



Queenscliff Uniting Church

May 4-6, 2018

Session 1

Does beauty say adieu? The call of beauty in a disfigured world

[G] Prelude: (Image 1 – Blank)

Thank you Kerrie for the kind words of welcome. We are pleased to be in this beautiful part of our country, at Queenscliff by the ocean, and to be part of this wonderful festival. Celebration of Diversity is central. We come from a background in the Christian tradition, but we look forward to learning from a wide range of different views in the course of the weekend.

What a strange moral landscape we now live in. What is truth, in the face of fake news and alternative facts? What is justice, in the face of violent civil war, and forced mass human migration? What is humanity, in face of Manus Island and Nauru?

We have called our presentation, 'Does beauty say adieu? The call of beauty in a disfigured world?' (Image 2 – title) This might well be regarded as a topic unworthy of consideration by, say, Mr Trump or Mr Morrison. Yet we face a question, which goes by various names – climate change, ecological crisis, the Anthropocene. The implications of this question now bear down on us; and hardest on those least able to cope with it. And it won't go away by waving a dismissive hand at it.

George Marshall, a communication theorist at Cambridge University, refers to climate change as a 'wicked problem'. By which he means it is the kind of problem that is difficult or even impossible to solve because it involves incomplete, or contradictory, or continuously changing conditions for its definition.

The trouble with a wicked problem is that what you think should be done about it depends on what you think the problem is in the first place. And that's not so easy to say. Marshall writes:

We can define climate change as an economic problem, a technological problem, a moral problem, a human rights problem, a social justice problem, a land use problem, a

governance problem, an ideological battle between left and right worldviews, or a lack of respect for God's creation.¹

And this doesn't include those who refuse to believe that climate change is a problem at all. Each approach to the issue calls for a different sort of response, singles out different culprits as the 'real enemy' in the fight, argues for different ways to share the costs involved in rehabilitation, if in fact rehabilitation is what is needed, and uses different language and warrants to justify what is thought to be the appropriate action. It's a jungle out there.

Today we want to come at the issue not from the point of view of economics, technology, social justice, or human rights, though all of those stances are vital. We want to approach it from Marshall's last category, the ecological challenge from the point of view of lack of respect for God's creation. Or in our terms, the disfiguring of the beauty of the world.

The contemporary French philosopher/theologian Jean-Louis Chrétien asks the intriguing question: Does beauty say adieu?² Adieu is the French word for 'goodbye' or 'farewell'. But it means literally, 'to God' (à Dieu), that is, it is a commending of the other to God. Both meanings are pertinent for considering climate change.

Here is the orange-bellied parrot. (Image 3 – Parrot) One of Australia's critically endangered birds. Is this bird saying adieu to us?

Well, certainly it is in the first sense of Chrétien's question. The orange-bellied parrot is on the verge of taking leave. For good. It could well go extinct. Its face to be seen no more. Its voice to be heard no more.

But is it also saying adieu in the other sense: 'to God'? Is the beauty of this tiny creature an expression of a divine intention? The material articulation of a Godly logos? If we have the wit and wisdom to attend?

Our presentation will take the form of a spoken drama. A play in four short acts, if you like. There is a connection between the acts (we hope!). But they don't form a tight logical structure. They are more suggestive than demonstrative. They tell a story rather than make an argument.

The structure will be as follows: (Image 4 – the acts)

Act I: the Pietà

Act II: the ocean

Act III: the shearwater

¹ Marshall, *Don't Even Think About It*, p. 96.

² See *The Ark of Speech*, trans. Andrew Brown, (London: Routledge, 2004), chapter 4, pp. 77-110.

Act IV: the star jump

[J] Act I: The Pietà (Image 5 – title)

Rome. 21stMay 1972. A man climbed over a railing in St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, shouting that he was Jesus Christ—risen from the dead. With a hammer in his hand he leapt at one of the most famous works of art in the Western canon, attacking Michelangelo's sculpture the Pietà. (Image 6 – Pietà) I can still remember the feeling of shock, outrage, horror and incredulity on hearing this news. This can't be true. How could anyone do this? At the time the man was described as an Australian, and I felt too a sense of shame. (The man, Laszlo Toth, was an Hungarian by birth, though he had lived in Australia for a number of years).

This sculpture, a Renaissance masterpiece created from a block of Carrera marble selected from the quarry by Michelangelo is of Mary, the Mother of Jesus holding the dead body of her Son in her arms.

