Blue Disciple: A Christian Call for the Sea in Peril

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Abstract

This article offers the notion of ‘blue disciple’ as a constructive concept that might encourage and enlarge Christian engagements in dealing with the contemporary marine ecological crisis. I start with a discussion on the sea in Christian ecological discourse and practice. Then, I reread Jesus’ call for the four Galilean fishermen in Mark 1:16–20 to construct this idea of a blue disciple navigated by the community of creation paradigm. The blue disciple insists that engaging in efforts to overcome the marine ecological crisis in order to let the sea and its creatures flourish is a Christian call. Christian churches are, thus, invited to participate in a blue discipleship.

Keywords

1 Introduction

The marine ecological crisis has become a significant and public concern. Destructive fishing methods, overfishing, pollution (plastic, oil, and chemical), the impacts of anthropogenic climate change and emissions of greenhouse gases, are severe threats to the life of this blue planet. Given that the sea, claims Sylvia Earle, is the cornerstone of life on earth,1 the ecological crisis at sea

negatively affects sea creatures and all that depends on the sea for food, livelihood and oxygen. Among them are coral reefs which have suffered because of the sea’s warming and acidification, and the poor people in coastal areas who suffer more, although they are arguably less responsible for that crisis given their comparatively benign use of traditional fishing equipment to collect seafood during the low tide.

Despite recent efforts to tackle the crisis, global concern over plastic pollution and destructive fishing methods like trawling, as examples, continues to grow. This fact indicates that more efforts to tackle the crisis are necessary. Collaboration from all stakeholders, including religious groups and civil society, are demanded to make a massive movement for more significant impacts. The engagement of Christian churches and Christians in such collaboration is imperative. Christian leaders have already addressed the ecological crisis at sea, and such expressions of concern may potentially have positive impacts on marine conservation.

That potential needs to be enlarged to reach Christians at all levels to be encouraged to engage more actively, however. Societal change is crucial to deal with plastic pollution at sea. Political acts and the involvement of civil society including local fishing communities in appropriate ways are decisive to tackle destructive fishing practices. For Christian institutions and people to engage, theological reflection concerning the sea in the context of ecological crisis is of importance.

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8 See Kandziora et al. who insist that ‘societal change’ is required to tackle the sea pollution by marine debris (‘The Important Role of Marine Debris Network’, 657.).
This article aims to boost that potential by offering the idea of a ‘blue disciple’ as a theological concept insisting that engaging in efforts to overcome the marine ecological crisis is a Christian calling. I will first discuss the sea in Christian ecological discourse and practice. Then, I will offer a rereading of Jesus’ calling of the first four disciples in Mark 1:16–20 and its significance in order to construct the concept of blue disciple navigated by the community of creation paradigm in the fourth part of this article. The conclusion will be an invitation for Christian churches to develop a blue discipleship.

2 The Sea in Christian Ecological Discourse and Practice

Compared with the land, the sea does not have a significant place in Christianity, neither in its ecological discourse nor its praxis. The green, which portrays the land-based perspective of a sustainable earth, has dominated not only ecological thinking but also Christian theological responses to ecological crisis: that is despite two-thirds of this planet is blue and the sea is not an exception to that crisis.11 Such domination is evident in ecotheological conceptions such as green theology, green eucharist, green spirit, and so on. It could also be easily found in the cover of two more recent ecotheological books, Eco-Theology: Essays in Honour of Sigurd Bergmann,12 and Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation. Of course, one should not judge a book from its cover. In fact, the sea is not excluded from the scope and concern of those books. Richard Bauckham, for instance, stresses the ecological crisis at sea in his recent essay’s introduction in Ecotheology: A Christian Conversation. Jay McDaniel, also, presents his ‘green grace’ as multicoloured that comprises the brown house cat, blue sea, yellow fire and green grass.15 Yet, why should it

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11 I am grateful to Peter Manley Scott for an insightful conversation with him on this issue.


be green? The domination of the green displays a strong impression of land-based perspective that shapes readers’ imagination of ecotheology as identically green. The land-based perspective, acknowledges Bauckham, hinders them from noticing the crisis at sea,¹⁶ let alone constructing ecotheological reflections of the sea which derive from oceanic or sea-based perspectives, not land-based ones.

