewelry,
and went after her lovers, and forgot (שָׁכַחַה) me, says the Lord.

The word “forget” stands at the end of the unit and it summarises the indictment. Forgetting Yahweh in favour of Baal is the epitome of Israel’s sin. But the content of this forgetting is spelt out in a statement belonging to the context of the unit, 2:8[10] (Wolff 1964:188f):

She did not know (לֹא יָדְעָה)
that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal.

Israel did not know, Israel forgot, that the agricultural products, the grain, the wine and the oil, and the natural resources the silver and gold, did not come from Baal but from Yahweh. The contestation between Yahweh and Baal therefore takes us into the realm of economics.

Scholars such as Chaney (1986), Renteria (1992) and Todd (1992) have shown that the background to the violent conflicts between Elijah and Elisha, the prophets of Yahweh, and Ahab and the house of Omri leading to the revolution of Jehu in the ninth century, although focused on the religious issue, really had a basis in the socio-economic conditions that had developed in the Northern Kingdom after the break-up of the Solomonic empire. Of the two kingdoms the Israelite north was much less conducive for establishing a strong centralised monarchy than that of the Judean south (Wittenberg 2007:113f). In the first instance Israel was much more vulnerable to outside interference than

³ Phyllis Bird (1989) has investigated the relevant occurrences of זָנָה in Hosea and has found no evidence of cultic prostitution. The priests are attacked for sexual prostitution at the sanctuaries.

Judah because two major trade routes passed through the country. Israel was furthermore crisscrossed with hills that divided the country into many small isolated regions and made communication difficult (Rentería 1992:87f). Village and regional independence therefore thwarted any one group's ability to consolidate power and establish a centralised monarchy for the first fifty years after the secession (1992:88). However, this changed when Omri in a military coup was able to wrest control of the government and to embark on an ambitious project of establishing a strong centralised state. We have already noted that he built his new capital Samaria and that he also built a temple to Baal to give religious legitimacy to his rule. In order to establish a strong economy Omri formed an alliance with Phoenicia (1992:86):

The alliance proved symbiotic. The Phoenician economy depended on commerce rather than agriculture; hence it had to import food, particularly from nearby Israel. ... Israel benefited from the alliance by selling its agricultural surplus to Phoenicia and gaining access to its international overseas and overland trade routes. Furthermore, Israel's upper classes were able to avail themselves of exotic luxury items and military equipment through Phoenician contacts.

In order to export agricultural products Israel had to produce surplus. Grains were efficiently grown in the valleys and plain areas like Esdraelon and Sharon, where the land was owned by the urban elites who benefited from the new system (1992:89), but vineyards and olive orchards were much better suited for the terraced uplands (Chaney 1986:73). But here Israelite peasants had been involved in small-scale subsistence farming and animal husbandry for generations. Agriculture in the hill country depended on rain and was therefore subject to the vicissitudes of periodic drought and agricultural pests (1986:68). Any surplus produced would therefore have been kept by village communities themselves.

In order to gain control of the production of the uplands the monarchy and the elites began devising ways to bring the village land into the commercialised agricultural system. Todd (1992) has suggested several of those methods such as controlling the access to water, work animals, control of the sale of iron tools but above all the process of rent capitalism by charging exorbitant interest on loans. These forced peasants into slavery for debt and the loss of their land. The resultant foreclosure of many of the peasant producers led to the concentration of land in the hands of large landlords who joined the upland fields together into large and "efficient" vineyards and olive orchards producing a single crop for the export market. And since wine and oil were more valuable than most other agricultural commodities they made ideal exports to exchange for the luxury and strategic imports coveted by members of the ruling classes (Chaney 1986:73). As a result two conflicting systems of land tenure developed a dual economy that was the material basis of two fundamentally

different understandings of society and its proper values (1986:68), the one under the lordship of Yahweh, the other under Baal.