We feel immediately the immense weight of the body, the immense weight of her sorrow. The exquisite beauty of the carving itself was described at the time as 'divine', a 'miracle'. For over 500 years people have been drawn to this beauty, amazed at the exquisite delicacy of the expression of Mary's face, her timelessness, the perfect anatomical structure of Christ's body, the detail of each muscle and vein, the soft folds of Mary's veil and dress, the smoothness of the skin, the softness of Mary's lips.

This is probably the most well-loved of all the Pietàs in the Christian world. For in the mourning of the mother for her son, we feel a loss that is universal. Mater Dolorosa, the lament of Mary echoes the lament of other woman figures before her—the great ancient Mother goddesses of Mesopotamia, Sumeria, Egypt, Greece, Rome—the lament of Innana for Dumuzi, Ishtar for Tammuz, Isis for Osiris, Aphrodite for Adonis, Demeter for Persephone and Cybele for Attis. In these classic stories tears are given power to regenerate life.³ We recognise too our own tears. As a work of art, it speaks our loss, utters our lament. This sculpture is an icon opening a passage into the sacred, calling us to trust the birthing power of lament. For Christians, a portal to the divine, to a God who bears the weight of suffering and grief—the very heart of faith.

Toth had been trained as a geologist in Hungary and had come with his geologist's hammer. With 15 blows he severed Mary's arm at the elbow, (Image 7 – damaged image) knocked off a chunk from her nose, chipped an eyelid. (Image 8 – face) Bystanders subdued him and he

³ See Jules Cashford and Anne Baring, *The Myth of the Goddess: evolution of an image* (London: BCA/Penguin, 1991), pp. 584-6.

was subsequently admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Vatican officials gathered up the broken pieces, swept the area for the tiniest fragments, finding among them the chip of eyelid. Some people in the immediate chaos took souvenirs. Only 3 were ever returned. Today, restored, it is protected by bullet-proof glass. (Image 9 – Pietà)

What are we to make of this? This disfigurement of beauty? There was controversy over the restoration. Some argued that it be left in its damaged state, as a sign of the violence of our world, others wanted the evidence of restoration to be visible. The Vatican chose to return the sculpture as near as possible to its original condition. This damage (for Christians, this desecration) was not the result of an earthquake, or violent weather event, it was an intentional act by a human being—one of us. Yes, a disturbed person, needing help, but a human being nevertheless. We are, it seems, capable of violence, of attack on what is most precious.

[G] Act II: the ocean (Image 10 – title)

The ocean is beautiful. Everybody knows that. We all have our favourites. This is ours, Tathra Beach, on the south coast of NSW. (Image 11 - Tathra Beach). One of the reasons Australians flock to beaches like this, or live in towns like Queenscliff, is that we find here a beauty that seems somehow primal and life-enhancing. Beyond our dusty city streets, and the noisy ambition of our consumption, something arresting confronts us on the shore. To stand by the sea with the sun's light spearing the waves, salt spray shimmering above deep blue, the roar of the surf in our ears, is to feel instinctively—and probably say so out loud—'isn't it beautiful?' Having said it, we may feel slightly silly. It's so obvious. But faced with this astonishing spectacle, it is hard not to say something. Though we've seen it all before, this splendour 'strikes' us afresh, like a physical blow. The sea calls for something. And yet it's difficult to find words. 'Surf's up.' 'Great day.' 'Stunning colours.' 'This is the life.' Such utterances strive to give voice in response to the call. And they succeed in their way. But in the end, for all its banality, 'isn't it beautiful?' is difficult to avoid.

The sea draws us to itself. And its beauty is what calls to us. In the philosopher Chrétien's words, 'to think beauty from the starting point of the call implies that the address sent to us by beauty is not a contingent feature, added over and above its essence, but actually defines it [beauty] as such. ... What is beautiful is what calls out by manifesting itself and manifests itself by calling out.'⁴ In other words, beauty is a power that reaches out to us and 'pulls' us to itself. We are moved by it. That is, we are set 'in motion' in the simple physical sense of placing our bodies in the vicinity of the water. (Image 12 – surfer) We go to the sea. But we are also 'moved' in that other sense, of being 'stirred up'. Our emotions are engaged. We

⁴ Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, p. 9.

feel longing, or wonder, or exhilaration in the presence of the grandeur that meets us in the ocean.

