



C R E A T I O N

Creation – Not for Sale



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

CREATION—NOT FOR SALE

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INTRODUCTION

Anne Burghardt

This booklet is part of a small collection published by the Lutheran World Federation on the occasion of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. “Creation—Not For Sale” is one of the three sub-themes of the Anniversary’s main theme, “Liberated by God’s Grace.” The popular essays in this booklet were written by authors from all regions of the Lutheran World Federation; the ecumenical voice is here represented by a Greek Orthodox theologian.

In light of today’s massive exploitation of natural resources, it is crucial that we pay attention to God’s entire creation. We read in Genesis that God considered creation to be “good” and entrusted creation into human care. The notion of “dominion” in Genesis 1:26 has often been misused and it has all too frequently been overlooked that God declares all creation to be “good,” quite apart from its usefulness to humans. The renewed relationship between God and human beings therefore also has implications on how humans relate to the rest of the creation, since creation primarily belongs to God and is only entrusted into our hands. The essays in this booklet explore different aspects of the theme “Creation—Not For Sale,” ranging from subject as varied as genetic engineering and raising the question of “whose” rather than “who” we are to issues of climate change and climate justice, land grabbing, etc. The list of topics addressed in the essays is far from exhaustive. Nonetheless, we hope to offer some initial impulses for theologically informed discussions on the understanding of being created by God and on the integrity of creation.

AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD: REFLECTIONS ON THEOLOGY OF CREATION

Barbara R. Rossing

The sacredness and goodness of creation is a conviction affirmed in Scripture and in core Lutheran theological principles.

The poetic refrain “God saw that it was good” anchors the creation story in Genesis 1. Repeated six times, with variation, the refrain culminates in the declaration of “very good” on the sixth day (Gen 1:31). The Hebrew conjunction *ki* can also be translated adverbially as “how”: “God saw *how* (*ki*) good it was” (Common English Bible). “How good” evokes God’s delight in discovering each element of the world as good. God finds joy in creation.

“Good” is the key word—the goodness of all, as God looks at each aspect of the world. *Tov* in Hebrew expresses joy and relationship, as well as beauty. One rabbinic commentary translates *tov* as “beautiful.”¹

Genesis 1 is liturgical poetry, showing us the beauty of each element of creation. Sun, earth, atmosphere (“firmament”), oceans and all biological organisms, including humans and all species of plants and animals: each has its own ecological niche, and each is declared beautiful and good in the eyes of God.

SEEING THE EARTH

God’s first response—seeing—can also serve as a starting point for us today. Genesis 1 situates humans within the enormity of the whole cosmos. Thanks to photos of the earth from space, we are now able to see the earth as never

¹ Ellen Bernstein, “Creation Theology: A Jewish Perspective,” in *The Green Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 1–53.

before. The 1972 iconic image of the earth taken by the crew of the US Apollo spacecraft, the most widely distributed photograph of all times, reveals the beauty of the earth as a blue marbled planet, with living oceans and continents. We can see what the astronauts saw: the earth's sheer beauty, its vulnerability, as well as a new sense of humanity's place on the planet, all suffused with an overwhelming sense of awe. Astronaut Michael Collins describes it:

I remember so vividly what I saw when I looked back at my fragile home—a glistening, inviting beacon, delicate blue and white, a tiny outpost suspended in the black infinity. Earth is to be treasured and nurtured, something precious that *must* endure.²

As astronaut Bill Anders said about circumnavigating the moon in 1968, “We came all this way to explore the moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the earth.”

Seeing the earth today means opening our eyes to see its beauty and also its vulnerability—the devastation humans are causing to God's good creation. Astronauts record their shock in seeing changes to the earth such as the diminution of the polar ice cap. Commander Ellen Collins, the first woman to lead a US space shuttle mission, told how she saw the island of Madagascar: “We saw deforestation [...]. The rivers and streams that normally would be a bluish-gray color are now brown from the erosion of soil flowing into the ocean.”³

The thinness and vulnerability of the earth's atmosphere relative to the rest of the planet is also something astronauts see. From space, the earth's atmosphere looks like a “thin blue line”—thinner than the peel of an apple relative to the apple. Genesis describes this protective layer as a “firmament.”

