



FUTURE SHAPE



Caring for God's creation

Mission studies for ministers on creation care

4 Creation care is ethical mission

“Most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentration via the greenhouse effect.”

(Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC)

“Effects, processes, objects or materials derived from human activities as opposed to those which occur in natural environments without human influences are said to be anthropogenic.”

(Definition taken from Wikipedia)

“CO2 is a greenhouse gas which means that it has the effect of absorbing and retaining the heat coming from the earth, like a greenhouse, and then reflecting some of that heat back towards the earth. The more greenhouse gases present, the more heat is absorbed, retained and re-emitted... thus warming the earth.

The problem with a warmer earth... growth of deserts and increasing desertification; near worldwide decrease in mountain glaciers; decrease in northern hemisphere sea ice; substantial thinning of arctic sea ice in late summer...

(Information taken from ‘Mission and Climate Change: ‘The End is Nigh’, paper given by a BMS Researcher, June 2006.)

NOTES

A. Introduction

Paul's unexpected challenge to the Romans (6: 1): "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?" implies the key question of ethics. He wants to know how, in light of the grace of God received in Jesus Christ, we can expect to indulge ourselves and then presume on God's readiness to forgive whatever we do. His famous answer, "by no means!", is as close as Paul ever came to an expletive,

wonderfully translated by one New Testament scholar (also a Baptist tutor) as, "hell, no!" But the essence of his original question ('what shall we do?') takes us to the very heart of ethics where we grapple with issues of motivation and action in the face of tough questions for practical living.

It is the distinctive of Christian ethics that it lives in the grace of God and looks

for the difference it will make to daily life. In this sense, creation care really is ethical mission through its claim to be an important application of the values which motivate our lifestyle choices. The Old Testament and the New Testament people of God share the combined privilege and responsibility of living out the purpose of God as a positive response to his love, a purpose which includes a commitment to care for the environment in which all creation lives.

In this session we are looking at three ethical values which have a substantial bearing on our attitude towards creation care.

Before we do that, it will be useful to note that, in his book, *Spiritual values for earth community*, David Hallman contrasts a range of 'Christian' values with three 'negatives' on which he believes Western societies have based themselves and for which the environment is paying a heavy price: consumerism, economic globalisation and violence.

1 Consumerism

Consumerism has been variously defined as:

- ☒ the promotion of the consumer's interests
- ☒ a preoccupation with and an inclination towards the buying of consumer goods
- ☒ the theory that an increasing consumption of goods is economically beneficial
- ☒ a movement advocating greater protection of the interests of consumers.

It is Hallman's contention that such consumerism "is exacting an intolerable environmental cost on the earth. It is a factor in the increasing gap between the rich and the poor." (*Hallman, op cit, p 23*)

2 Economic globalisation

Globalisation is the subject of a huge debate 'out there' in terms of both its nature and its consequences. As used by Hallman, the term 'economic globalisation' seems to have in mind what others have defined as:

- ☒ a globalised economy in which distinct national economies are subsumed and re-articulated into the system by international processes and transactions
- ☒ an active process of corporate expansion across borders and a structure of cross-border facilities and economic linkages
- ☒ an ideology which seeks to reduce resistance by making it seem both beneficial and unstoppable.

Aquiline Tarimo, a Roman Catholic priest from Tanzania and Professor of Social Ethics in the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, examines economic globalisation from an African perspective. This is a topic of major importance but we can do no more here than note a couple of Tarimo's comments which are most pertinent for our purposes:

"The dynamics of economic globalisation have brought into being transnational financial institutions whose power exceeds that of nation-states and whose policies frequently result in massive violations of human rights... increased dependence on child labour, low wages and environmental destruction... The economic mechanisms of globalisation are designed to enrich the rich at the expense of the poor." (*Tarimo, article Globalization and African economic reforms, p 33*)

Tarimo concludes, *"The Christian maxim of the love of neighbour raises a serious challenge for economic globalisation"*. (*Tarimo, op cit, p 34*)



In truth, the effects of globalisation are complex and often paradoxical –

“Although we live in ever closer relationship with one another, we are ever more attentive to our differences... although globalisation has made available to many an experience of personal and social life that is not only novel but exhilarating, it also has its shadow side of emmiseration and violence.” (*Hogan, article Cross-cultural conversations, p 2*)

(The word “emmiseration” is hardly one we use every day! It is more often spelt ‘immiseration’ and is used to describe a process of bringing people into misery, usually the misery of impoverishment.)