In church ministry, the green has become the central theme of church engagements with ecological issues. The greening church, greening leadership, greening worship and greening mission are but a few examples that speak of Church ecological praxis.¹⁷ A staggering example of the sea’s inferiority is the Ten Commandments of Food. a form of Food for Life Campaign by the World Council of Churches. The Ten Commandments of Food speaks of food, those who provide food and the place where the food comes from. Unfortunately, this vital campaign neglects the sea as a food source for the world population and the primary source of food and nutrition for the people whose life depends on the sea.¹⁸ The Ten Commandments of Food is green, a land-based ecological practice of Christian churches.

Again, to mention those facts above does not necessarily mean that Christianity completely fails to engage with marine ecological issues. A remarkable work of Meric Srokosz and Rebecca Watson, Blue Planet Blue God: the Bible and the Sea, also focuses on clarifying what the Bible says of the sea and its significances to deal with the marine ecological crisis.¹⁹ Edmund Newell also contributes to this stream with his The Sacramental Sea in which he presents a long history of the Christian encounter with the sea in diverse ways to encourage Christians to respect and treat the sea with reverence. Meanwhile, the Christian Church of Pacific Grove performs the practical form with a startling program, The Blue Theology Mission Station.²⁰ However, these examples are nothing compared to green’s domination globally. The sea, the blue,²¹ is

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¹⁶ See, Bauckham, ‘Being Human’, p. 16.
situated as inferior to the land, the green, in Christian engagement with ecological crisis.

Given that the sea is created and valued as good by God, and is ecologically decisive for the life of inhabitants of the blue planet, Christianity needs to display its blue hues alongside the green and other colours that speak of diverse ecological realities. As Nancy M. Victorin-Vangerud contends, if we believe that God’s oikos includes the ocean, greening theology is not enough. A blue-green oikoumene is required for a sustainable household of God.22 Furthermore, Christian scripture and tradition does not always portray the sea in ways that encourage Christians to care for the sea. As the sea is identified with the mythical marine chaos which threatens God’s creation, Catherine Keller found Christian teaching of eschaton which derives from a tehomophobic and anthropocentric reading of the Apocalypse in Revelation 21:1–4 – ‘the sea was no more’ – endangers the sea as it can lead to what she calls ‘a literalization of the apocalyptic tehmicide’. In this apocalypse, the marine ecological crisis should not be a problem as it is fulfilling Christian hope, the annihilation of evil and the renewal of creation.23 Therefore, Christianity needs to pay much more attention to the sea, especially in the context of the marine ecological crisis. The blue hues should scatter in Christian ecological discourse in the mode of reusing, recycling and renewing, to use Keller’s terms,24 biblical narratives to generate concepts that shape Christians’ blue imagination and encourage them to be sea-friendly.

In that regard, the extensive work of Srokosz and Watson is worth noting as they do not only address what Christian scripture says about the sea but also construct blue concepts and terms. The oceanographer and biblical scholar found that Christian biblical scholars have not provided a comprehensive picture of the sea as portrayed in the Bible.25 Their work aims to deal with that situation. They succeed in giving readings and fresh discussions on the biblical accounts of the sea that could encourage Christians to care for the sea and participate in efforts to overcome the marine ecological crisis. They contend that ‘[i]f we truly believe that God created and values the oceans, we should make this our concern too’.26 Supported by the scientific knowledge of marine life and its crisis, they construct theological concepts and practices with Blue Planet, Blue God and Blue People as the key terms. They assert that

24 Ibid., 187.
26 Ibid., p. 234.
the significance of the sea for our planet (Blue Planet) because of God who creates and reigns over it (Blue God) demands us to live in awe and wonder of the sea and its creatures, embracing the existence and natural dynamics of the sea, and treating the sea according to God’s will (Blue People). As the blue people, we should have ‘concern for the welfare of the sea and its creatures, for our fellow human beings, and for the planet as a whole’. That concern should be embodied in manifold actions as our response to God’s concern for the whole creation. Doing nothing is the same as destroying God’s good creation.