Carbon dioxide itself is colorless, so the build-up of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere cannot be seen directly from space. What can be seen are the effects of increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide on the planet—the drying up of large lakes such as Lake Chad in Africa; catastrophic flooding in Asia; deforestation in the Amazon and Congo River basins; shrinking glaciers in the world's mountain ranges; smoke from unprecedented wildfires; and dustbowls caused by drought. Too much heat from greenhouse gases (primarily carbon dioxide) is killing ecological systems humans need for our survival.

² Michael Collins, “Foreword,” in Roy A. Gallant, *Our Universe* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1980), 6.

³ Cited in Wangari Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 57.

GOOD, VERY GOOD

God sees each creature as “good.” By calling each creature good, God initiates an ongoing relationship of love with the earth and with each of its creatures. God “is *affected* by what is seen.”⁴ As Norman Habel notes, a similar exclamation of “good” is used to describe the response of Moses’ mother when the child is born. Moses’ mother “sees he is good” (Ex 2:1). Similarly, in Genesis 1, “God beholds Earth emerge from the waters below and ‘sees it is good.’”⁵ Earth is God’s living child.

For God, earth’s ongoing creative ability—the process evolutionary biologists describe as its capacity for bringing forth new species—is “good.” With amazing scientific insight, Genesis describes earth as a partner with God in creating more life forms. Written before our scientific worldview, Genesis differs from our modern cosmology. Still, its appreciation of earth’s ongoing creativity coheres with our understanding of the biological processes of evolution and speciation. Beginning with the creation of plants on the third day, the earth itself becomes a cocreator with God, bringing forth creatures of its own—“The earth brought forth vegetation” (Gen 1:12). This is repeated on the sixth day with the emergence of animals, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind” (Gen 1:24). Creation is a process from below, in which creatures also become cocreators, bringing forth more and more creatures of their own in the bounty of life and creation. God calls this entire process good.

What does the goodness or beauty of creation mean for us today? It can mean a number of things. The creatures are good as food for people to eat, as Martin Luther emphasizes in his commentary on Genesis. God’s feeding of hungry people with the good gifts of creation becomes increasingly important in an age of hunger.

Utility for humans is not the primary meaning of “good,” however. “Good for humans” is not what God says. This is important because stripping the earth’s resources through extractive mining, drilling, agriculture and industry has been justified on the grounds that God gave humans “dominion” over creation in Genesis 1:26. But if we look closely at each day’s creation, we see that God declares the creatures as good for their own sake, quite apart from any usefulness to humans. This is a perspective shared by God’s speech from the whirlwind in Job 38–41.

⁴ Terrence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 40.

⁵ Norman Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth An Ecological Reading of Genesis 1-11* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 42.

Perhaps most importantly, goodness also means interconnectedness, an ecological principle. God declares the entirety of creation to be “very good” (*tov ma’ov*, Gen 1:31). This superlative on the sixth day is not reserved for humans alone, as some anthropocentric interpretations have claimed. Rather, it is when God saw everything, and how the whole creation works together as an interconnected living ecological system, that God declares everything to be very, very good.

GOOD AS COMMON GOOD

The goodness or “good” of creation poses ethical questions for us today.

A “good” can become a noun, indicating one’s own private property or possessions—“my goods,” in English, similar to the Greek *ta agatha*. Jesus’ story about the man who builds bigger barns in order to hold all his “goods” (Lk 12:18, 19) contains an urgent warning about the perils of hoarding goods for one’s own exclusive gain. In his warped vision, the man thinks he himself has produced his own goods. He fails to realize that it is the earth that brought forth his abundant crops. The man loses his soul. Martin Luther labels this hoarder “Mammon.”⁶

If “good” is understood primarily in terms of private gain, without considering the consequences for our neighbor, for future generations or for ecosystems, we are all imperiled. God calls us to see the goodness of creation by valuing inter-relationships most of all.

