

## A Political Theology of Nature

This book argues that the modern separation of humanity from nature can be traced to the displacement of the triune God. Locating the source of our current ecological crisis in this separation, Peter Scott argues that it can be healed only within theology, through a revival of a Trinitarian doctrine of creation interacting with political philosophies of ecology. Drawing insights from deep ecology, ecofeminism, and social and socialist ecologies, Scott proposes a common realm of God, nature and humanity. Both Trinitarian and political, the theology of this common realm is worked out by reference to Christ and Spirit. Christ's resurrection is presented as the liberation and renewal of ecological relations in nature and society, the movement of the Holy Spirit is understood as the renewal of fellowship between humanity and nature through ecological democracy, and the eucharist is proposed as the principal political resource Christianity offers for an ecological age.

PETER SCOTT is Senior Lecturer in Theology in the Department of Theology & Religious Studies at the University of Gloucestershire. His previous publications include *Theology, Ideology and Liberation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) and the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (co-editor, 2003).

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# A Political Theology of Nature

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PETER SCOTT



Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-0-521-64165-4 — A Political Theology of Nature  
Peter Scott  
Frontmatter  
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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521641654](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521641654)

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First published 2003

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-0-521-64165-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-52717-0 Paperback

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*For Harry Jonathan and Esther Katelyn, in great hope*

Boundless intemperance / In nature is a tyranny.

MACBETH ACT IV, SCENE III

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## *Preface*

Always I have linked Christian living with issues of power, theological existence with politics. Even when I have struggled with my baptism – and I have struggled quite a lot! – the shaping power of my religious formation has always included a political aspect, although I have changed my mind on the nature of that politics. This book encompasses these interests: it offers a theology of living before and from the triune God within the politics of ecology. I do not know whether sufficient time remains to overcome the injustices in our ecological relations with nature. Yet while there is still life in us, we keep on. That seems right and hopeful.

This book has been a long time in the writing. Through this process I have accrued many debts. I am glad to acknowledge these here.

First, I must thank my academic home through this period in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Gloucestershire. I am especially grateful for the granting of several sabbaticals and the support of Stanley Rudman and Fred Hughes (past and present Heads of Department). The able administrative assistance of Patricia Downes and Annie Brocklehurst has given me much needed time for this research. Library staff, including Maggie Wheel and Sue Mills, have graciously responded to many requests for information. In the closing stages of the project, Scott Jordan and Chris Evans furnished vital computing support. Throughout this period, I have taught courses in ecological and political theology: I thank those students who studied this material with me for their theological seriousness. Perhaps some of their questions as to ‘what I think’ are answered here. Not least I thank members of the Theology Reading Group who remind me of the importance in theology of learning in community.



Sabbaticals in 1996 and 1998 were spent in the extraordinarily rich and creative environment of the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, where I learned so much. I am grateful to the Centre's Director, Wallace M. Alston, and its Senior Scholar for Research, Robert Jenson, for encouragement and support. Through these periods members of the Centre made formative contributions to this project, including: Don Browning, Torrance Kirby, Bill Lazareth, Nancy Duff, George Hunsinger, Tony Ugolnik, Peter Ochs, Niels Henrik Gregersen, Victor Nuovo, Avihu Zakai, David Tracy, Frank Clooney, George Newlands, Wentzel van Huyssteen, Miroslav Volf and Rusty Reno. Our stays at the Centre were greatly enhanced by the active kindness of Mary Beth Lewis, Maureen Montgomery, Linda Sheldon, Cecelio Orantes and Kathi Morley.

I owe a considerable debt to those friends and colleagues who have read and commented on various chapters and whose contributions have greatly improved the book. Here I thank Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bill Cavanaugh, Melissa Raphael and Elaine Graham. I am very grateful one more time to my friend, Al McFadyen, for many arresting conversations, some of these not immediately theological. Debts of a more general kind I also have: to Denys Turner, who talked through with me some of my early ideas; to Luco van den Brom for an important conversation; and to Victor Nuovo and Avi Zakai who give me confidence where none exists. For theological-moral support and timely interventions I thank Peter Selby and, once more, Niels Gregersen.

Cambridge University Press, through Alex Wright, Ruth Parr and Kevin Taylor, has been a wonderfully efficient publisher. I thank Paul Northup for kindly compiling the bibliography at short notice and Gillian Maude for her careful copy-editing. The series editors, Colin Gunton and Daniel Hardy, have read the entire manuscript and I am grateful to them for their feedback and encouragement. Special thanks must go to the latter: years ago Dan Hardy read a brief prospectus for the book and responded almost immediately with a strong recommendation to pursue the ideas now presented here.

A paper written for the 1999 meeting of the Society for the Study of Theology, published as 'The Future of Creation: Ecology and Eschatology,' in David Fergusson and Marcel Sarot (eds.), *The Future as God's Gift* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) represents a preliminary version of part of the present work. Chapters 7 and 8 are revised and greatly expanded construals of sections of this essay. I thank the Society for the invitation to present a plenary paper. Furthermore, I am grateful

to Celia Deane-Drummond and Paul Murray for invitations to speak at various colloquia and conferences. Preparing for these has been the occasion of important moves along my cognitive path.

To my wife, Amanda Pitt, I owe more than my words can say. ‘I am asham’d: does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it?’ (*The Winter’s Tale* Act V, Scene III). And, further, I am grateful to my parents, Anne and Michael Scott, for their continued interest in my work and touching willingness to read every word of my theological prose.

When I first began work on this project neither of our dear children, Harry and Esther, had been born. So the book has been written through the many changes that parenthood brings and has, I hope, been improved by them. One of my deepest fears is that the ecological issues discussed through this book will barely be addressed by their parents’ generation. If they ever ask me what I did through this period, I shall say that I brought them to Sunday School and wrote this book. I hope that they find wisdom in both. To them this book is dedicated, with measureless love.