OK, but what actually does that mean? The answer is both simple and complex. It is simple in that the appreciation of the beauty of the sea is a single unified experience. We stand on the shore. We see, hear, taste, smell and feel the scene as one whole: 'Ah! the sea!' And we are moved inwardly. 'Isn't it beautiful'?

On the other hand, it is pretty obvious that this simple experience it is made up of a number of interacting parts that have their own particular calls, and demand their own particular responses. For example, today the sky is a stunning blue that is almost tangible. It grabs at our attention. Tomorrow the beach is wild, full of sound and movement that just clamours for us to dive in. (Image 13 – big wave) The day after, the waves are huge and perfectly formed as they run toward the shore. It is hard not to be sort of mesmerised by them. Colour, sound, shape, each of these in turn has its beauty, and each has its own different 'manifestation' or 'call' to us.

In an intriguing essay, the great German physicist/philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, argues that beauty is a form of the truth, and 'the sense of the beautiful ... [is] a particular capacity for perceiving reality.'⁵ ...the sense of the beautiful is a particular capacity for perceiving reality. In seeing and hearing beautiful things—say, this colour, that wave, these sounds—we perceive at the same time something that exceeds, that goes beyond, the particular beauties before us, and unites them together as examples that draw from us the same exclamation: 'this is beautiful'.

Weizsäcker calls this deeper perception that accompanies a particular encounter with a beautiful object, 'the sense of the beautiful'. In any particular perception of a lovely thing—say a Queenscliff ocean wave—there lies embedded another, more general 'accompanying perception' that is the ground or condition, which makes it possible for us to recognise this particular experience as an experience the deserves the description 'this is truly beautiful'.

So what does, 'Isn't it beautiful?' finally mean? A lovely wave? Well, yes. A stirring sound? Yes, again. A dazzling light display? Yes, a third time. But also something along with that, that is more than just that. What we finally sense looking at the ocean in its full glory on a sunlit day at Queenscliff—though we sense it more implicitly than explicitly—is the manifestation of what was classically called the 'Harmony of Nature', or what Weizsäcker calls *das ökologische Gleichgewicht*⁶, 'the ecological balance' of things. (Image 14 – Australia from space)

For something like 4 billion years, the ocean has been evolving in intricate interaction with land and air, day and night, heat and cold, depth and surface, gravitational pull and wind

⁵ Weizsäcker, *Zeit und Wissen*, p. 411. Italics added.

⁶ Weizsäcker, *Zeit und Wissen*, p. 417.

disturbance. Across this enormous interval of time, the great cycle of evaporation, cloud formation, precipitation and inundation has scoured the land and drained all manner of chemical and biochemical materials through the rivers back into the sea, gradually building and changing its chemical composition. The steady rotation of the earth on its axis, bringing constantly changing periods of light and dark, has driven great currents of air and water to circulate around the planet, regulating temperatures, distributing moisture, generating nutrients.

The long slow process of the formation and evolution of life, beginning with the tiniest of single cell creatures and leading to the brilliant abundance of a hundred million different life forms, arises in and continues to depend on the fecundity of the seas. All this, and everything else that belongs to the web of being that make up planet Earth, is implicated in—or, we might say, lies behind, undergirds—the spectacle that the sea presents to our senses. This is what its beauty is. This, finally, is what we intuit, what we feel deep in our souls, when we see and hear the sea.

And clearly it is fundamental to our existence. Human beings are latecomers in this massive, evolving planetary interaction and balance of things. We depend absolutely for our lives on the air, water, light, plants and animals that make up the habitat which produces and sustains everything. Thus, when we ‘perceive this balance as beautiful’, Weizsäcker says, ‘we perceive the harmony without which we cannot live.’⁷ That is why, ultimately, this (Image 15 – Tathra beach) beauty holds such a fascination. And that is why, amongst other things, this beauty, the beauty of the sea, gives us a measure which transcends our immediate (economic) interests by which to judge our human actions in the world and, indeed, to evaluate what are, in the final analysis, our real interests as individuals and as a species.

Weizsäcker concludes, speaking in a sombre mode, ‘a humanity which disregards and destroys the balance [i.e., the beauty] of the landscape, presuming it to be economically inconsequential, is a humanity gone mad.’⁸

To disfigure this beauty means not only to deface what is exquisite to behold; it means to hammer away at our own foundations in the world.

[J] Act III: the shearwater (Image 16 - title)

Will we or won't we? Late winter in Melbourne. It is cold and growing dark. There is a lecture about plastics and the ocean tonight. We are tired and it is way out in the eastern suburbs somewhere. Oh, let's go. We hurry out to the car and I spread the ancient Melways out on my knees. (We are among the few hardy souls lingering still in the fast vanishing

⁷ Weizsäcker, *Zeit und Wissen*, p. 417. Italics added.