The revolution of Jehu saw the abolition of Baal worship in Israel, but the underlying economic structures were not changed. On the contrary, the economic and political policies of Israel's monarchical establishment during and subsequent to the reign of Jeroboam II aggravated the situation of conflict and crisis. While Israel's deepening involvement in interregional trade and commercial agriculture brought much profit to the royal house and ruling elite, it led to an increased impoverishment of the rural peasant population (Keefe 2001:191). Impoverishment was the basic concern of Amos and the main thrust of his indictment. Hosea's focus is different, but he is closer to Amos than generally assumed (2001:32). The pressure of a rising market economy and the crown's deepening investment in cosmopolitan orientations led to a breakdown of traditional values. Human relationships were governed more and more by profit motives, and the solidarity of society in general disintegrated (2001:191). For Hosea the culprit is the monarchy and the cult in the state sanctuaries where the bull icons were worshiped as the personification of the power of the state (Jeremias 1983:20). Although the god worshiped at the state sanctuaries was Yahweh for Hosea the state cult was nothing less than the worship of Baal.

Against this background the indictment in Hosea 2:13 that Israel forgot Yahweh and instead went after her lovers becomes clear. The lovers whom Israel as the wife of Yahweh in the marriage metaphor is chasing after, because

They give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink (2:7),

are not fertility deities, but should rather be interpreted as Israel's foreign allies and trading partners (Keefe 2001: 195).⁴ They are the new "lords", the Baalim, who had replaced Yahweh. This "new" commercial economy had brought great riches with conspicuous consumption of luxury items to the upper class, but in the process Yahweh, as the creator god had been forgotten. This is shown by the lack of the knowledge of Yahweh's Torah, the third dimension of the knowledge of God mentioned in Hosea.

3c Forgetting the Torah of Yahweh

We have seen above that the indictment against the priests in chapter 4 opened with the charge that they had forgotten the law of their God, and that forgetting the תורה of Yahweh really meant rejection of the דעת אלהים the knowledge of God. This lack of knowledge is further demonstrated with a reference to the lack of אמת and the lack of חסד. Scholars like Andersen and Freedman

⁴ This interpretation is supported by Hos 8.9 where Assyria is seen as Israel's lover. Other prophetic texts also use the metaphor of "lovers" for Israel's supposed allies: e.g. Jer 4.11; 22.20-22; Lam 1.2; Ezek 23.5-21 (Keefe 2001:195).

(1980:336) have taken these as referring to two different charges, but Jeremias (1983:60) and Zobel (1986:48f) have pointed to numerous Old Testament texts that use the phrase *אמת והסד* together as a hendiadys, in which the first noun *אמת* emphasises the permanence, certainty and lasting validity of the second *הסד* (Josh 2:14; Prov 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28). This enduring quality of *הסד* is also emphasized in Hosea 6:4 which says of Ephraim

Your *הסד* is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.

What is *הסד*? Mays (1969:63) points out that none of the English words proposed as translation for the Hebrew term (love, steadfast love, kindness, piety, religiosity, and devotion) are satisfactory. Scholars have therefore tried to establish its meaning from its original setting in life. Wolff (1964:184), Mays (1969:63) and Andersen and Freedman (1980:336) have followed Glueck (1927) who emphasised the close relationship between *הסד* and *ברית*.⁵ They claim that the sphere of *הסד* is the covenant. But Zobel (1986:45-49) points to the many occurrences of the term in early narrative literature outside covenant contexts. It is a term used in interpersonal relationships primarily between relatives and friends and expresses an element of mutuality. It is often constructed with *עשה* and can then be rendered as “do good”; it is therefore not simply an attitude but involves an action in accordance with that attitude. Stoebe (1971:602) points to the affinity of the term with *רחמים* and explains *הסד* as goodness and kindness beyond what is expected based solely on magnanimity towards others. The original setting of the term, according to Zobel (1986:52), is the family or clan not the covenant. “The fruitful and productive common life of such a close human society requires constant mutual kindness on the part of all its members.” Goodness and kindness are part of social norms that function to preserve and promote life, thus strengthening society. These social norms tended to be formulated as divine requirements, as *משפטים* — an integral element of Yahweh’s Torah.⁶ As such they define the rights valid in the community. *הסד* is not a legal term (1986: 53)⁷ although doing “good” occurs in parallel statements to doing *משפט* “justice” as that what God demands (cf.

⁵ Wolff therefore translated *הסד* in his 1964 (1953) article consistently with “covenant faithfulness” though no longer in his commentary.

