“The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God.”
Psalm 104:21 (ESV)

Fear, Death and Doxology

Rocky Mt. Local Chapter
September 13, 2021

John R. Wood, Interim Executive Director

With thanks to my colleagues
Darcy Visscher - Doug Harink
1. Counter-intuitive
   “You have heard it said …”

2. Social Psychologists & Ecologists
   “Fear makes a difference”

3. Academic Theologians
   “Humans were always mortal”
Our Story Tonight

What will this view do for us?
Familiar Fear

Luke Skywalker

“I’m not afraid” …
“You will be. You will be!”
Familiar Fear

Luke Skywalker

“I’m not afraid” …
“You will be. You will be!”

“We have nothing to fear except fear itself”
Luke Skywalker
“... I’m not afraid” ...
“... You will be. You will be!”

“We have nothing to fear except fear itself”

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom”
Death is a powerful influence on our behavior and judgement.

Death Salience (awareness) shapes attitudes, arouses us to action.
Terror Management Theory

Just talking about death changes our judgements
Fear in Ecology

We see adaptations to fear and to predation
Depend upon Chance and Learning & Behavior

Startle-response
Warning Coloration

Camouflage
Hiding in Plain Sight
Scared to death?
Or a normal part of life?

Direct Effects
Mortality

Indirect Effects
Behavior
Stress
Non - Lethal (or Non-Consumptive) Effects
Cortisol – Good, Bad and Necessary

(a) Short-term stress response
1. Rising blood sugar
2. Blood pressure increase
3. Faster breathing
4. Faster metabolism
5. Increased attention
6. Slower digestion
7. Lower kidney function

(b) Long-term stress response
1. High blood volume
2. High blood pressure
3. Processing of proteins and fats to glucose
4. High blood sugar levels
5. Immunosuppression
6. Cardiovascular disease
7. Decreased production of sex hormones
8. Kidney failure
Complex Consequences of Risk in a Predator-Prey Community

Life without a predator

Life Exp. = 5.5 Years
Offspring = 2

DeWitt, Schuler, Visscher & Thiel (2017)
Fisher Reintroduced to Wisconsin

Increasing Risk of Predation

Life without a predator

Life Exp. = 5.5 Years
Offspring = 2

Life with a predator

Life Exp. = 3.2 Years
Offspring = < 1

DeWitt, Schuler, Visscher & Thiel (2017)
Nutritional State Reveals Complex Consequences of Risk
Fear, Death and Doxology

Outline

The Phenomenology of Death
Life and the Necessity of Death
Programed Cell Death
What is Ecological Death?

Carolus Linnaeus

A “Thought Experiment” about a world without death
The Biological Necessity of Death

Discovery of Programmed Cell Death

Arrows indicate 3 cells undergoing apoptosis (PCD)

Robert Horvitz with Caenorhabditis elegans
2002 Nobel Prize
The Vitality of Death PCD – Shapes Organisms

Sculpting

Deleting Structures

Adjusting Cell Numbers

Eliminating Dangerous or Injured Cells

PCD & Lace Plant
From Programmed Cell Death to the Biosphere

Cells to Atmosphere

Plankton Bloom

Connecting the smallest life forms to biosphere scale processes
Fear, Death and The Wages of Sin

Traditional View of
“Death is not part of God’s perfect will for man …”
Davies, Zondervan (1978)

Sin - The Source of Fear and Death?
or
Death - The Source of Sin?
(Or the “fear of death” results in sin)
Death and “The Fall in the Lost World of Genesis”

“All of this [ecology] indicates clearly that death did exist in the pre-Fall world …”

“Human resistance to death was not the result of immortal bodies. No, the reason we were not subject to death was because the antidote [to our mortality] had been provided …”

[The tree of Life – Gen. 3]

Fear, Death and Doxology
Outline

The Phenomenology of Doxology

Doxa – and the “Hospitality of God

Three-eyed Seeing (C. Southgate, 2019)

1. Gloria mundi – Gift of land/creature praise
2. Gloria crucis – Gift of incarnation/self-sacrifice
3. Gloria excelsis – Eschatological song of new
The Doxology

“The term doxa, for the divine glory of God”

Suffering and death are shaping the Creation

“Barth suggests that the world praises God most intensely in what he called its ‘shadow side’”

“The world is not in any sense a simple place of beneficence it is full of beauty, but also of harshness.”