The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017 comes at an urgent moment for creation. It is time for a new reformation, ethicist Larry Rasmussen and other theologians argue: What we need is an ecological reformation that turns the church towards earth-healing and the common good.⁷ In laying out the contours of what an eco-Reformation might look like, Rasmussen underscores the need for an economy that fosters the common good, so that “the primary goods of the commons—earth, air, fire, water, light—are cared-for requisites of a shared good, a good for both present and future generations of humankind and otherkind.”⁸

We live at a moment when goods are commodified, but nature and the atmosphere are still too often treated as a sewer or as a resource with no

⁶ Margot Kassmann, “Covenant, Praise and Justice in Creation: Five Bible Studies,” in David G. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (Geneva/Maryknoll: WCC/Orbis, 1994), 42.

⁷ Larry Rasmussen, “Waiting for the Lutherans,” in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 37 (2010), 86–98.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 78

value or price. Most countries of the world have not yet put a price on carbon dioxide pollution. Industries are allowed to burn fossil fuels without paying for the consequences of their pollution. Poor people's livelihood is threatened by unsustainable development. The Bible teaches a political economy of "enough for all," based on sharing of what is given for the common good of all (Ex 16). Love for neighbor, including future generations as our neighbor, is at the heart of both the Bible and Lutheran theology.

LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF CREATION AND THE CROSS

God's grace is not for sale, Martin Luther insisted five hundred years ago. Luther's bold economic critique called for reform not only in the church but also in the debt structure of society that was impoverishing people.⁹ Today, we can extend Luther's reformation insight about the pricelessness of grace and life itself into other realms, including creation itself. Creation and future generations are my neighbor, whom I am commanded to love. They are not for sale.

We can draw on incarnational and sacramental theology that discerns God in all of life. In his writings on the Lord's Supper against the Calvinists, Luther insisted that the finite can really hold the infinite: *finitum capax infiniti*. "Deep incarnation" is a phrase coined by the Danish Lutheran Nils Gregerson to express the idea of the radical incarnation of God in all matter. Incarnational and sacramental theology insists that God is present, as Luther says, "in every little seed, whole and entire [...] Christ is present in all creatures, and I might find [Christ] in stone, in fire, in water, or even in a rope, for [Christ] is there."¹⁰ Rasmussen and others call this Luther's "joyous panentheism." Today, even as creation is degraded, we can embrace Luther's joyous insistence that God is present

in every single creature in its innermost and outermost being, on all sides, through and through, below and above, before and behind, so that nothing can be more truly present and within all creatures than God himself with his power.¹¹

⁹ Guillermo Hansen, "Money, Religion, and Tyranny: God and the Demonic in Luther's Antifragile Theology," in Wanda Deifelt (ed.), *Market and Margins: Lutheran Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2014), 31–68.

¹⁰ Cited by Larry Rasmussen, op. cit. (note 7).

¹¹ Martin Luther, "That These Words of Christ, 'This Is My Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, 1527," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 58.

The Lutheran theology of the cross—the insistence that God is present also and even most of all in brokenness and pain—can also help us to face the sin of ecological devastation, the injustice of the effects of climate change on the poorest of the poor—and to formulate an analysis of both sin and redemption capable of addressing the ecological crisis.¹²

Indigenous communities' spiritual perspectives can also help us to recover an emphasis on the goodness of creation. Sami Lutheran theologian Tore Johnson underscores the communal nature of creation, in which all living beings are seen as interrelated in a circle of life. "Sami tradition reflects the idea that creation has a voice that should be listened to."¹³ Johnson calls for an eco-theological starting point that begins with creation, doing "theology from the circle of life."¹⁴

ARE FOSSIL FUELS "GOOD"? ENERGY AND THE COMMON GOOD

In order theologically to address the climate crisis we must also address the question of the goodness and risks of fossil fuels, as part of God's creation. Energy poses a problem of competing goods. God's first act of creation in Genesis 1 is light, the energy that powers our life. The sun's light provides energy in abundance to sustain everything on earth. Each hour of every day the sun delivers more energy to earth than humans consume in an entire year.¹⁵ Humans have recently discovered how to tap into ancient sunlight—by burning solar energy banked deep within the earth in the form of coal, oil, and natural gas, buried for millions of years beneath the earth's surface.

Energy is essential for human flourishing. But how do we balance the need for the development of cheap fossil fuels with the risks of carbon dioxide pollution? Climate scientists note that we need to leave three-fourths of known petroleum resources in the ground, in order to stave off dangerous changes to the planet. Commitment to the common good, to future generations, necessitates transitioning away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy.