⁶ In this context we could point to Gerstenberger’s contention, which he had already made in 1965, that the apodictic prohibitions, primarily the ten commandments, considered by Alt as essential elements of Israel’s early covenant law, had their original setting in admonitions that address family and clan relationships and as such reflect the basic order (“*Lebensordnung*”) of family and clan relationships (1965:128ff). Subsequent scholarly investigations of the Decalogue have largely confirmed Gerstenberger’s findings, though Gerstenberger’s claim that the original setting was the Israelite nomadic clan instruction cannot be maintained. See Crüsemann (1992) for further details on the Decalogue.

⁷ Jeremias (1983:60) sees it differently. He claims that the two concepts used in 4:1 guard the right of Yahweh, the rightful owner of the land.

Mic 6:8, Hos 12:7 [6]). What constituted right and good social conduct was most probably the content of the Torah which, according to 4:6, the priests neglected to teach.⁸

It is now important to realise that this ethic of social behaviour is not restricted to the human realm, but it includes animals as well. In ancient Israel the dichotomy between society and nature so common in modern thinking is totally absent. The same element of mutuality or reciprocity that is the prerequisite for the attitude of *חסד* applies also to animals, in particular to domesticated animals. These are not objects or things that can simply be exploited, but they belong to what Mary Midgley (1992:211) has perceptively called “the mixed community”. Animals have to be treated with respect because animals in rural communities belong, so to speak, to the family (Wittenberg 2007:160).

Due to the affinity of *חסד* and *רחמים* the goodness and kindness shown towards animals take the form of compassion. This is shown in the saying in Proverbs 12:10 which characterises the right behaviour towards animals by way of a contrast between the action of the righteous and the wicked.⁹

The righteous knows *ידע* the need (*נפש* - literally “the soul”) of his animals,
but the mercy of the wicked (*רחמי רשעים*) is cruel.

The righteous knows the “soul” of his animals. There is a strong mutual bond between both that will manifest itself in compassion. In the case of the wicked the expected compassion is really cruelty, it is no compassion at all.

How this mutual relationship of community does not only determine traditional norms of conduct but becomes part of the Torah of Yahweh can be seen in different stipulations in the Covenant Code, Deuteronomy, and the Holiness Code.¹⁰ Although environmental legislation is not the main focus of the Torah the treatment not only of domesticated animals but also of the whole Earth Community is not outside the scope of Yahweh’s will. The order of nature and the order of society are not two distinct realms, but they belong together. This is illustrated by the two verses in Hosea 4:1-3, verse 1 which contains the indictment against all the inhabitants of the land, here the people of Israel, because there is no knowledge of God in the land, and verse 3 that speaks of the mourning of the land, affecting the whole Earth Community liv-

⁸ Wolff (1964:193f) suggests that the priests might have been involved in teaching an ancient Israelite catechism dealing with the norms of right living according to the Ten Commandments.

⁹ The original setting of many of the wisdom sayings in the Book of Proverbs was Israel’s rural farming community. See Wittenberg 2007:61-79 for further details.

¹⁰ See my article: “Plant and animal rights – an absurd idea or ecological necessity” in Wittenberg 2007:162-171 for further details.

ing in the land, including the birds in the air and the fish in the sea. The close links between verse 1 and verse 3 show that “justice and righteousness” צדק ומשפט as the just order of creation has to be the foundation of society as well as of nature.¹¹ The indictment that there is no knowledge of God in the land therefore means that the people have forgotten that not only nature but they too stand under the just order of Yahweh. Forgetting the משפט of Yahweh can only spell disaster. This is beautifully illustrated by Jeremiah 8:7

Even the stork in the heavens knows (ידעה) its times;
and the turtledove, swallow, and crane observe their coming;
but my people do not know (ידעו) the right (משפט) of the Lord.