⁸ Weizsäcker, *Zeit und Wissen*, p. 417.

world of pre-GPS navigation.) I think I can find the way! The traffic is heavy and the going is slow, the passenger light dim. But we seem to be making good progress—until . . . we realise we are on a divided highway travelling in the wrong direction. We wait and wait for a break in the median strip, minutes ticking by, and finally make an illegal U-turn. By the time we arrive it is way past the starting time. We find a park and venture up to the door. The church is packed. A man who seems to be in the know ushers us to a seat at the very back. We slip in muttering apologies to those around. Up front in the distance, a young woman is standing at a lectern. She is speaking quietly. But it is immediately clear she has the full attention of her audience. On a screen to her left is a picture of a large dark brown bird with wings raised. It has a pinkish bill and strange white coloured legs. As the talk proceeds, we learn it is a Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*). Its home is on Lord Howe Island, 600 km east of Port Macquarie off the coast of NSW.

The speaker is Dr Jennifer Lavers from University of Tasmania. (Image 17 – JL) She has been studying sea birds in Southern Australia for many years, and particularly the shearwaters. (Image 18 – Shearwater adult) The colony on Lord Howe is the largest in the world, she says. But it has been in serious decline for more than two decades. The causes include ‘Bycatch’ (so-called) of the birds on long line fishing trawls and loss of habitat. But Lavers work concerns the plastic debris that the shearwaters ingest—mistakenly—for food.

An image goes up on the screen. (IMAGE 19 – plastic bird) It shows the skeletal remains of a juvenile shearwater. Ragged remnants of dark decaying feathers cluster around a delicate ribcage picked clean of flesh and bleached white in the sun. In the centre of this little temple of curved bones, where once the digestive tract of the bird worked its magic, lies a heap of plastic rubble – blue, red, yellow, white, green. Here you can make out the lid of a small bottle. There what looks like the cap of a biro. The rest ... well, just bits and pieces. The speaker holds up an array of snap-lock plastic bags. Even at this distance there is no mistaking it. Each bag holds a cluster of plastic trinkets, which is the detritus found in the belly of a dead shearwater bird. Numbered. Weighed. Dated. One bag, the remnants of a chick which weighed 445g when it died, amounts to 276 separate pieces of plastic, weighing 64.1g or 14.4% of the bird’s body mass. ‘That’s the equivalent of you or me eating 10 kg of plastic rubbish,’ Lavers says softly.⁹

Once ingested the plastic debris contributes to a wide range of impacts on the birds. It ‘can block or rupture the digestive tract and leak contaminants into the bird’s blood stream resulting in ulcerations, liver damage, infertility, and in many cases, death.’¹⁰ In 2005, Lavers

⁹ For a detailed report and analysis of this data see, Jennifer L. Lavers *et al.*, “Plastic ingestion by Flesh-footed Shearwaters (*Puffinus carneipes*): Implications for fledgling body condition and the accumulation of plastic-derived chemicals,” *Environmental Pollution* 187 (2014), pp. 124-129. Available at www.elsevier.com/locate/envpol.

¹⁰ Jennifer Lavers, “Seabirds as sentinels of marine health,” www.jenniferlavers.org/research/, p. 2.

found that 79% of fledgling shearwaters on Lord Howe Island had significant—meaning detrimental—levels of plastic debris in their guts. By 2014, that number had reached almost 100%. ‘It’s just so heartbreaking to go back year after year,’ she says, ‘and see the problem get worse and worse.’ And the fate of the shearwaters is a significant marker. As it goes with the shearwaters, so it goes with virtually every other sea bird of Australia.

Jennifer Lavers devotes a lot of her effort to extracting this ingested plastic from the birds in order that they survive and live their lives. (IMAGE 20 - chick)

At the end of the talk, Jennifer Lavers makes an appeal. ‘Each of us can do something about this starting now,’ she says. ‘Cut down, or cut out, your use of plastic bags. Balloons are a disaster. They’re brightly coloured. They attract attention. They completely clog the digestive systems of creatures that eat them. And they take years to break down. Be careful how you dispose of plastic toothbrushes. You’d be amazed how many end up in the digestive tracts of large birds, like the Albatross. Bottle tops are lethal. If you fish, don’t leave plastic lures or broken fishing line behind in the sea. They always go somewhere. And it’s often onto or into the bodies of fish or seals or dolphins or birds. The ocean is drowning in plastic. Don’t make it worse.’