Of course, the work of Srokosz and Watson is not flawless, but their endeavour should be a characteristic of Christianity today to display Christianity as not only green but also blue. If, because of its too important role, ecotheology should animate all Christian theology, as David Clough suggests, and the whole life and praxis of Christian churches, as Conradie urges, then blue must be intrinsic to that movement. It is not only for Christian communities in coastal areas but also for those in inland regions as they could impact and be impacted by the sea.

For displaying Christian blue hues, readings of biblical accounts and constructing theological reflections of the sea, and their implications for marine life are of importance. Navigated by this spirit and the approach of Srokosz and Watson, the following discussions attempt to reread and reflect on Jesus’ calling of the four fishers of Galilee in the Gospel of Mark in light of today’s marine ecological crisis. With that, I expect to make Christians’ engagement in the marine crisis more imperative. Not only because they believe that God creates and values the sea, as Srokosz and Watson insist, Christians actively engage in tackling the ecological crisis at sea also because that is what Jesus commands them to do. That is their identity as Jesus’ disciples, their mission.

3 Revisiting ‘Follow Me’ as Christian Calling in Mark 1:16–20

Jesus’ calling of the four Galilean fishers is a vital narrative in Christian understandings of discipleship. ‘Follow me’ is a prominent theme in Christian faith; consider the song ‘I have decided to follow Jesus’, which is originally from India

27 Ibid., pp. 224–234.
28 Ibid., p. 231.
but has travelled throughout the world and is sung in numerous languages. In resonance with this song is David Platt’s influential book, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live*. Platt even goes further, implying that such a call requires separation of the fishers from their daily world as they were called to leave behind their professions, dreams, family, and friends.

Both the song and Platt’s book do not capture the comprehensive aspects of that call, however. The chorus’ stress on individual and volitional response to Jesus, argues F. Scott Spencer, outshines the social and imperial dimensions of discipleship as emphasised especially by the synoptic gospels. Studies on the social, economic and political contexts in the gospels, especially Mark, make it implausible to overlook the dimensions raised by Spencer. Owing to this, Spencer’s critique is also relevant to Platt’s which regards that call as limited to the spiritual dimension in a narrow sense – separated from physical ones – namely the salvation of soul. For Spencer, ‘follow me’ in the synoptic gospels is an imperious call for the Kingdom of God. That call challenges the Roman-Galilean Empire exploitative system of the industrial fishery.

To go further than Spencer whose scope is limited to fishers, Jesus’ call could be read as reaching out to the marine ecological issue that is relevant to our contemporary crisis at sea. Jesus calls the four fishermen of Galilee not to leave their fishing world – their fellow fishermen and the Sea of Galilee. They are summoned to bring and embody the Good News into that world, in which their fellow fishermen are likewise called and the Sea of Galilee can always express its intrinsic value by feeding all people that need food to live. They are

33 Ibid.
35 Spencer, “Follow Me”.
37 See Platt’s discussion on that in chapter 8, paragraphs 2–3, of his book.
39 This water body is actually a lake, but in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and John – and only them (Newell, *The Sacramental Sea*, pp. 25–6.) – it is consistently called sea (*thalassa*).
called to face that fishing world as ‘transformed persons,’ as those who live in and proclaim God’s love for all in words and deeds. For this claim, the Roman imperial system in the Galilean fishing industry and Jesus’ resistance to it as framed by Mark’s gospel will be discussed.