3d The Consequence of the Lack of Knowledge: Disaster in Society and Disaster in Nature

The editors who compiled the Book of Hosea in Judah looked back at the disaster of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.E.. Israel had not been able to withstand the massive onslaught of the Assyrian Empire just as the many other Ancient Near Eastern states that were conquered and then integrated into the Assyrian provincial system, but to the editors the message of Hosea pointed to a much more fundamental malaise than simply wrong foreign policy decisions. The indictment that there was no knowledge of God and no enduring goodness provided the lens which illuminated the message of Hosea and revealed the real reasons for the disaster. Instead of the worship of Yahweh, Israel had turned to the worship of the power of the state. After the prosperous period of Jeroboam II when the monarchy with its priesthood through the new economic system had corrupted the cohesion and community spirit of Israelite society, the new situation under Jeroboam's heirs revealed that the false worship of the true God had its counterpart in false politics both internally and externally (Andersen and Freedman 1980:48). חסד had been supplanted by “the bloody art of politics by conspiracy and murder which marked Israel's waning history” (Mays: 1969:4).¹² In 4:2 this charge is emphasised by the listing of five infinitive absolutes, cursing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery. The phrase “they break all bounds” stresses the violent nature of the evils enumerated in the Decalogue-like list. The verb פרץ usually refers to destructive actions such as the breaking into a house, the breaking of water and breach of defence works.¹³ The impression is created of a society in total disorder with all community relationships disrupted, emphasised by the phrase “bloodshed strikes against bloodshed” (4:2, Hayes 2002:48). The floodgates of crime, corruption, and sexual abuses had been opened. This indictment that the editors of the Book of Hosea sum-

¹¹ See Schmid (1968) for details on the ANE conception of justice as the order of creation.

¹² “We can count four Israelite assassinations within the space of twenty years, and in each case the assassin himself usurped the throne” (Andersen and Freedman 1980:50).

¹³ Cf. Andersen and Freedman 1980:337f also for references.

marised in 4:1-2 is expounded in the chapters 4-11 in greater detail (Jeremias 1983:60). Israel did not have the moral resources to withstand the Assyrian onslaught.

It is remarkable that the editors did not restrict themselves to pointing to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom as the consequences of the lack of the knowledge of God as shown by Hosea's oracles, but that they included verse 3 which points to the consequences for nature as well.¹⁴ As the text now stands it is closely linked with verse 1 as we have already noted. The response of the earth in verse 3 to the indictment in verse 1 is conveyed primarily with the two verbs אבל "mourn" and אמלל "languish". The verb אמלל "to be weak, to languish" in the sense of a loss of fertility and life-bearing capacity gives the impression of a waning of nature together with the "drying up" of its paired term (Hayes 2002:42). At the same time, as Hayes points out (2002:43), אמלל occurs with אבל almost entirely in laments and judgment oracles in contexts of mourning when it can then also mean to "mourn" or "lament". When the verb is read as "mourn," the psychological sense of אמלל "languish," is heightened, and 4:3 portrays a vast sorrow that touches all elements of creation (2002:44).

To what is the earth reacting? According to 4:1 Yahweh has a lawsuit¹⁵ with the inhabitants of the earth. Those who dwell on the earth — the animals, the birds and even the fish in the sea in verse 3 — seem to be part of this lawsuit because it is linked with the previous verses by על־כן "therefore". But in what sense can the judgement of Yahweh over Israel for transgression be extended to the whole realm of nature? Wolff (1974:68) sees Yahweh's approaching judgement in the form of a great drought which also snatches away the wild animals and birds, even the fish of the sea. Andersen and Freedman (1980:334) even want to claim liability on the part of the animals. "When the covenant virtues – integrity, mercy and knowledge of God – are lacking in the earth, even the animals behave outside the bounds of knowledge." Surely, to claim that there is no knowledge among the beasts and that they are therefore also guilty of judgement cannot be right.

Two objections have been raised against this view. First, Hayes (2002:45) points to the fact that the consequence in verse 3 of the evil acts done on the land are introduced by על־כן and not by לכן. Although both may be translated by "therefore", לכן usually introduces the prophetic judgement speech, whereas על־כן generally introduces a statement of fact, designating the result of the action. Second, Hosea is not merely using the imagery of a massive drought to illustrate Israel's punishment; he is announcing the reversal

¹⁴ It is immaterial whether 4:3 belongs to the original preface of the revised edition of Hosea's message or whether it was added only later as Jeremias and Rudnig-Zelt maintain (see above). It now belongs to the context of 4:1-3.