¹² Wanda Deifelt, "From Cross to Tree of Life: Creation as God's Mask," in Karla Bombach and Shauna Hannan (eds), *Eco-Lutheranism: Lutheran Perspectives on Ecology* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2013), 169–76.

¹³ Tore Johnson, "Listen to the Voice of Nature: Indigenous Perspectives," in Karen Bloomquist (ed.), *God, Creation and Climate Change: Spiritual and Ethical Perspectives*, LWF Studies 02/09 (Minneapolis/Geneva: Lutheran University Press/The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 106

¹⁵ James B. Martin-Schramm, *Climate Justice. Ethics, Energy, and Public Policy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 3.

Bishop Mark Narum of North Dakota, suggests that Luther’s catechism question, What does this mean? is a question we might ask also about energy policy. Many residents of the Western North Dakota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), where Bishop Narum serves, have benefited from an enormous oil shale boom, made possible by the development of hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling technology. Bishop Narum underscores the good that oil has brought to land owners and to the region’s employment. Oil poses complex pastoral issues in congregations, requiring listening to diverse views. Narum asks, “If God is creator of all and God says, ‘It is good,’ what about petroleum?”¹⁶

As part of God’s good creation, petroleum is certainly “good.” But does that mean we should extract and burn it all as fossil fuel? Or today, might petroleum perform an even greater “good” when left in the ground? Perhaps God has safely sequestered carbon in the sedimentary rock layers, over millions of years, in order to keep the earth’s atmosphere’s temperature at the ideal level for life. Whereas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the “good” of oil-rich rock formations was seen as the energy they provided humans to fuel our economic growth, they may now have an even greater good as a storehouse for sequestered carbon in the ground.

God’s love for creation in Genesis 1 invites us to explore complex ethical questions, to listen to one another, and to take bold, prophetic action to care for the whole of creation as our neighbor. Creation is endangered by human sin, as the astronauts are seeing. “How good!” expresses God’s love for each element of creation. That love that sees the earth in all its brokenness and beauty is the same love that compels us to act today. Luther’s vision of deep incarnation calls us to care for the earth and all its communities of life.

QUESTIONS

What does it mean to say that God’s creation is “good, very good” in an age when everything is for sale? Is anything priceless?

What steps of eco-Reformation might be needed and are possible in your church context?

Do we need to put a price on the creation, on ecosystems, in order to value them?

¹⁶ Mark Narum, “Prairie, Petroleum, Pondering: What Does this Mean?” in Bombach and Hannan, op. cit. (note 12), 150.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD AND CREATION. ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON GENETIC ENGINEERING AND RESPONSIVE SCIENCE

Ulrik Becker Nissen

As the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation is commemorated, two significant and immediate lessons emerge. We are awed by wondrous conditions that do not change. There is, on the one hand, the central Reformation insight that salvation is by faith alone and that righteousness is granted to us solely by God's grace. This has not changed over the last 500 years and of this we still need to be reminded today. On the other, when we read the writings of Martin Luther and the other Reformers, we are immediately struck by the enormous shift in some of the challenges that we need to address. Whereas certain societal and ethical issues bear resemblance to those of the seventeenth century, we are today dealing with radically new matters such as genetic engineering for instance, where we can search in vain for concrete reflections in Luther's writings. Even if such subjects raise new moral questions, we need to draw on the resources of our living traditions when dealing with these concerns. For the Lutheran tradition to remain alive and vibrant, we need to go back to our sources. In this way the Reformation lives on in the midst of new challenges, where we have to reflect on what our Lutheran heritage implies with regard to new political, ideological, cultural and scientific matters. In this essay I shall focus on the following questions: In light of the Lutheran Reformation, what does the theology of creation imply for contemporary Lutheran theology? We will consider this question in view of central insights in Luther's theol-

ogy of creation and what it means that the world is created by the Word of God. Second, what does a Lutheran theology of creation imply for the understanding of “whose” we are? When we examine topics such as genetic engineering, is the most crucial question “who” we are, or, rather, “whose” we are? Third, we will conclude our reflections by focusing on genetic engineering. In light of the two previous sections, how are we to assess genetic engineering? What would it imply if we were to think of science as a responsive concept?