As it goes with the shearwaters, so it goes with every other seabird in Australia, says Jennifer Lavers. But more than that. As it goes with the shearwaters so it goes with the ocean as a whole. According to a recent study by the World Economic Forum, that means in ‘a business-as-usual scenario, the ocean is expected to contain 1 tonne of plastic for every 3 tonnes of fish by 2025, and by 2050, more plastic than fish (by weight).’¹¹ More plastic than fish?

A hammer blow to the Pietà?

Delivered by us?

[G] Act IV: the star jump (Image 21 – title)

In act 2 of our little drama we met the physicist/philosopher, Carl von Weizsäcker, who argued that the call of the beauty in the world is the call of ‘that harmony without which we cannot live.’ But can we go one step further?

I am standing on a beautiful beach (Image 22 – Tathra beach) musing on the meaning of life, as one does as a septuagenarian in such circumstances. All of a sudden a little girl, four or five at the most, appears in front of me. Her back is toward me as she faces out to sea. A wave breaks in front of her and foaming water gushes over her feet. She squeals in delight. The wave retreats. As it does, she performs a perfect star-jump; (Image 23 – star jump) arms

¹¹ *The New Plastics Economy*, p. 7. See also Jennifer L. Lavers *et al*, ‘Plastic Ingestion by fish in the Southern Hemisphere: A baseline study and review of methods’, Article in press, *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2016), available at www.elsevier.com/locate/marpolbul, p. 1.

and hands stretched outward, legs and feet off the ground and splayed outwards to mimic her arms. She runs into the waves, splashing and calling, turning round and around, flinging spray over herself and others nearby. She seems to know exactly what to do. And watching, I wonder at her capacity to be seized by such joy. She has a living connection with the ocean I seem to have lost. If ever I had it.

What is going on here? Wonder is the beginning of philosophy, Plato said. And philosophy is the love of wisdom. The little girl by the sea knew wonder. You couldn't possibly miss it. Did she have wisdom too? Insight and understanding that eluded me? Looking at her from my great age, there is not much doubt. She did.

In what does that wisdom consist? (Image 24 – children in surf) And why do I note it with a kind of nostalgic envy? The child meets the world with uninhibited immediacy. She is not thinking of what needs to be done for lunch, or whether the ASX remains 'volatile'. The ruminations an adult behind her are of no slightest concern. She is caught in a moment of delight that absorbs her completely. She leaps to embrace what the beach has to offer. And is dazzled and delighted by what she receives. Spontaneously she gives voice to her joy in yelps of laughter and shouts of glee.

As we grow older, it seems, we lose this natural sense of the immediate and amazing 'otherness' of things, and the generosity with which they offer themselves to us. Familiarity displaces wonder. The practical demands of living, and our habitual ways of responding to experience, crowd out an intimate sense of astonishment at the strange thereness of the world. A child's jump by the water's edge awakens a dim echo within me. Such moments are not childish, but revelatory. They are 'a genuine if tantalizingly brief glimpse into an inexhaustibly profound truth about reality.'¹² But what is that for us adults?

Immanuel Kant, they say, is the philosopher for grown-ups par excellence. He is all for humanity 'come of age'. Traditional authority—religious, political, intellectual—is to be cross examined vigorously in the court of experience and reason. 'Think for yourself!' is his slogan. In a remarkable passage, Kant comes close to finding words which uncover what lies hidden in the gesture of a little girl leaping with delight in the waves of the sea. This matter, which a child can give such brilliant expression to, is, Kant believes, a matter which belongs to all ages and possibly to all cultures, religions and philosophies. It touches the human condition per se. And yet it encapsulates a mystery that defies any language that attempts to grasp it. (Image 25 – text) – this is a bit of a philosophical mouthful, and Herr Kant isn't known for his immediately lucid and accessible style of speech, nor does he have our 21st century sensitivity for inclusive language, but hang in there, he does have something significant to say!

¹² David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 90. Pages 87-94 are a brilliant analysis of the experience of childlike wonder at the world. The whole of chapter two (pp. 84-151) spells out powerfully some of the philosophical and theological implications of this experience.