3.1 The Exploitative Roman Imperial System in the Galilean Fishing Industry

Spencer’s claim regarding the exploitative fishing industry of the Roman Empire system anchors primarily on the work of K. C. Hanson. In his article, ‘The Galilean Fishing Economy and the Jesus Tradition,’ Hanson specifically addresses the Galilean fishing enterprise under Roman control, conducted by Herod Antipas, a Roman client-king. As regulated by the Roman system, taxes and fishing leases made Galilean fishing, an essential industry, beneficial to the emperor and local elites, but exploitative and oppressive to the fishermen. Raimo Hakola challenges Hanson’s claim by arguing that, instead of being exploited and oppressed, the Galilean fishermen benefited from the development of the fishing industry in Galilee.

Firstly, Hakola denies Hanson’s argument that fishing leases were practised in the Galilean fishing industry. Hakola claims that the empire did not regulate fishing rights in the Sea of Galilee: it is his conviction that Hanson’s point of departure, Michael Rostovtseff’s conclusions in his *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, is inadequate to the Roman world. Recent scholars assert that Rostovtseff’s conclusion, which derives from his research on Ptolemaic Egyptian papyrus documents saying that the state regulates fishing leases, cannot be generalised to Roman imperial fishing. Shreds of evidence show that fishing rights were required for inland lakes, ponds, coastal lagoons and even rivers occasionally because those water bodies were subjected to the ownership of state, temple or private citizens. Yet, that regulation did not apply to the open sea since the category of fish was regarded as *res nullius*, the property of no one, from the classical Greek period to Byzantine

43 Ibid., 121.
44 Ibid., 122.
emperors. Considering that there is no evidence of the Sea of Galilee as subjected to ownership and that the size of Galilee's inland water is comparable to the open sea, Hakola concludes that there were no such fishing regulations that oppressed the Galilean fishermen.

Secondly, Hakola argues that the custom house in Capernaum and the increasing development of the fish market in Magdala indicate the economic boost of those involved in that circumstance: that boost would include the local fishermen. That economic increase is signified by the existence of market officials (agoranomoi) as supported by the discovery of lead weights. Hakola asserts that agoranomoi were responsible for dealing with the price of fish by which the consumers were protected from abuses by fish retailers and excessive prices, and the consumers with limited means could buy small fish. This kind of regulation, argues Hakola, implies that the market was stable and predictable, and, therefore, both fish suppliers and consumers benefited. Accordingly, although he acknowledges that taxes were regulated, Hakola suggests that the Galilean fishermen were not exploited and oppressed: they were beneficiaries of that fishing enterprise.

More recent studies support Hanson's claim, however. With regards to fishing regulation, John S. Kloppenborg disagrees with Hakola concerning fishing rights. He contends that the inland water of Galilee is not analogous to the open sea. This is because the much larger size Moeris Lake in Fayûm (ranging from 1270–1700 km² compared to 166.7 km² of Lake Galilee), as indicated by documentary papyri, was regulated in ways that ‘fishing rights were held by individuals and the state, sold, inherited, and guarded jealously’ in the Roman world (P.Oxy XLVI 3267 (37–41 CE)). Although the Galilean fishers were not like those in Egypt in all respects, argues Kloppenborg, it is difficult to argue that Galilee’s fishing industry was free from regulation. Herod Antipas and Herod Philip, or large landowners, presumably had fishing rights and leased them to the Galilean fishers. In fact, Hakola acknowledges that the possibility

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 122–4.
47 Ibid., 126.
48 Ibid., 128.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 126.
51 Ibid., 128.
53 Ibid., 595.
for the state to have any interest in the Galilean fishermen and interfere with their business remains open.54

Concerning exploitation and oppression, Kloppenborg’s insight is similar to Hakola’s as they assert that the Galilean fishers were not categorised as the poorest. Hakola argues that some fishermen in small rural villages like Capernaum had a modest standard of living and some fishermen’s families were able to gain a moderate livelihood.55 Kloppenborg suggests that the Galilean fishermen were in the ‘above-subsistence level’ though indeed not ‘upper class’.56 However, none of them clarifies whether or not such modest and moderate living levels are normal in the sense that they are the standard of prosperous living. Robert J. Myles and Michael Kok, whose study on this topic is the most recent, succinctly say,57

