

# DAILY BREAD

## "Grain of Hope: Slice of Heaven"

# Hexameron

### The Seventh Day

They didn't know what to call it:  
that human-made or human-marred age.  
The idea was controversial.

Should a brief history  
and briefer spell of technological change  
be set beside the vast cosmic span  
which saw exploded gas condense to stars?  
Be viewed as equal to that Genesis-day,  
or evolution-stage when boggy life  
emerged from the sea?

In the end they called it  
the Anthropocene  
because surely some word  
should mark the Hiroshima-blast, should hold the  
fact  
of melted ice-caps, forests turned to stumps;  
should recognise the choke of plastic waste  
that might outlive all species?

They might have called it  
the anti-Sabbath, or the Seventh Day  
a day of reversal  
in which a gratitude for all things visible  
and invisible turned into grasping  
acts which treated nature as a slave;

a Seventh Day in which a stilled resting  
in wonder turned to driven, driving will;  
a day in which one species enthroned  
itself as earth-god, in that act rejecting  
the God who saw that everything was good.

It was observed  
people who lived in the Anthropocene  
kept certain animals as pets while others  
were hunted to extinction;  
sorted their rubbish carefully into bins;  
praised clean air, yet jumped into their cars;  
and crept like a dark shadow though the earth  
making it in their image.

Diane Pacitti, 2020

### An Agricultural Hexameron

In the beginning, before agriculture,  
there was the living earth, and the people were of it.

**DAY 1.** At least 100 000 years ago people start noticing the rhythms of seed-producing plants and recognise their gift. They begin to follow plants as well as animals. Their lives depend on it as the world sinks deeper and deeper into ice.

**DAY 2.** Throughout the subsequent 100 000 year deep freeze, the ice ebbs and flows regionally, revealing great gifts of new topography, and taking them away again. For thousands of human generations the people travel and stay, flourish and retreat, literally following the revelation of the land and its life. Customs and lore of peoples intimately bound up in the life of the earth are ritualised and celebrated.

**DAY 3.** Around 11 500 years ago the climate begins to warm and the current interglacial period blossoms. In the Levant and many other places a more settled symbiosis between species becomes possible. The people increasingly put down roots in places where 'their' plants grow well, sowing, harvesting and modifying them, and increasingly enclose 'their' animals. These big thaws had been occurring regularly every 100 000 years or so, but this one turned out to be different. We know it as the Holocene, the 'entirely new', characterised by human writing, technological revolution and urbanisation.

**DAY 4.** The earth continues to warm throughout the Holocene. The people become more confident, staking their food-growing faith on a benign climate as cultural memory of ice recedes. Monotheistic creation stories and scriptures full of agricultural imagery are written down. Genesis 1, informed by the crisis of exile from homeland, mandates the people to manage the land and its life, a break from earlier myths of participation in a wilder earth story. A paradigm based on bending of other species to our formidable will (dominion, stewardship) takes hold.

**DAY 5.** The earth continues to warm, notwithstanding one or two diversionary 'little ice ages'. The Greco-Roman world establishes firm patterns of thought in the west, including turning the soul away from the sensible world, and bequeaths us *oikos* and *domus*. English speakers grow these concepts into ecology/economy and domestication, which come to signify management of earth systems by the people as farmers, miners, technologists. Other (indigenous) lore with its process-focus on interactions between living and non-living beings is increasingly marginalised.

**DAY 6.** From around 1850 the rate of warming accelerates dramatically, powered by burning of fossil fuels. The post war '*green revolution*' powers up intensive agriculture and consequent destruction of ecosystems. The manipulation of genomes races ahead of our ethical and relational understanding. Chemical control of whole environments contaminates our ecosystems, committing us to live with intolerable levels of our own technological excrement. Extinction of species reaches 10 000 times historical rates. The Anthropocene dawns.



St James's Church  
197 Piccadilly  
London  
W1J 9LL



The term Hexameron refers to the genres of theological treatise that describes God's work on the six days of creation or to the six days of creation themselves; often taking the form of commentaries on Genesis. As a genre it was popular in the early church and medieval periods. The word derives its name from the Greek roots hexa-, meaning "six", and hemer-, meaning "day".

We are grateful to Prof. Kate Rigby for introducing us to the idea of hexameron. Kate is writing a book-length hexameron which will reference St James's eco church work, and has given a talk on the Daily Bread project.