THE LUTHERAN THEOLOGY OF CREATION AND THE WORD OF GOD

When we consider contemporary concerns such as genetic engineering for instance, we face a challenge that is no different from the other fundamental questions that theology has always been confronted with. Where, then, do we turn when we seek answers to these difficult issues? One approach is to turn to the natural sciences or to take a broader philosophical approach. We can certainly learn a lot from this, but does it lead us to a proper theological understanding? In order for it to be theology in any ordinary sense of this term, we must emphasize genuine theological resources. We need to situate the starting point of our reflections within a hermeneutic shaped and informed by church and Scripture. This does not neglect other resources but maintains a proper awareness of where theology comes from. Theology is a view from somewhere.

Reflections on the foundation of theology are particularly pertinent considering Luther’s emphasis on the centrality of Scripture for the Christian faith and theology. *Sola scriptura* implies that a Lutheran theology can never ignore the normative role of Scripture. If a Lutheran church forgets the normative role of Scripture, it gives up being church in the Protestant sense of the term. When we take this Lutheran insight as our starting point, then the obvious place to go is Luther’s “Lectures on Genesis” in order to reflect on how we are to understand creation today. In these lectures we are immediately reminded of two things: (1) creation is called into being by the Word of God; and (2) creation in its origin is an expression of God’s beneficence.

In his comments on the first verses of Genesis, Luther emphasizes that God creates heaven and earth through the Word. “The Father creates heaven and earth out of nothing through the Son, whom Moses calls the Word.”¹ The world is created by the Word of God, which is Christ himself.

¹ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis Chapter 1–5,” in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1 (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 9.

For Luther, Christ is present and at work in God's creative work from the very beginning. He follows up on this in his exegesis of Genesis 1:3, where the Word is emphasized as the means and instrument of God's creative work and how this points forward to the Johannine understanding (Jn 1:1) of Christ as the Word of God.² The intimate link between creation by the Word of God and Christ as this very Word is significant for the theological meaning of creation. God calls the world into being by God's Word, draws the human being into a responding and living relationship, and spiritually nurtures the human being by God's Word. Therefore Oswald Bayer can say that for Luther creation is fundamentally about the establishment and preservation of community.³ Creation points forward to justification by faith, and just as the justified sinner responds with gratitude, Luther understands creation as an expression of God's beneficence, pointing forward to the ultimate good, justification by faith in Christ.

The other central motif in Luther's theology of creation is its expression of God's solicitude and benevolence. We find this view in Luther's reflections on the first time it is said that God finds the creation good (Gen 1:10). Luther points out that the meaning of this verse is that God has created a good dwelling place for the human being (even if still not created) and wishes the human being to respond with gratitude.⁴ The same reading is continued with regard to the following verses of Genesis 1:11, where Luther argues that when human beings are created, they will find an already fully equipped and marvelous place to live in. God takes care of human beings and gives them all they need. It is significant to note that also here Luther draws a parallel to God's beneficence with respect to the spiritual gifts, where God also gives us all that we need. This is the "[...] concern, care, generosity, and benevolence of God" that we already find in these first pages of Genesis and that we are to consider the significant lesson of these verses.⁵

Therefore, when we attempt to identify some theological key points in Luther's theology of creation, we can safely say that for Luther creation is not just about the origin of matter. Rather, it is about the relationship to and community with God and our fellow creatures. Luther's emphasis on the Word and God's beneficence is an expression of God's calling creation into a living and responsive fellowship. It is from this perspective that we can concur with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who says that the meaning of creation can only be known from the perspective of the church. We can never reflect on

² Ibid., 16f.

³ Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie: Eine Vergegenwärtigung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 88ff.

⁴ *LW*, op. cit. (note 1), 35.

⁵ Ibid., 39.

the meaning of creation from a neutral point, but can only contemplate the meaning of creation from the particular place, there where we have encountered God's beneficence. Therefore, Bonhoeffer argues that it is hopeless to hypothesize about the origins without an awareness of where we come from. We can only know about the origins as those who live from Christ.