...the consideration of the profound wisdom of divine creation in the smallest things and of its majesty in the great whole, such as was indeed available to human beings in the past but in more recent times has widened into the widest admiration—this consideration not only has such a power as to transport the mind into that sinking feeling called adoration, in which the human being is as it were nothing in his own eyes, but is also, with respect to the human moral determination, such a soul-elevating power, that in comparison words, even if they were those of King David in prayer ..., would have to vanish as empty sound, because the feeling arising from such a vision of the hand of God is inexpressible.¹³

Does the beauty of the world say adieu?

Kant in his philosopher's roundabout way answers 'yes'. The grandeur of the world leads us to 'a vision of the hand of God'. This way of putting it raises questions in our secular times, of course. And they need to be addressed. But not here. For the moment, it is enough to note the disposition that Kant identifies as fitting for human beings when they confront the world around and within. The incredible, living, dynamic cohesion, both in the tiniest details ('smallest things' - *26) and in the majestic scale ('great whole' - *27) of the universe, has been intuited by people since time immemorial.

In more recent times, with the astonishing explorations of science, this wondering awareness, Kant asserts, has been informed, deepened and amplified immeasurably ('widened into the widest admiration' - *28). The immediate sense of the 'great whole' in the 'smallest things', and the 'smallest things' in 'the great whole', if given due attention ('consideration' - *29), draws us forcefully ('such a power to transport us' - *30) towards a strange ambivalent sentiment. On the one hand, there arises a humble feeling of our own insignificance in the face of grandeur ('nothing in his own eyes' - *31). On the other, an exultation of being ('soul-elevating power' - *32) that seizes us by the throat, rendering us speechless (words – 'even ... those of King David in prayer ... vanish as empty' - *33). Isn't this the adult's star jump?

Kant calls this sentiment 'adoration'. Intriguingly, he describes it as 'that sinking feeling' - *34. This is a fascinating image, if at first sight counter-intuitive. Isn't adoration essentially an elevation, an uplift of spirit, not a deflation or descent? Yes. And Kant notes carefully its 'soul-elevating power'. But it is not sinking as opposed to rising that is at issue here. It is sinking as in being inundated, overwhelmed or swamped by the intensity of the situation. Adoration is a flooding experience. At once both uplifting (I am a part of this great whole) and humbling (I am nothing in comparison). Exactly this tension creates the liquid

¹³ Immanuel Kant, 'Religion in the Boundaries of Mere Reason,' in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 212 (emphasis in the original). Cited in Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: the Deconstruction of Christianity II*, trans. John McKeane (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p.16.

turbulence of spirit Kant calls adoration; a turbulence which, at times, threatens to carry us away in its flood.

This, or something like it, is what the child knows and I have forgotten. Andrew Harvey, the mystic theologian and activist, believes such forgetfulness is extracting a deadly price in our time. ‘There is a worldwide famine of adoration, and we are all visibly dying in it’, he says.¹⁴ To put it another way, wonder-blindness, a lack of profound respect and love toward the ‘great whole’ and the ‘smallest things’, is as big a danger to the future of the planet as unbridled commitment to growth without limit and consumption without sustainability. They are two sides of the same coin. (Image 34, 35, 36, 37 – Pietà and sea)

If we do not see and love beauty, we will probably find it easy enough to live with defacement and destruction. If we don’t know reverence and respect, there is a good chance we won’t recognize profanity when it comes along. If we have no feeling for wonder, it is more than likely we won’t feel grief at its loss. Such deadness of heart is almost unthinkable in relation to the Michelangelo’s sculpture. We feel it in the gut. But in Harvey’s ‘famine of adoration’ many of we moderns do not see or feel the ‘plastic ocean’ as a hammer against the face of the Pietà. Adoration is a flooding disposition which loves beauty, cultivates respect and rejoices in wonder. In our noisy, anxious, violent, consumption-driven world it is in short supply.

The destructive attack on the integrity of creation calls for a response. It needs to take many forms, of course. One of those forms, we feel, is the urgent need to bear witness to what we might call the iconic or sacramental reality of this world, our home. The call to make space for, and to bless, the welling up of wonder, even adoration, in our lives. The call to open ourselves to the grace of the more-than-human-world. The call to take arms against the immense suffering we are presently causing to bird and fish, to tree and ocean.

If we believe the beauty of the world really does—or even might—say adieu, let us bear witness in our society to this suffering grandeur in our words and our deeds, our art and our songs, our politics and our philosophy.

Jan Morgan & Graeme Garrett

¹⁴ Andrew Harvey, *The Return of the Mother*, p. 169.