[t]he suggestion that the fishermen were ‘middle-class’ or ‘relatively prosperous’ immediately raises the question: relative or middle to what? Certainly, when compared to many slaves and the expendable population that was surplus to the demands for labour, one could suppose that fishermen were relatively prosperous. But in terms of their placement within the broader class struggle of an agrarian society, in which the overwhelming majority of the population, including independent producers like fishermen and artisans, lived below, at, or moderately above subsistence level, such comparisons seem less helpful.

In fact, Hakola himself recognises that according to archaeological evidence, a huge economic disparity existed between Magdala and other rural villages surrounding the Sea of Galilee, which implies that some people enjoyed upper-class living;58 others had to accept a lower status from the Galilean fishing industry as a result of their submission to Roman control.59 Also, if the ordinary people in Magdala could gain an upper-class living, how much higher was the living standard of the client kings and local elites? In Josephus’ reports, as Hanson cites, Augustus received 1000 talents (six million denarii) and his wife, Julia, received 500 talents (three million denarii) as the annual tribute from Herod the Great. Josephus also estimates that Herod Antipas, the client-king in

54 Hakola, ‘The Production and Trade of Fish’, 124, 126.
55 Ibid., p. 129.
58 Hakola, ‘The Production and Trade of Fish’, 129.
Galilee, earned 200 talents (1.2 million denarii) from his tetrarchy.\textsuperscript{60} Meanwhile, the regular income per day in the first century, as Kloppenborg asserts, ranged from about one-half a denarius to one denarius.\textsuperscript{61} Does not that massive disparity between the fishermen and ruling elites display the exploitative and oppressive system of the Roman imperial fishing industry? Alicia Batten is correct to suggest that

\[\text{while the fishers that we encounter in the gospels may not all have been starving, there is good reason to think that they were burdened by strict regulations, taxes, and tolls, only to see much of the profits fall into the hands of tax collectors and rulers'.}\textsuperscript{62}

Moreover, anchored on the discussion of the rural-urban relationship between \textit{polis} and \textit{chôra}, Myles and Kok convincingly claim that the Galilean fishers are exploited and oppressed. The Galilean fishermen were the inhabitants of a rural area, \textit{chôra} or the colonised territory outside the \textit{polis}. They were exploited by the occupying regime located in the urban environment, \textit{polis}, because the rural-countryside was set to serve the urban-city.\textsuperscript{63} Myles and Kok support this assertion with the fact that the urban-based scribal elite, who overwhelmingly produces textual evidence concerning this issue, was rarely envious of the life of the so-called ‘middling groups’ in \textit{chôra}.\textsuperscript{64} In support of this, they cite Batten who remarks that ancient

\[\text{writers such as Plautus (Rud.), Ovid (Meta. 3:583–591) and others describe the fisher’s life as impoverished and miserable. In some cases, men who fished were characterised as unmasculine, as their trade meant that they earned their keep by serving the indulgent pleasures of others, particularly rich fish eaters'.}\textsuperscript{65}

It would seem then that the Sea of Galilee is exploited and oppressed. That Roman system must have positioned the fishermen to take as much as possible from the Sea of Galilee. In this circumstance, the Sea of Galilee was forced to enrich a small number of people, the ruling elites, while the fishermen and other villagers suffer. The Sea of Galilee was managed to serve some people’s

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{61} Kloppenborg, ‘Jesus, Fishermen and Tax Collectors’, p. 597 (footnote 94).


\textsuperscript{63} Myles and Kok, ‘On the Implausibility of Identifying the Disciple’, 82.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p. 383.