The attempt—with the origin and nature of humankind in mind—to take a gigantic leap back into the world of the lost beginning, to seek to know for ourselves what humankind was like in its original state and to identify our own ideal of humanity with what God actually created is hopeless [...]. Only in the middle, as those who live from Christ, do we know about the beginning.⁶

WHOSE ARE WE? RESPONDING TO CREATION AND THE WILL OF GOD

The emphasis in both Luther and Bonhoeffer on the Word of God and the response to this Word moves the focus in the understanding of the human being away from “**who** we are” to “**whose** we are.” We are not on our own. Rather, we stand in a living and responsive community with the Triune God as our Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. It is this living community with God that we are called to respond to and to obey the Word and will of God.

The responsivity as a defining feature of what it means to be a human being also implies that we are not on our own. It is not sufficient to pursue a modernistic account of the individual as an autonomous being. Rather, we have to maintain that we have the center of our being beyond ourselves and in that sense we are “eccentric beings.” We live our lives on “borrowed breath,” we are not our own creators. David Kelsey makes an extensive argument for this in his theological anthropology, where he contends that the human being is rightly understood as created, consummated and reconciled. As created beings we are living on “borrowed breath,” as consummated we are living on “borrowed time” in anticipation of the eschatological hope, as reconciled we are living by Christ's death.⁷ Kelsey's argument is comprehensive, but the central idea in his work is the understanding that a Christian theological anthropology must be understood in light of the Christian traditions in order to provide a substantial contribution within

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3,” in Martin Rüter, Ilse Tödt, and John W. De Gruchy (eds), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 3, transl. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 62.

⁷ David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vols 1 and 2 (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

this context. This rootedness in a particular community does not preclude the discussion with other approaches, but it identifies more clearly how to understand these issues from a Christian theological perspective.

If we understand the human being as fundamentally an eccentric being, we move the focus from ourselves to seeking and realizing the will of God. When Bonhoeffer reminds us that we cannot understand creation as separate from Christ, he is at the same time reminding us of the reality of our lives. There is no reality apart from Christ and therefore the true understanding of reality is revealed only in Christ. For the Christian this means that we are called to live our lives in discipleship. We are not called to be the masters or mistresses of our own or other people's lives, but to live our lives following Christ and seeking the will of God in all that we do. When we focus our attention on **whose** we are, we are at the same time asserting that we are servants. We are living our lives with a calling according to which we are to respond with faithfulness. As Christians we have a lord, and we are called to be obedient to God's will. Bonhoeffer formulates it succinctly when he states that the Christian is called to be obedient, but at the same time it is an obedience intimately related to responsibility as a responsive concept that binds together obedience and freedom.

Obedience without freedom is slavery, freedom without obedience is arbitrariness. Obedience binds freedom, freedom ennobles obedience. Obedience binds the creature to the Creator, freedom places the creature, made in God's image, face-to-face with the Creator [...] In responsibility both obedience and freedom become real [realisieren sich].⁸

The obedience to the will of God grows out of the response in faith and gratitude to God. As Luther so excellently shows, this is a response that is an integral part of living as a created being, surrounded by all the good things God has provided for us with creation and with the spiritual gifts bestowed upon us in Christ. So when we approach an issue such as genetic engineering, we are not simply engaging with this issue from the perspective of how far we can go. Rather, the Christian approach should be to ask what the responsible (understood as a responsive concept) approach is to this technology. The responsible approach reminds us that ultimately we are not on our own. Ultimately, we are called to live our lives in responsive community with God and with our fellow creatures. This is a responsivity

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Ethics," in Clifford J. Green (ed.), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 5, transl. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 287f.

which reminds us of our creatureliness, just as it cautions us to live our lives seeking the will of our Lord and the best for our fellow creatures.

GENETIC ENGINEERING IN LIGHT OF RESPONSIVE SCIENCE

The concept of the human being as a responsive being carries with it a reservation concerning the concept of co-creation. In Philip Hefner's *The Human Factor*,⁹ the human being is understood as "[...] created co-creators whose purpose it is to be the agency, acting in freedom, to birth the future that is most wholesome for the nature that has birthed us."¹⁰ Hefner supports this thesis by pointing to three basic elements: (1) The human being as created by God to be a cocreator; (2) the evolutionary process as a conditioning matrix; and (3) freedom as key to God's intention. Balancing these three elements, Hefner seeks to maintain an understanding of God as Creator and the human being as created—understood in light of contemporary scientific and evolutionary insights.¹¹

