

A Future for All: Implementing the Christian Imperative to Care for our World Birmingham 14 July 2018

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1. The relatively stable climate most of human civilization has known is now likely to suffer considerable disruption. Despite the huge benefits of technology and industrialization, we now know what the early industrialists didn't: that burning fossil fuels (as well as cutting down rainforests, some industrial agriculture, eating too much red meat) damages God's earth and the wellbeing of humanity and all other creatures.

The most affected places will be sub-Saharan African and South East Asia: places that have done least to cause damage and are least able to adapt. Global CO2 emissions must peak by 2020 and cut back rapidly after that if we are to avoid the worst climate disruption.

What sort of world will my grandchildren find when they are my age?

2. 'The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it' (Ps. 24.1); 'his compassion is over all that he has made.' (Ps 145.9). Climate change puts questions to Christians. Our human relationship to other creatures; the use we make of technology; our responsibilities to poorer communities and to future generations; our economic priorities; how we respond to corporate power; how we handle our fears and uncertainties - all these are at base to do with our relationship to God, and with God's purposes of flourishing for his Earth. They are moral and spiritual questions.

3. 'What did you do to cherish my creation in its hour of danger?' (Mary Grey). Or is it an hour of opportunity? - live more healthily, with more food security, less anxiety?

4. How have we got to this point? Loss of biblical 'triangle of relationships' between God, the earth and humanity. We have 'eclipsed' God, and so damaged all our other relationships: a view of Nature without reference to God, and of human beings as the 'lords and masters', free to exploit Nature and dominate it to meet our needs and our wants.

We are caught up in contradictions - apocalyptic language from scientists, low priority for politicians.

5. Michael Northcott (*A Political Theology of Climate Change*, SPCK 2014) discusses the separations which happened in the Enlightenment: nature from culture, body from spirit, science from ethics, facts from values.

In the New Testament, the concept of pulling apart, dividing, separating, setting at variance, is 'diabolical'. The ministry of Jesus, however, is predominantly, healing, gathering up fragments, restoring, putting back together. Part of our Christian imperative must include a repair of the breach between body and spirit, nature and culture, science and ethics. This needs collaboration between those engaged in mission, ecology, development, as part of the Mission of God to make all things new. **Economy, ecology, equity belong together.**

Covenant.

The personal covenant between God and people is a symbol of a deeper cosmic covenant between God, humanity and the earth.

(i) Covenant and Creation

(a) ***In the beginning was the Word; all things were made through him.***
Genesi 1; Wisdom literature: - in Christ all things hold together. (Col. 1,15ff).
The triangle of **God, humanity and nature**, is the basis, for our calling to unity with one another and with all creation.

(b) ***The world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.***
Living in the world without God provokes the prophets to call for repentance and a change of direction. Isaiah 24. 4f. Today we tell stories of a world without God:
(i) a story about management and control” ‘lords and masters’ of Nature.
(ii) a story of doom.
(iii) a story about greed, and the assumption of limitless consumption and economic growth. ‘When the free market is made into an absolute, outside of rational control in the light of ethical principles, it becomes a power that enslaves human beings....The idea that if economic life is detached from all moral consideration and left to operate by its own laws all will be well, is simply abdication of human responsibility.. If Christ’s sovereignty is not recognized in the world of economics, then demonic powers take control.’ (Lesslie Newbgin)

(c) ***The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world***
John’s Gospel gives us a different story:
-instead of management: a story of interdependence, cooperation and fellowship;
- instead of despair: a story of compassionate love and mercy leading to hope;
- instead of greed: a story of generosity and self-giving service.
A story about love and justice Christian mission needs to hold the environmental and developmental agendas together, and relate both to a renewed economics rooted in human values and the flourishing of all creation. Climate change shows up the illusion that human flourishing can be achieved by limitless consumption and industrial growth.

(ii) Covenant and Sabbath
Nature’s rhythm, and the reminder of spiritual values.

(iii) Covenant and Justice
the social expression of neighbour love is justice. Our response at personal, social and national levels.

(iv) Covenant and Hope
The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory.
Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus are linked to healing and redemption of all creation The cosmic redemption of all things in Christ. ‘The Kingdom of God is creation healed.’ (Kung); ‘the glory of God is a human being fully alive’ (Irenaeus).
Can climate change provoke us into transformative action –a different way of living, informed by God’s Wisdom? a rethinking of our desires?

The costly discipleship of restraint

(This material is explored in a longer paper “Climate Change and the Gospel” available on the Operation Noah website: <http://operationnoah.org/resources/climate-change-gospel/>) and in David Atkinson *Renewing the Face of the Earth*, Canterbury Press 2008, and *Hope Rediscovered*, Ekklesia Publishing, May 2018.