\textsuperscript{65} Batten, ‘Fish Tales’, 9.
greediness. Of course, the Sea of Galilee is not meant to serve humanity according to the anthropocentric view of nature. Instead, that water body contributes to human life and the other creatures as an embodiment of its intrinsic value. What is clear here is that the Sea of Galilee itself suffered because it was prevented from giving food for all people as an embodiment of its intrinsic values.

How, then, should Jesus’ calling of the four Galilean fishers in Mark be understood in light of such an exploitative and oppressive fishing enterprise?

3.2 ‘Follow Me’ to Resist

The call is Jesus’ imperative for the Galilean fishers to face and resist that exploitative system of the fishing enterprise. As Spencer suggests, ‘follow me’ means ‘[y]ou’re working for me now, not Antipas; you’re fishing for the Kingdom of God, not the Roman-Galilean empire.’ They were called to leave behind their place as ‘employee’ in that exploitative and oppressive system. Instead, Jesus brought them into what Myles regards as ‘a new collective subject who ... goes on to antagonize beneficiaries of the exploitative classes, including those officials who, in the eyes of the Synoptic narrators, work on behalf of the elite to maintain the status quo.’

Yet, such resistance was conducted through a movement that aims to impact not only the Galilean fishing context but also all other areas under the exploitative and oppressive control of the Roman Empire. Jesus does it through discipleship in which he gathered the fishermen and the other eight, taught and demonstrated to them God’s Kingdom.

In resistance to the emperor’s claim of owning the water bodies, Jesus taught the disciples of how true lordship over the sea was expressed through the feeding of the multitude with fresh fish that were usually consumed only by the wealthy. Raj Nadella asserts that the feeding is Jesus’ challenge against the centripetal movement of resources for the ruling elites’ interests. In contrast, Jesus performed a centrifugal movement of resources. The feeding places the Galilean villagers, the multitude, as the recipients of the food for life, offered by the sea, in and through that event.

Accordingly, the work of the Galilean fishermen should benefit all people including themselves, as they do not work

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66 Spencer, ‘Follow Me’, 145.
68 Ibid., p. 132.
70 Batten, ‘Fish Tales’, pp. 5–12.
for the Roman empire, but for the Kingdom of God. The fishermen do not work to enrich a small group of people with political and economic power, but to make their and all others’ life flourish with food from the sea.

The fishermen also expand that resistance to the broader context, the Roman world. Despite their usage of the Greek word *thalassa* (sea), instead of *limne* (lake) to mention Galilee’s inland water as a keyword in their resistance, the former fishermen also have their own ways to resist. The author of Mark, who is associated with Simon Peter, for instance, arranges the feeding narrative (Mk 6:30–44) next to Herod’s banquet (Mk 6:14–29) as a displayed contradiction of the economic system between the Roman-Galilean which profits the elites and the Kingdom of God which benefits the multitudes. This arrangement is Mark’s way of demonstrating the system of the Kingdom of God performed by Jesus in the feeding narrative to resist the exploitative system of the Roman Empire.

In a different context, John also continues that resistance by demonstrating the fall of the exploitative/demonic system of the Roman Empire throughout the book of Revelation. The former Galilean fisherman proclaimed the edge of the Caesar’s lordship over the sea, in which his economic and political practices manipulated the sea to be a means and source of suffering, oppression and death. The sea was no more, death will be no more in the renewed heaven and earth, declares John, in Revelation 21:1–4. Indeed, it is not the saltwater body but the Romans’ evil manipulation of the sea that will be annihilated. That is how the former Galilean fishermen face that exploitative and oppressive fishing world. They were not called to leave their fellow fishers and the Roman exploitative fishing industry that oppressed the Galilean villagers. They were in discipleship to come back to such a world as different persons, the disciples of Jesus. ‘Follow me’ in this respect is understood as to follow Jesus’ resistance and works to embody the Kingdom of God in the social, political, and economic dimensions of the fishing enterprise in the Sea of Galilee, the Mediterranean Sea and all other water bodies under Roman control. That ‘follow me’ still applies even if the Galilean fishers were not exploited and oppressed as much as the Galilean poor villagers.

