

World of Wonder:
Contemporary Discipleship,
Climate Crisis and Anglicans



Submitted by Stephen Drakeford
on behalf of the
Diocese of Toronto's
Creation Matters Team

Wonder

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;

Psalm 24:1a

We give you thanks and praise, almighty God, for the gift of a world full of wonder, and for our life which comes from you. By your power you sustain the universe.

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God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31a

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and pronounced that it was good. The intricacy, beauty and harmony of creation are a wonder: from the Arctic Tern's annual migration from pole to pole, to the majesty of the Giant Sequoia tree to the delicate beauty of the 4" Peacock Mantis Shrimp that packs a punch with 200lbs of force in its ¼ inch claw - creation is awesome! Creation is a sign of God's infinite creativity and joy. Creation is a gift.

Humanity was created in the context of this wonder and given caretaking responsibilities. Humanity was commanded to nurture, tend and live in harmony with creation, seeking all of creation's flourishing. This consciousness is an essential part of our *Imago Dei*; to live in harmony with God, all creation, including humanity.

The wonder of the intricate web of creation is that humanity (as part of creation) is endowed with the particular gifts of memory, reason, skill and love. While these attributes are not humanity's alone, humankind is specially tasked by God to nurture this creation-gift from God. It is humanity's privilege and responsibility.

Christian Disciples are not exempt from this responsibility. But Western Christianity has largely forgotten that to be Christian is to not only to live in peace with God and harmony with our neighbours but also to be in a peaceful, harmonious relationship with creation. We have forgotten what it is to be made in the image of God. We do not love and treasure the world that God loves and treasures.

Crisis

The first crisis is we have forgotten our *Imago Dei*. We are aware of further crises both on the planet and in our parishes. These crises are interconnected.

Climate Crisis

Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the animals
have fled and are gone.

¹¹ I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
a lair of jackals;
and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation,
without inhabitant.

Jeremiah 9:10-11

Ancient Israel lost sight of its own *Imago Dei*. And because of Israel's faithlessness in Levitical husbandry, Sabbath and Jubilee the prophet Jeremiah observes local climate crisis and links it to the fall of Jerusalem. The 21st century is not the first century to see climate crisis, however this time the crisis is global and not regional. And this time the current climate crisis is linked to the collapse of humankind and not only a nation.

The October 2018 Special Report of the IPCC (United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) documents the details of climate change and its global effect. The Diocese of Toronto Creation Matters Team and this position paper understand global climate change as a result of human addiction to consumption and the use of fossil fuels. The climate crisis is human hubris and flawed economic policy. The climate crisis is of political failure, 'nation taking up arms against nation'. Climate Crisis is an indicator of human allegiance to mammon and idolatry. Climate Crisis is not only the lamentable loss of species diversity and wonder but is linked to human loss of life, human migration, war and human displacement. Climate crisis is a key indicator of human sin and loss of human identity. We have indeed forgotten who we are.

Parish Crisis

Many church communities are in crisis in mission, identity and relevance- a kind of amnesia of identity. There have been times of wonderful faithfulness. But the church's ability to witness to power and politics has always been subject to erosion. As a result, the church is now generally seen as irrelevant to the major crisis of climate change and ecological crisis and, according to 60's historian of science and activist Lynn White, the cause. His influential paper, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis, published in *Science* magazine in 1967, laid the blame at the foot of the church: "We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man."¹

Identification with dominant culture, consumerism, colonialism, and political power has wooed the Church from its ability to witness to climate and human justice. For example, historical Anglicanism has often been co-opted as the religious arm of the British Empire.

A Theological Reset

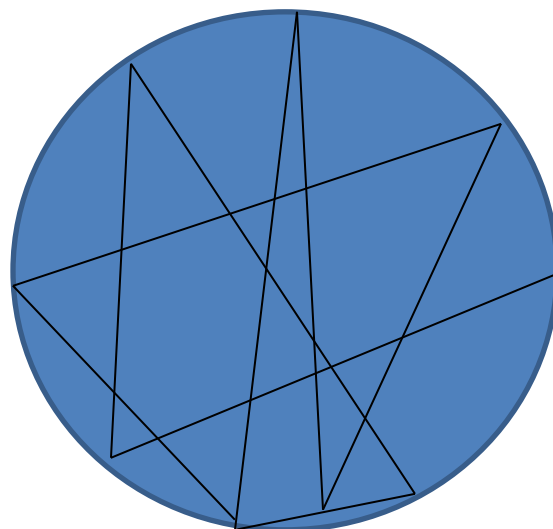
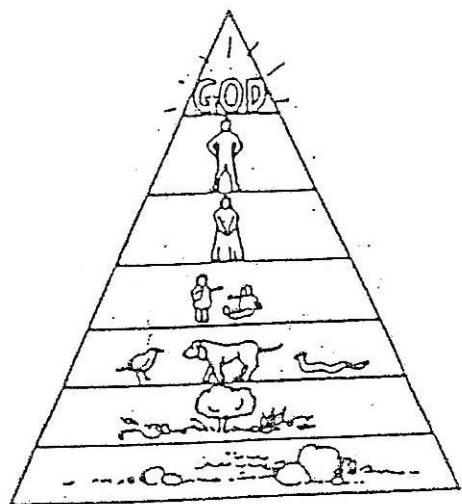
In short, climate crisis is the result of the rupture the Genesis narratives illustrate between humanity, God and creation. A loss of relationship with God, humanity and the Earth has led us to this place of global disaster. The mistranslation of 'dominion' from Genesis 1 over creation and assumptions of human primacy have led western Christians to see creation as a resource for our own use, rather than a partner in mutual flourishing. It is time for a theological reset.