Hallman’s objection to economic globalisation stems from his conviction that “it is in many ways an extension of consumerism to a worldwide level, posing significant threats to ecological sustainability and social justice.” (*Hallman, op cit, p 23*)

3 Violence

“Violence is an explicit and implicit value related to militarism, ethnic rivalry, economic domination, social conflict and environmental destruction... The natural world is a particularly vulnerable victim of the violence perpetrated by economic systems. Human societies have viewed mineral deposits, forests, water systems and animal life primarily as ‘natural resources’ for exploitation” (*Hallman, op cit, pp 29-30*).

B. But by way of contrast...

Hallman identifies seven values as “spiritual values for justice and sustainability” – gratitude, humility, sufficiency, justice, love, peace, faith and hope. We cannot hope to consider more than the first three values in one session but all of them deserve further consideration. In particular, the work of peace-making (linked to conflict resolution and reconciliation)

is becoming increasingly important to the practice of contemporary mission – see, for example, Stephen B Bevans & Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in context: a theology of mission for today*.

1 Gratitude (I Thessalonians 5: 16-18)

Of course, a serious credibility check on gratitude is inevitable, especially if we are prepared to reckon with suffering and poverty. But gratitude as an ethical value for creation care is an appropriate response not to personal prosperity but to our experience of God’s life-sustaining gifts. It is a recognition that we have to move away from exploitation of created resources – “the environment as ‘resource’ risks threatening the environment as ‘home’” – to an attitude of gratitude towards the creator and responsibility to the created. (*See Golser, article Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church, pp 65-72*)



As Christians, it is our relationship with God that must determine how we relate to other people and to the environment. And, as we may need to learn by humbling experience, it is often the poorest, the neediest and the most suffering who demonstrate a deeply moving spirit of gratitude which is its own rebuke to others who do have good reason to live grateful lives. The truth is that all sorts of people have discovered gratitude as a welcome alternative to depression, anger and

frustration and as a force to be reckoned with when it comes to sustaining a lasting commitment to the struggle for justice. Psalm 67 is a clear example of the inter-relationship of God's generous justice and our human gratitude. And Christian ethics is itself "lived gratitude", a deliberate expression of our willing dependence on the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In the words of a Jewish prayer quoted by Hallman:

*"Even if our mouths were as full of song as the sea,
and our lips as full of praise as the breadths of heaven,
and our eyes as bright as the sun,
and our hands as outstretched as the eagles of the sky,
and our feet as swift as gazelles,
we could not thank you enough."*

2 Humility

The gospels make it clear that Jesus' relentless challenge to status was more than once a sharp rebuke to his disciples (Mark 10: 35-45; John 13: 1-17). And humility continues to be in short supply in the struggles for dominance which characterised the 20th century and seem set to continue well into the 21st. It is this contrast between pride and humility which is particularly relevant to the way we view our human authority over creation (Genesis 1: 26-28). The challenge is to move from domination (unlimited authority) to stewardship (caring responsibility) to inter-dependence. "With humility, we begin to view the world with affection and respect" (Hallman, *op cit*, p 52). Living justly and sustainably in the 21st century will require of us, among other things, humility in the way we understand our relationship to the rest of creation: "...assuming a humbler self-understanding in relation to the rest of creation may be an important step towards more just and sustainable living." (Hallman, *op cit*, p 53)

3 Sufficiency

"Faith systems have a real opportunity to provide a vision of sufficiency for the global community based on long traditions of advocating and living simpler lifestyles.... Incorporating the spiritual value of sufficiency into daily lives is a challenge for people in industrialised societies who have become used to all the material comforts they have accrued."
(Hallman, *op cit*, pp 64 & 66)

Sufficiency is an important ethical value on two counts:

- ❑ it attempts to reduce the gap between rich and poor
- ❑ it responds to the environmental problems caused at one end of the scale by poverty and at the other end by high consumption levels. It is therefore a timely consideration because it tackles both extremes; it seeks to reduce over-consumption and to make poverty history.

The environmental consequences of over-consumption affect all of us, over-consumers and under-consumers alike. This makes sufficiency an impartial leveller with a vital link to efficiency in terms of the environment. For example, cars may be much more energy-efficient now than they used to be but a dramatic increase in the number of such cars has led to them being driven at higher speeds and for longer distances, with obvious consequences for the environment. That is efficiency without sufficiency! At the



end of the day, sufficiency is more about carefully chosen life-style than efficient planning. And, for all sorts of reasons, we must choose sufficiency life-styles in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ and so with reference to their impact on the poorest and most vulnerable of the world's peoples. We must opt to live in such a way that they have enough food, clean water, clothing, shelter and political freedom to sustain themselves and to make a contribution to society. *And what changes will such a commitment entail for us?*