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‘Follow me’ has, therefore, blue hues. Jesus’ discipleship is blue, and it generates blue disciples.

4 Blue Disciple

The previous discussion has explicated that to follow Jesus should be understood as more than just a spiritual journey in a narrow sense, being asocial and leaving the world behind. Instead, Jesus calls and makes disciples of the Galilean fishermen to face the world, one of which is the fishing industry with its all dimensions. Yet, the discussion on how that call is clearly inclusive to ecological dimensions is essential to bring that idea into the marine ecological crisis today, given that the fishing industry is only one of many causes of the marine ecological crisis mentioned earlier in the introduction.

It is clear that, although the narrative of the call does not intentionally and explicitly speak of the current ecological crisis at sea, the ‘follow me’ in that context comprises the ecological dimension. We know precisely today that that kind of Roman system which is profit-oriented for a small number of people could be destructive to marine life, and other creatures’ life due to the vital role of the sea for the common life on earth. In fact, the anthropogenic crisis at sea cannot be separated from the social, political and economic facets. Hence, following Jesus as his call demands must directly affect marine life and all whose life relies on the sea. However, ‘follow me’ in this scheme falls on the ontological anthropocentrism as it places human interests at the centre and, then, the sea just receives the impacts of what is directed to humanity. To put it differently, Jesus’ followers should care for the sea so that the sea keeps giving food for them. Thus, the sea is situated as an object and a commodity for human interest. Therefore, an essential question is can we understand the ‘follow me’ as a call that is directed to humanity and the sea at the same time? I find the community of creation paradigm helpful to answer this question as I discuss in what follows.

In the community of creation paradigm, the sea is perceived as having vital existence and agency in the earth community’s common life not as object and commodity but subject and participant in God’s creation. As Elizabeth A. Johnson and Richard Bauckham insist, each of God’s creatures has intrinsic

value. They all are equal as co-participants in God’s creation. All of them exist in the interconnected and interdependent relationship in God’s embracing love. Based on their readings on Psalm 104, 148; Matthew 6:25–33; Job 38–41, Johnson and Bauckham assert that all created beings, not only humanity, have a particular position and role in supporting their common life. In varied interactions each member gives and receives, being significant for one another in different ways but all grounded in absolute, universal reliance on the living God for the very breath of life, Johnson contends. Humanity’s relation with other creatures, as David Atkinson suggests, is framed as that which places humanity in the position not as manager, but fellow creatures living in interdependence, cooperation and fellowship with the others.

The sea has intrinsic value, Srokosz and Watson insist, as seen in diverse expressions. The sea and its creatures praise and obey God; even leviathan, a great sea monster, is depicted in Psalm 104:26 as God’s aquatic playful creature. The sea creatures have their own duty before God as God bless and commands them to ‘[b]e fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas...’ (Gen. 1:22). God values their existence as good (Gen. 1:21) and their interconnectedness with other creatures, in which they contribute to humans’ and other creatures’ lives, as very good (Gen. 1:31). Unlike St. Basil, who considers the sea creatures less valuable than the terrestrial animals because the aquatic animals do not have souls and cannot be controlled for human interest, the community of creation paradigm insists that the sea and its creatures are co-participants alongside all other creatures in God’s creation. The sea creatures have their own life and role. Even in their crisis, the sea’s agency plays a fundamental role (alongside human agency) for its recovery.

In light of this paradigm, the feeding narrative as framed in Mark’s Gospel can be read as Jesus’ recognition and support for the Sea of Galilee to embody its intrinsic value, one of which is to feed the poor. Jesus involved the Sea of Galilee in his ministry of feeding the multitude with two fish as an embodiment of God’s Kingdom. Indeed, the sea exists not only for humanity, but the sea’s role for the earth community is also for all human beings in need.