¹⁵ Many scholars have interpreted the *rib* as a "covenant lawsuit" (cf. Deroche 1981:400).

of creation (Deroche 1981:403; Hayes 2002:55). The languishing of “beasts of the field”, “birds of the sky”, and “fish of the sea” suggests the faltering of all creation. The three groups of animals are mentioned because they represent the three spheres in which the animal kingdom lives: the sea, the heavens, and the land. They constitute the totality of the created world. This way of listing animals occurs primarily in texts concerned with creation and they are found in many passages of the Hebrew Bible as well as ancient Near Eastern texts¹⁶ (Deroche: 1981:404). A similar phraseology is used in the Yahwist and Priestly flood accounts as well as the Atrahasis Epic (Hayes 2002:56). It is clear from the beginning of Genesis 6 that the flood represents the undoing of creation. In the same way Hosea 4:3 announces not merely a severe drought but the reversal of creation.¹⁷ This is clear from the choice of the verb *חָסַף* (Niphal) in the sense of “being swept away”. The actions described by Hosea 4:3, Zephaniah 1:2-3 and Jeremiah 8:13 by the verb *חָסַף* are the opposite of those described by *בָּרָא* — they are anti-creation (Deroche 1981:404f).

The theme of reversal of creation is tied within Hosea 4:1-3 as a whole to the abrogation of law and ethical principles in Israel (Hayes 2002:60). As we noted above scholars like Hans H. Schmid (1968) see this relationship as fundamental. Schmid posits a broad unity between cosmic, political, and social order in the ancient Near Eastern concept of creation. Disorder in the social realm therefore has consequences also for the cosmic realm. This is not due to Yahweh’s judgement. Koch (1955:1-42) denies that the fateful consequences in nature are due to an active punishment by Yahweh. According to Koch Yahweh merely watches over the organic connection between human deed and the fateful consequences that follow organically out of it. Lack of knowledge of God and the lack of enduring goodness cannot therefore remain without consequences; they lead to disaster not only in society but in nature as well.

C CONCLUSION: RELEVANCE OF HOSEA 4:1-3 FOR A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Hans Walter Wolff (1964) has termed the knowledge of God that was entrusted to the priests and that they had to take care of an original form (“Urform”) of theology. The whole passage underlines the startling fact that good sound theology is important and that a wrong theology can have disastrous consequences. What then are lessons that we could learn from the priestly theology that would be relevant for our own theological reflection today? Although our context is so totally different, they seem to me to lie in the following three areas determined

¹⁶ Cf. Zephaniah 1:2-3; Genesis 1 in a different order: fish (v. 20a), birds (v. 20b); and beasts (v. 24) also Genesis 1:26. Cf. also Pss 8, and 104 and an Egyptian hymn, naming beasts, birds, and fish, among others (Hayes 2002:55).

¹⁷ The oracles in Zephaniah 1:2-3 and Jeremiah 8:13 also announce the reversal of creation (Deroche 1981:404). See also Jeremiah 4:23-28 which describes the ruination of all nature in the last judgement of God (Andersen and Freedman 1980:340f).

by the three main dimensions of the knowledge of God in Hosea as I have outlined above.