Theology in a Suffering World: Glory and Longing.
Christopher Southgate (2019)
Ecological Applications to Creation Care

1st – Biotic death present from the beginning

Genesis 1

Are fruitfulness and death twins in Creation?
The Galileo Dilemma – Again?

Re-reading Genesis 1
vs. 20 - 25

Vs. 20 - Swarm with living beings …
Vs. 21 - God created the great sea-serpents …
Vs. 25 - All crawling things of the soil …

Vs. 31 - Tov, Tov, Tov Meod!

Physical Death
Ecological Applications to Creation Care

1\textsuperscript{st} – Biotic death present from the beginning

2\textsuperscript{nd} – Land is a gift that includes death & doxa
Physical Death
Ecological Applications to Creation Care

1st – Biotic death present from the beginning

2nd – Land is a gift that includes death

3rd – Flourishing depends upon endings

The pruning metaphor
Physical Death
Ecological Applications to Creation Care

1st – Biotic death present from the beginning

2nd – Land is a gift that includes death

3rd – Flourishing depends upon endings

The pruning metaphor

This?
Physical Death
Ecological Applications to Creation Care

1<sup>st</sup> – Biotic death present from the beginning

2<sup>nd</sup> – Land is a gift that includes death

3<sup>rd</sup> – Flourishing depends upon endings

The pruning metaphor

Or This?
Physical Death
Ecological Applications to Creation Care

1st – Biotic death present from the beginning

2nd – Land is a gift that includes death

3rd – Flourishing depends upon endings

4th – Groaning of creation is not primarily from physical death, but from the dislocation of relationships caused by human sin.
Unlikely Prophets of Our Time

Temple Grandin (2010)
Dead Cow - “Where did it go?”

Greta Thunberg (2019)
Climate Disaster - “How dare you?”
1st – Biotic death present from the beginning
2nd – Land is a gift that includes death
3rd – Flourishing depends upon endings
4th – Groaning of creation is not primarily from physical death, but from the dislocation of relationships caused by human sin.
5th – Doxa and reflection invokes longing
Fear, Death and Doxology
What Finishing Well Looks Like

Rev. John Bonham and Grandson Conner Cantelon
A Good Death - From: John Bonham

To his daughter Judi; September 2016.

“I now have two reservations for my next two residences.

Today it was confirmed that there is a hospice room now reserved for me at the General Hospital, ninth floor. Ruth went and inspected it ... she is pleased with the facility, but not the parking. MY last reservation was made for me by our sovereign electing God in eternity past, purchased for me by our Saviour on His cross and confirmed to me by the gift of the Holy Spirit at the moment of my conversion and reconfirmed thousands of times in the years of my adulthood. It is glorious, eternal, colourful, musical, ALIVE, beyond our imagination, fulfilling all of our intellectual, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual capacities. The journey goes on, for how long ...?”

Love John

He died on December 22, 2016.
Go now in peace
Preaching the good news to all creation.

Embracing “Sister Death”  

St Francis of Assisi
Contemporary Christian Thinking on Death?

Christian thinking on death in this pandemic … alternately embracing and avoiding
The Freshman’s Dilemma

Erwin Schrödinger

What is Life?

“… not some mystical force…”

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them” …

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14
Why, indeed, have you forsaken me?

*Descensus Christi ad Inferos*, “The descent of Christ into hell"
The Chora Church, Istanbul, c. 1315  
(public domain)
“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

Hebrews 9:27-28
Christian Thinking on Death

Christian thinking on death …
alternately embracing and avoiding

13th Century Tame Death
15th Century Black Death
20th Century Denial of Death