

GOOD NEWS FOR GOD'S WORLD – ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

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1. FIRST THE BAD NEWS!

Climate Change	Food security	Desertification	Biodiversity loss
Deforestation	Population growth	Water stress	Pollution & waste
Energy production	Over-consumption of basic resources:		

Planetary Boundaries (Rockstrom 2009) "Safe space for human thriving":

Biodiversity loss	Anthropogenic Climate Change	Nitrogen / Phosphorous cycle
Ocean acidification	Ozone depletion	Freshwater use
Land use (top-soil / urbanization)	Chemical pollution	Atmospheric aerosol loading

PROJECTIONS: THE IMPACTS OF ANTHROPOGENIC ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

- 300,000 people a year dying by 2010-2030 (WHO)
- 200 million environmental refugees by 2050 (UNHCR)
- Heatwaves more frequent & more intense (Nature No.432)
- Extreme drought affecting 10% of the planet by 2050 - up from 2% now (Hadley Centre, UK Met. Office)
- Up to a million species extinct by 2050? (IUCN)
- "Abrupt & irreversible" Climate Change (IPCC)

Over-consumption of basic resources:

- for the whole world to have the lifestyle of the average European would require 3 planet earths;
- world's richest 20% consume 16x as much of the earth's resources as the poorest 20%

Ethical Crisis

- Food: More mouths to feed (population) / Less food planted (biofuels) / Less food harvested (extreme weather events) / More meat consumed in the West, India & China / More food wasted (53% of all food produced in UK)
- "Inevitably the poor are picking up the tab. The poor are there when the hurricane hits, when the tornado comes, when freak weather conditions are there. 98% of those killed and affected by natural disasters come from developing countries." Dr. Elaine Storkey, Tearfund Former President & A Rocha Council of Reference
- "The rural poor depend directly on the natural resource base. This is where their pharmacy is, this is where their supermarket is, this is in fact their fuel station, their power company, their water company. What would happen to you if these things were removed from your local neighbourhood? Therefore we really cannot afford not to invest in environmental conservation." Dr Stella Simiyu, Kenyan botanist, Christian and A Rocha Trustee

2. ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY: The need for a paradigm shift

- Recovering from the trap of Greek / Platonic dualism between material & spiritual; this world & the next world
- Recovering the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: transformation of people, churches, society & culture, all creation.
- Re-reading the Bible: What is the Gospel / Good News for creation (Noah & John 3:16)

A Biblical Narrative of Hope (based on 'Planetwise', Dave Bookless, IVP, 2008)

1. CREATION

- ✓ **Creation is good, but not God!** Genesis 1; Romans 1.20
- ✓ **The earth is God's, not ours!** Psalm 24.1; 50; Leviticus 25:23
- ✓ **God cares for creation** Psalm 104; Genesis 7-9; Job 38-42
- ✓ **Humanity is part of creation, related to everything else** Genesis 2.7; Psalm 8
- ✓ **Humanity is called apart - to image God in caring for creation** Genesis 1.26-28; 2.15; Ps. 8

2. FALL

- ✓ **Breakdown of relationships, between God, humanity and creation – Gen. 3:17**

- ✓ **Results of sin:** Land suffers (Jer. 12.4), mourns (Hos. 4.1-3), vomits (Lev. 18.25-28), groans (Rom. 8.19-22)
- ✓ **God's judgement on ecological sin** - Revelation 11.18

3. LAND

- ✓ **God continues to sustain all creation** (Psalm 104:27)
- ✓ **God has a covenant with the earth** (Genesis 9:17)
- ✓ **Israel: modelling God's purposes in the land** Lev. 25; Deut. 22.6; 1 Kings 21; Festivals, Sabbath, Jubilee
- ✓ **Land as a spiritual barometer** 2 Chronicles 7.14
- ✓ **Rootedness: belonging where God plants us** Jeremiah 29.4-7
- ✓ **Being at home in God's world** – OIKOS and SHALOM

4. JESUS

- ✓ **Source, Sustainer & Saviour of Creation:** Colossians 1.15-20 "By him ... for him ... in him all things hold together
Birth & life: 'Peace on earth' Luke 2:14; calming storm Luke 8:22-25;
- ✓ **Death & Resurrection:** Earthquakes & eclipse; Col. 1:19-20; Resurrection as first fruits of new creation
- ✓ **Future glory:** Ephesians 1:9-10 'all things under one head' – Jesus Christ

5. THE PRESENT & FUTURE AGE

- ✓ **Fire judgement & destruction?** - No! Refiner's fire: 2 Peter 3 & Malachi 3:2; discontinuity & continuity
- ✓ **Heaven & earth pass away?** – No! Matthew 24:35 & Psalm 119:89-90
- ✓ **New heaven and new earth?** – Yes, but 'kainos' (renewed) not 'neos' (replaced); Isaiah 65:17-25; Hosea 2.19
- ✓ **Creation waiting to be set free:** Romans 8.19-22;
- ✓ **"I am making everything new":** Revelation 21:5 – not making new things, but making old things new again!

"God will redeem the whole universe; Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of that new life, the fresh grass growing through the concrete of corruption and decay in the old world." N. T. Wright, "Surprised by Hope" p.134

3. GETTING INVOLVED – Integral Mission in God's world

The Church's missional calling:

- "The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." Romans 8.19
- "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on earth." Genesis 9.17
- "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation." Mark 16.15

"The whole creation is waiting in eager longing – not just for its own redemption, its liberation from corruption and decay, but for God's children to be revealed: in other words, for the unveiling of those redeemed humans through whose stewardship creation will at last be brought back into that wise order for which it was made." N. T. Wright, "Surprised by Hope" p.213

The Five Marks of Mission

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind & to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Evangelical definitions of mission:

- Lausanne: "Using the whole church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world."
- John Stott: "everything that Jesus sends his people into the world to do."
- Cape Town Commitment: "Creation care is a gospel issue within the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

- A Rocha, working in 20 countries - an example of ecological theology integrated into world mission. www.arocha.org

- Eco Church: online programme for churches with 3-stage award scheme: <http://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>

- At Your Service: crammed with Christian eco resources in different languages: <http://atyourservice.arocha.org>

- Planetwise Blog: regular comment on topical and biblical eco-issues: <http://blog.arocha.org>