- Fundamental to the knowledge of God in Hosea is the distinction between the God of Power and uninhibited human self-interest, for Hosea identical with the God Baal, and Yahweh the God not only of salvation history but also of creation. Theology for far too long has concentrated on salvation to the detriment of creation. This has led to the fateful dichotomy between nature and history in biblical scholarship. But this is not the biblical view. Due to the mechanistic conception of nature of the Cartesian and Baconian scientific worldview biblical scholars have tended to relocate God's acts away from nature to history (Keefe 2001:76). God has no longer a role to play in nature; his task is primarily in the salvation history of Israel and subsequently in the salvation of the individual through Jesus Christ. The larger context of creation has been forgotten. But theological reflection that wants to counter the environmental challenges needs to return to the biblical vision of God and needs to arrive at a fundamental change in our value system, a change that puts Creation rather than we humans with our individual needs in the centre (Kjellberg 2000:11).
- Knowledge of God in Hosea also entails the knowledge where the gifts and the resources of the earth come from, a distinction between the new economies driven by the monarchy and commercial activities of the ruling elite, the economy of Baal, and Yahweh's economy, the economy of nature. Wendell Berry (1983:54-75) makes a similar distinction between our modern Western industrial economy, which he terms, the Little Economy, and the Great Economy, God's economy of the Earth. Usually we think that there is only one economy which for us is the big global economy and forget that it is really only a little economy within the Great Economy of nature. We think that human society is separate from the universe and that the Earth is comprised of infinite resources that we can exploit with impunity for our wellbeing (Cullinan 2002:47). But Berry stresses, that if humans want to develop their little economies successfully they must live in the Great Economy on *its* terms not on our terms (1983:58). But just as the ruling elite in Israel had forgotten that the wine, the oil and the grain ultimately came from Yahweh, so many human societies "have 'forgotten' that we are part of a natural world and that our well-being is ultimately derived from the health of our habitat, that is, the Earth" (Cullinan: 2002:23).
- Hosea 4:1-2 stress that the lack of the knowledge of God leads to a lack of *אמת* and *חסד*. This is not simply a kind and benevolent attitude, but it is an action of goodness towards the neighbour. It seeks to establish justice in society. But Hosea also makes clear that justice in society cannot

be divorced from justice in nature as well. Living creatures, all those that dwell in the land, according the Old Testament world view are not things that can be exploited at will, but they are creatures in need of respect and compassion even of rights. Cullinan (2002:53-71) makes the point that modern systems of law are dangerously divorced from what he calls “the Great Law”, the law of Nature.¹⁸ We have seen that the concept of *משפט* justice points to the broad unity between the cosmic, political and social order. The *תורה* of Yahweh simply enacts the establishment of that order of creation in society.¹⁹

- Ignoring the law of Yahweh in the scramble for power and self-enrichment by the monarchy and the ruling classes undermined the social cohesion of Israelite society and inevitably led to disaster. It came as Hosea had announced and the editors of his oracles had recorded. But it was not only a disaster of the Northern kingdom, they also pointed to the disaster in nature as well. Biblical scholars have far too long simply ignored the message of 4:3 on the grounds that it was a late, even apocalyptic insertion having no bearing on the fundamental message of Hosea. I have tried to show the organic link of verse 3 with the whole lawsuit in 4:1-3. Human actions have consequences for Earth as well, because we all are inextricably linked with the total web of life. “Despite the

¹⁸ “Animals, plants and almost every other aspect of the planet are, legally-speaking, objects that are either the property of a human or artificial ‘juristic person’ such as a company, or could at any moment become owned, for example by being captured or killed. For as long as the law sees living creatures as ‘things’ and not ‘beings’, it will be blind to the possibility that they might be the subjects (i.e. the holders) of rights” (Cullinan 2002:55).

¹⁹ Cullinan (2002:63) claims that all pre-modern legal systems tried to establish jurisprudence in accordance with the rhythms of the planet and that only our modern laws do not recognise that our human laws have to take account of this wider context. To show that ancient societies agreed that good laws were based on an inherent sense shared by all humans that some things were right and others were wrong, those deeds listed in Hos. 4:2 as an indication of the lack of knowledge, Cullinan (2002:64) quotes the following passage from Cicero (*De Republica* iii, xxii, 33): “True law is right reason in agreement with Nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrong-doing by its prohibitions. And it does not lay its commands or prohibitions on good men in vain, though neither have an effect on the wicked. It is a sin to try to alter this law, nor is it allowable to attempt to repeal any part of it, and it is impossible to abolish it entirely. We cannot be freed from its obligations by Senate or People, and we need not look outside ourselves for an expounder or interpreter of it. And there will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and for all times, and there will be one master and one ruler, that is, God, over us all, for He is the author of this law, its promulgator, and its enforcing judge.”

overwhelming evidence that we are on completely the wrong track as far as regulating ourselves is concerned, we display an immense capacity to avoid addressing the most vital issue of our time” (Cullinan 2002:30). Sound theology, the knowledge of God, should assist Christians to address this vital issue and thus assist in avoiding global disaster.

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