

The Theological Basis for Creation Care

This year's vestry motion on climate action is rooted in our faith. Scripture, the teachings of saints, and contemporary theologians, all remind us that we are called to care for God's creation and our neighbour.

1. Scripture shows us the following:

- *God made, cares for, and sustains all creation, which he pronounces "good"* (Gen 1:31). Following the Great Flood, God establishes his covenant not only with humankind but with "every living creature on the earth" (Gen. 9:8-17). The Old Testament frequently speaks of the earth as the Lord's (Psalm 24:1) and of God's goodness in creating and sustaining the universe and all living creatures (Prov. 3:19-20, Jer. 32:17, Job 38-42, Wisdom 11:24)
- *Humankind is entrusted with the responsibility of stewarding and caring for the earth, as image-bearers of God* (Gen. 1:28 2:15). The law given to God's people Israel includes examples of caring both for the non-human creation itself and for human neighbours through restrained use of the creation (Ex. 23:10-12, Lev. 19:9-10, 23-25; Lev.25; Deut. 22:6-7, Deut. 26:12-13).
- At the same time, *the non-human creation is described as participating in praise and worship of God in its own right.* (Lev. 26:34, 2 Chron. 36:21, Job 38:7, Psalms 19:1-6, 65:12-13, 96:11-13, 104, 148, Isa. 55:12)
- The New Testament tells of how *God, in Christ, is the one through whom all things were made, and the one who holds together and redeems all creation.* (John 1:3; see also Rom. 8:18-25, Col. 1:15-20).
- *Jesus reminds us that loving our neighbour as ourselves is part of the Great Commandment* (Matt. 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-28). In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus teaches us that everyone is our neighbour, including people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. This extends to all the people of the world who share our common home, the earth.

We are called to love our neighbour through our stewardship of creation. Care for our neighbours includes acting to preserve the quality of the air they breathe, and doing what we can to prevent climate impacts that threaten their health and their lives.

2. Some statements from saints/theologians

Christian saints throughout the ages have noted God's delight in and care for the non-human creation. A prayer by St. Basil the Great (c. 329-79) asks God to "enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things" and repents of "exercising dominion with cruelty, so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to Thee with song, has been a groan of travail." The medieval nun Hildegard of Bingen wrote of the "fiery life of divine wisdom" running through all creation. Evangelist John Wesley preached a sermon called "The General Deliverance," expounding his belief that all creatures would share in God's redemption to eternal life. And of course, St. Francis of Assisi is well-known for his communing with non-human creatures and celebrating their wordless praise of God. As Pope Francis writes, Francis "is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically... [who] was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast." (Laudato Si', para. 10)

3. Anglican Marks of Mission/Baptismal vows

The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican church are a set of five commitments that describe how Anglicans participate in God's mission in the world. The Fifth Mark of Mission, "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth," was incorporated into the Baptismal Covenant in the BAS by General Synod in 2013, with the addition of the question: "Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?/I will, with God's help."

4. Contemporary statements by global Christians on the urgency of climate action:

In his 2015 Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis used a wide range of theological arguments to urge "Care for our Common Home" - the earth. Here are ten statements from that document:

1. As Christians, we are called “to accept the world as a sacrament ... a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale.” (para. 9)
2. The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. (para. 23)
3. The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest (para. 48)
4. The gift of the earth with its fruits belongs to everyone (para. 71)
5. Communion with nature is not real if our hearts lack concern for fellow human beings (para. 91)
6. What does “Thou shall not kill” mean when “20% of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor and future generations of what they need to survive?” (para .95)
7. “Environment”, is a relationship between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves. (para. 139)
8. The common good extends to future generations. (para. 159)
9. Purchasing is always a moral, not a simply economic act (para. 206)
10. The human person grows, matures and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships ... to live in communion with God, with others and all creatures. (para. 240)

The same year as *Laudato Si’* was issued, a group of Anglican Bishops and Archbishops from around the global Anglican Communion issued a statement called “*The World is our Host: A Call to Urgent Action for Climate Justice.*” They wrote:

“In different ways each of our own dioceses are deeply impacted by climate injustice and environmental degradation.”

“We believe that the problem is spiritual as well as economic, scientific and political, because the roadblock to effective action relates to basic existential issues of how human life is framed and valued: including the competing moral claims of present and future generations, human versus non-human interests, and how the lifestyle of wealthy countries is to be balanced against the basic needs of the developing world. For this reason the Church must urgently find its collective moral voice.”

“We recognized that some of us serve in cultures and nations that are major contributors to global warming, while others live in places which contribute little to the problem but are disproportionately affected by it.”

“We acknowledged that salvation in Christ calls us to responsibilities beyond ourselves. Especially in the developed world our view of salvation has often focused on our individual souls and journey to heaven. Our responsibility to care for God’s Creation has been overlooked or ignored. We have acted as if Christ only died to save the human race. The truth of the redemption of all things in Christ, which is the message of the life-giving cross, must be reclaimed.”

“Listening to one another we learned that attending to the current and future life and health of our planet will require sacrifices now, both personal and collective, a deeper appreciation of the interdependence of all creation, and a genuine commitment to repentance, reconciliation and redemption. This calls for a profound change of heart and mind.”

It is now more than a decade since *Laudato Si’*, *The World is our Host*, and the *Paris Climate Agreement*. The need to take climate action is more urgent than ever – for us, for our human and our non-human neighbours.

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For further reference, please visit the Diocesan website at <https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/diocesan-life/social-justice-advocacy/creation-care/creation-care-educational-resources/>