80 Johnson, Ask the Beasts, p. 268.
81 Ibid., pp. 267–73.
82 Bauckham, Bible and Ecology, pp. 64–102.
83 Johnson, Ask the Beast, p. 268.
85 Srokosz and Watson, Blue Planet, Blue God, p. 55.
86 Ibid., pp. 39–54.
87 Bauckham, Bible and Ecology, p. 15.
The sea gives food and oxygen for humanity. To some degree, the sea helps human beings to accept their vulnerability before and reliance on the sea and its creatures. Likewise, the sea exists not for other creatures, but oxygen, for instance, produced by the sea creature – phytoplankton – is also for those creatures in need. As Winston Halapua wonderfully asserts, the waves of the sea breaking over reefs and embracing the coastlines, freely and unconditionally, embody God’s life-gifting love for all without ceasing.

The community of creation paradigm clarifies that the Galilean fishermen’s fishing world is, for us today, inclusive of marine life. The call is not exclusively for human interest, but also for the sea per se. Christianity should not be alienated and separated from the sea and its ecological crisis as Jesus’ disciples need to cooperate with the sea for their common life as God’s creatures. Christian discipleship, wherever and whenever it takes place, should never be without the blue array.

Christians who live in inland areas are not an exception in that manner, given that despite the contribution from the sea they enjoy – from the salt on their dining table to the oxygen they breathe – they could also damage the sea with plastic materials, pesticides and other toxic chemicals brought by the rivers to the sea, for instance. Christian fishermen and coastal people are challenged in this movement, to become blue disciples who should partake by fishing and acting in ways that preserve the marine life. In this regard, ‘fishing for people’ as the task of Christian discipleship can reasonably mean seeking for the Kingdom of God to be embodied in marine life by challenging the human-made system and activity (Anthropocene) that hinders the sea from embodying its intrinsic value. This is the very heart of the blue disciple.

As the fellow creatures of the sea and participants in God’s creation community, the blue disciples are called to, in respect and reverence, let the sea flourish by being itself and expressing its intrinsic value. To follow Jesus means standing against systems and practices that hinder the sea from flourishing. Jesus’ disciples resist destructive fishing practices, exploitation or overfishing.

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sea pollution and anthropogenic climate change as forms of oppression toward the sea. The blue disciples eagerly learn to know the sea and its life, seek for ways to preserve the sea with sustainable fishing; look for solutions to let the sea recover from damages, pollutions and impacts of climate change caused by human activity; and act accordingly. Christian disciples in blue fashion are not those who leave the sea behind but who come to the sea in peril and work in such ways, including collaboration with other stakeholders or parties, for the liberation and recovery of the sea. That blue is imperative. That is their identity as Jesus’ disciples.

5 Conclusion

I have presented the blue disciple as a concept aiming to enlarge Christian contribution in dealing with the marine ecological crisis. Navigated by my rereading of ‘follow me’ as Jesus’ call of the four Galilean fishers and the community of creation paradigm, blue discipleship speaks of Christian engagement to overcome that ecological crisis as a call, an embodiment of their identity as Jesus’ followers. This idea could, firstly, work on challenging the un-sea-friendly and ignorant perceptions and attitudes towards the sea in Christian ecological discourse and practice as the blue array is integral to Christian discipleship. Christian disciples are always seeking for the sea to flourish by being itself and embodying its intrinsic value, contributing to the common life of the blue planet. Secondly, the blue disciple could work to convince other stakeholders such as marine conservationists and scientists to work collaboratively with Christians. That is not only because they need Christians to collaborate but also because Christians need them to embody their call for the sea in danger. With those two efficacies, the blue disciple holds what Conradie regards as the twofold Christian constructive ecotheological task, namely ‘a contribution to Christian authenticity’ and ‘a contribution to public, interdisciplinary discourse on sustainability’.94 Yet, the blue disciple delivers its contributions in ‘acts’ too.

Christian churches are invited to work on the blue disciple as Jesus calls them to follow him in his blue discipleship.