A Way of Being

Perhaps a theological reset is as simple as naming our dominant worldview and rethinking it. Michael Dowd names our dominant western Christian worldview: At the top of the pyramid is God, then Man, then Woman, then Children, (Staff, Slaves and arguably the Elderly, Sick and Poor. One could further add People of Colour different from the one holding the pyramid), then Animals, then Plants, then Rocks, Earth and Minerals.

Grant Jahnke in his Doctor of Ministry thesis on Creation Spirituality suggests an alternate vision: a circle where we are all part of a large circle of interconnection. Each point represents Human, Plant, Mineral, Solar System, Animal etc., all interconnected and all held in the circle of God. The circular illustration would be reflective of an Indigenous Spirituality.

¹ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, March 10, 1967, 1203.



A Theology of the Land

In his paper *Faithful Land Stewardship, A Theological Basis for Church Redevelopment* Dr. Jason McKinney writes

In Scripture, land is understood as a divine gift. It is never a simple possession. Land is created by God (Gen 1:1). Thus, land is not the *product* of human labour, even while it remains the *context* of human labour. In Scripture, humans are uniquely tasked with stewarding the land (Gen 1:26). However, even this privilege is revocable and contingent upon the keeping of covenant (just use). Human beings are honoured guests of the Creator -- but guests nonetheless.

The curses at the end of the Adam and Eve creation narrative imply that an idyllic cosmos is the vision when humanity lived in harmony with creation. Once out of the Garden, food production, childbirth and cultivation; all things natural were subject to travail. We became separated from the land through banishment and as a result humans loose creation-harmony. Like the Prodigal Son, we have squandered the gift and found ourselves out of sync with creation: no, we perceive we are at enmity with creation.

A key message of Jesus was one of reconciliation with creation. The Gospel of John is sprinkled with this reconnection: John 1: 1 links Jesus as the Author of Creation. John 3:16 reminds us that Jesus died for the Cosmos (and not the 'world' often assumed to mean the human world) and that whosoever believes in Jesus proclaims that reconnection with creation alongside personal transformation. Finally the resurrection scene in John 20 takes

place in a garden and Jesus is mistaken as a gardener; an indicator of the task humanity is to recover: the gardener of creation.

In the Gospel of Matthew, 6:26-30 Jesus underscores creation as teacher.

²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?
²⁷ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[a] ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

A rethink of our worldview; a wholesome reset of a faithful theology of the land, and then its subsequent practice; a new look at the Gospels would provide the ground by which the church could faithfully speak to the current climate crisis.

Over the last twenty-five years, as we have begun to repent of our colonialism and listen to First Nations teachers, we now acknowledge the land and aboriginal residents at the beginning of our gatherings. Perhaps we have begun the reset. And now we can not stand by as humans witness the destruction of the rainforest, the plunder of the Arctic and the extermination of iconic species like the African Elephant and the Orangutans of Borneo. Like guilty bystanders we watch (if we dare look) the wholesale loss of species diversity- indeed the extinction of so much that causes us to wonder and praise God. Climate change has now forced us to consider a theological reset: a Christian Discipleship that includes loving and caring for creation.

A Theology of Christian Discipleship, Unity, and Communalism

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. – Acts 2:43-47.

Songwriter Midge Ure asks the question in his 2014 song 'Are We Connected?'

All hail to this new religion
 Crossed wires in conversation
 Are we one on one
 Are we worlds apart
 Are we something strong
 Are we connected

The witness of the Apostles and the early Christians, the witness of the creation narratives, the witness of the prophets, and the witness of the First Nations would answer Midge Ure by saying 'yes, we are all connected.' Pop stars, hipsters, poets, scientists and the Ojibwe all know it: we are all connected. The Church also knows that we are all kin to everyone and everything. However Christian practice is not generally informed by our theology. While not universal, many are coopted by dominant cultural movements such as individualism, consumerism and latterly populism. Our lifestyles and daily practices are shaped more by dominant culture than they reflect a faithful Christian counter-culture.

The theological reset here would be for Anglicans to reclaim our essential biblical unity. Discipleship would be grounded in kinship with all creatures and thus hallmarked by kindness, generosity, sacrifice and love. Contemporary Discipleship would be political, demanding open borders for climate migrants, laws for the wholesome husbandry of the land, and compassion, love and legal protection for biodiversity. In addition to personal piety Christian discipleship would expand its focus from love of God and neighbour to encompass love of creation.

Parish Reset

Qualities of parishes turning to a wholesome theology of creation might include:

Acknowledgement: Where failure is acknowledged there is hope of renewal. And as we have acknowledged the land in the context of justice for First Nations we need to live into a way of acknowledgement of love and respect for Creation

Repentance: Often repentance is confused with acknowledgment, but repentance is the decision in word and deed as a parish to actively care for creation and neighbour. Re-examination of theological assumptions and a subsequent realignment to the shared primacy of God's Creation leads to lifestyle change.

Christian Practise and Lifestyle: With acknowledgment and repentance comes a realignment of our consumption practises and lifestyle choices.

As parishes acknowledge the effect of climate change on the day to day life of people, especially as it affects the poor and marginalized first, a parish's mission is reshaped to include

Resilience: Parishes become places known as places of refuge and restoration in the midst of climate disaster: warming and cooling centres for the climate afflicted.

Sanctuary and Healing: Sanctuary would include shelter for climate refugees, and a place to lament, acknowledge the pain of a changing planet and mourn the loss of biodiversity.

Advocacy: Parishes find ways to speak for climate and human justice.

Conclusion

All of this would be empty if we do not recover love for creation. In the beginning God made the Heavens and the Earth, and it was good. God so loved the Cosmos that God sent the Son. Grounded in the love for creation that God has, the task of resetting, rethinking and reshaping is not arduous but an offering to God in gratitude for Jesus, the human family and God's wonder-full Creation.