Hefner's position has been widely debated. One of the critiques raised is that he goes too far with his concept of the human being as "cocreator" and instead to employ the term "creative creatures." Hefner rejects this proposal due to its insufficient framing of the dual nature of the human being—"[...] a creature who has been brought into existence by nature's processes, and who has been given by that nature the role of free cocreator within those same processes."¹² Admittedly, the dual nature of the human being as both conditioned and free is a view shared by most theologians and philosophers, as we can affirm this both from tradition and from our experiences. The more substantial problem with Hefner's proposal lies with his understanding of God, the human being and the relation between the two. In order to argue for his position, he tones down its implications for the concept of God,¹³ limits the role of tradition in the construction of his proposal,¹⁴ and situates his theory in a methodology taken from the natural sciences.¹⁵

Even if the concept of the human being as created cocreator can be said to express part of the scientific responsibility we have as human be-

⁹ Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31ff.

¹² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 32ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23ff.

ings for the continuous development of the sciences and the possibilities of new scientific technologies, the fundamental problem with the concept is that it presumes too much with regard to the human being. It tends to move the center of human life to the human being itself and thereby to eradicate the responsive dimension of the human condition. This danger is particularly pertinent when we approach the question of genetic engineering, particularly when it takes the form of manipulation with or genetic enhancement of human beings.

When we address the question of genetic engineering, we have to be aware that this is a very broad concept covering many different scientific potentials and ethical issues. Basically, genetic engineering is the attempt to replace a piece of DNA in the cell of a living organism with the intention of producing a new trait or characteristic. This can be used for medical purposes such as in the treatment of genetic disorders with gene therapy; animals can be modified for the purpose of research; crops can be enhanced either for the purpose of growth or to improve the conditions of children suffering from malnutrition, etc. There are many good and noble reasons for genetic engineering—not to do so in some cases would be ethically questionable. When genetic engineering is used to construct T cells for treating cancer there is a moral argument for endorsing the development of this new technique. When we can use genetic engineering to advance treatment possibilities for various kinds of diseases, it would be morally wrong to argue against this, if we do not have very good reasons for doing so. However, at the same time, there are certain uses of genetic engineering, where we have to be very cautious and probably warn against the use of this technology in these contexts. This is particularly the case, when genetic engineering is claimed to be a technology we can use for designing or enhancing certain hereditary traits in human beings. Generally, we have to be extremely careful when we use such a radical technology to make permanent changes in the genetic profile of a given organism. With regard to plants, this has given rise to concern about genetically modified crops and how inherited new genes in the seeds of a plant may spread in unpredictable ways to wild plants. With regard to human beings there has been a strong concern about hereditary changes and research on gametes that lead to permanent changes in the human genome. Again, the concern is whether we can foresee the future implications of the deep and fundamental changes we make.

Instead of seeing the human being as created cocreator, I contend that we should understand the human being as a responsive being. The concept of responsivity lies deeply within the Lutheran tradition, and emphasizes the human being as living in responsive community with God and fellow creatures. As created beings we are not semi-Gods, but created creatures

living our lives in light of God's will. But, at the same time, we have a responsibility and calling. We are called to do our very best in developing new kinds of biotechnology and improving on current approaches to science and medicine. Our task is to find the path between Scylla and Charybdis—the Scylla of an overestimation of our role as created beings, and the Charybdis of a subservience to the forces of depravation at play within creation. It is here that we can aim at having both a positive view of biotechnology, and at the same time maintain that we are finite beings living our lives on borrowed breath.

QUESTIONS

What role can 500-year-old Lutheran texts play in the contemporary assessment of current scientific and technological challenges?

Does the concept of the human being as a “responsive being” carry more weight theologically than the alternative “created cocreator”?

What kinds of genetic engineering can we endorse theologically, and where should we be cautious?

NATURAL DISASTERS AND GOD'S GOOD CREATION

Naoki Asano

GOD'S NATURE

Who is God? What is God? Where is God? Numerous questions arise when one starts to think about God. The answers differ depending on one's faith and culture, and even among people of the same faith one will hear different views. Human beings tend to "create" God in their own image. While it is true that people have their own opinion about God, they generally share a common view about God's nature, namely that God is good. God is what is good. Everything good is from God. God is the source of goodness. Even though in terms of etymology there is no clear link between God and good, in theological terms we can state that everything good is from God.