"Today's generation needs to act as stewards of the natural environment and to hand it over to future generations as intact as possible." (Hallman, op cit, p 69)

"The time has come when we must divert the focus of science and technology from industrial innovations and centre it upon understanding the vulnerabilities of the environment. No more important books can be written in our time than those which bring home these truths in a simple manner to a widespread audience..."
(Klotz, *Ecology crisis*, pp 6-7)

"Climate change is not just an environmental or economic issue; it is a moral and ethical one. It is not just an issue for politicians or businesses; it is an issue for the world's faith communities." (David Miliband addressing the Vatican, 2007)

Books referred to in the course of this study:

Bevans, Stephen B & Schroeder, Roger P ***Constants in context: a theology of mission for today***, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2004 ISBN 978-1-57075-517-0

Golser, Karl *article **Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church*** in Hogan, Linda (ed), ***Applied ethics in a world Church: the Padua Conference***, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2008 pp 65-72 ISBN: 978-1-57075-759-4

Hallman, David G ***Spiritual values for earth community***, WCC Publications, 2000. ISBN: 978-2-82541-326-7

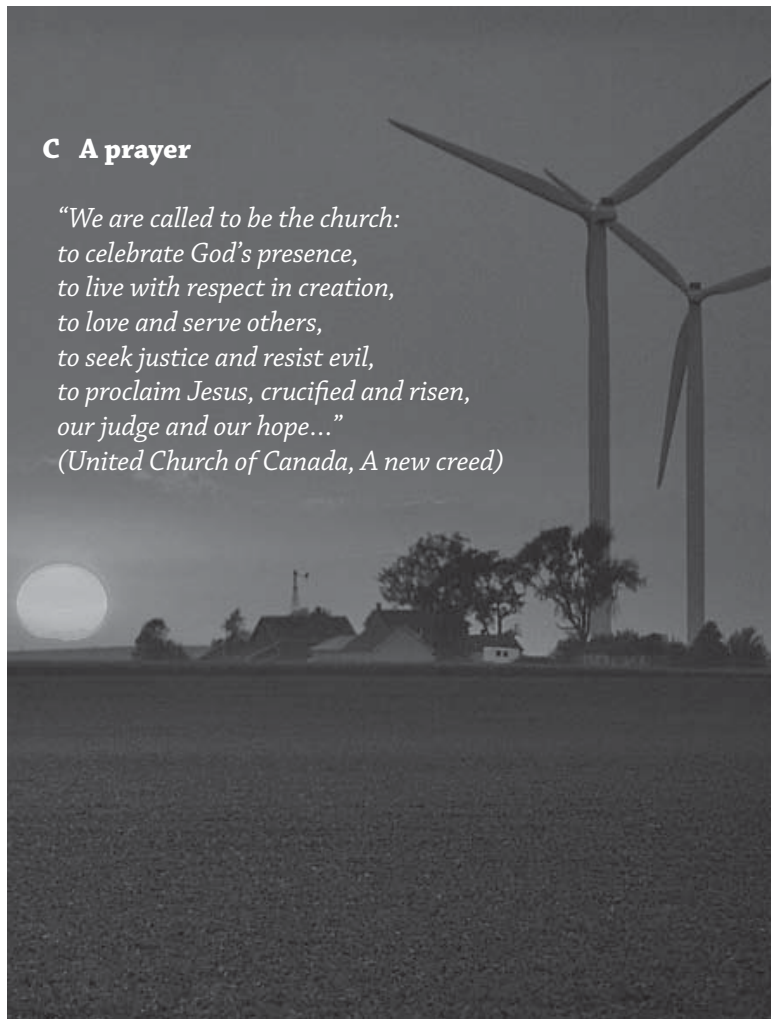
Hogan, Linda *article **Cross-cultural conversations: Applied ethics in a world Church*** in Hogan, Linda (ed), ***Applied ethics in a world Church: the Padua Conference***, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2008 pp 1-10 ISBN: 978-1-57075-759-4

Klotz, John W ***Ecology crisis: God's creation and man's pollution***, Concordia Press, London, 1972 ISBN: 978-0-57000-050-1

Tarimo, Aquiline *article **Globalization and African economic reforms*** in Hogan, Linda (ed), ***Applied ethics in a world Church: the Padua Conference***, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2008 pp 32-38 ISBN: 978-1-57075-759-4.

C A prayer

*"We are called to be the church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope..."*
(United Church of Canada, *A new creed*)



For some practical suggestions for action by government, the local church and the individual, see the small group material associated with this study.