GOD'S CREATION

Creation set in when God pronounced, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), "and God saw that the light was good" (Gen 1:4). God created the sky, water and land. God saw them and commented, "It was good." God created the plants, stars and living creatures, saying, "It was good." And, finally, God created humankind. Then "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen 1:31). Creation completed.

Humankind was created with special attention and care. "God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them" (Gen 1:27). And "God blessed them" (Gen 1:28). Human beings are unique because of the imbedded image of God and the blessings bestowed upon them that God did not impart on other creatures. It is no wonder that in reference to

human beings God said, “Indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). God was pleased with God’s own work of creation.

It should be noted that God made human beings unique for a particular reason: God wanted to create a partner for Godself. God told the man and woman, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1:28). God commissioned them to care for life on the planet. Human beings were ordered to control all creatures and nature so that they would have life in abundance. In light of having been created in the image of God and with special blessings bestowed upon them, human beings could have observed God’s ordinance and grown plants and bred animals while safeguarding their natural environment on earth, under the sea and in the air. Unfortunately, this is not how it turned out 4.6 billion years later. What went wrong? In view of the planet’s increasingly serious environmental deterioration, what are the implications of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve by eating the fruit of a tree of knowledge of good and evil?

Two key terms in Genesis, “subdue” and “have dominion,” describe more precisely what God expected of human beings. In human terms, both terms can easily be misconstrued since they imply having powerful authority over something or somebody. When discussing issues such as the destruction of nature and the exploitation of natural resources, non-Christian environmentalists sometimes accuse Christians of the biblical interpretation of creation, according to which God let human beings “subdue” and “have dominion” over the creation. Is such a Christian faith to blame for our global problems? If not, is it the Bible that leads to such deterioration? Or, ultimately, is God to blame for letting it happen—God who ordered God’s blessed creatures to “subdue” and “have dominion” over nature? Taking into account that God is eternally good, it would make no sense to blame God for this. Nothing evil comes from the source of goodness.

BEFORE AND AFTER THE FALL

In the following, I shall look at the creation story from a wider perspective. God saw that creation was very good. Creation proved to be perfect. Everything went well. “Subdue” and “have dominion,” the two annoying terms used by God while “handing over” the creation to Adam and Eve, might sound different when we acknowledge that under God’s sovereignty, even subduing and dominion can have a sound connotation. According to the biblical narrative, the Fall of the ancestors of humankind did not only affect their own lives, but also those of the whole of creation, since

creation had been totally committed into their hands. The Fall changed the whole scenario of God’s ongoing creation. Human beings changed the meaning of the two terms and the way in which they were implemented. God’s reign and dominion are thus different from human ones which are always in danger of being corrupted by power.

God freely chose to create the world and let human beings control it. Human beings are also blessed with the freedom to choose. We try to choose what we believe is right using our God-given free will, but unfortunately we very often fail. Human will, even though it is a gift from God, is in bondage to sin as Luther expounded in “On the Bondage of the Will.”¹

NATURAL DISASTERS

Natural disaster is one of the most challenging theological issues. It is difficult to deal with because when it actually takes place we cannot help asking why God let the tragedy happen. There is no satisfactory answer to this dilemma and thus to the question of theodicy.

The Book of Job is very often referred to in relationship to questions of theodicy. Job’s friends tried to explain to him why Job had to suffer such calamity in spite of his faithfulness to and righteousness before God. Eliphaz told him, “You have sinned” (Job 35:6); Bildad advised him to repent; and Zophar warned Job that his guilt deserved punishment. No one could comfort his sorrow and agony. Job could not figure out why he had to suffer loss and pain in spite of his faithful life before God. Finally God speaks to him out of the whirlwind, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (Job 38:4). The Word of God overwhelmed him with the supreme authority of the Creator and sovereignty of the Almighty. Job answered the Lord, “I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth” (Job 40:4). Job saw God as the ultimate being, before whom he has nothing to say, no need to find reasons why he had to suffer. God was there as ultimate goodness. God’s goodness cannot be measured by human reasoning. Suffering should not be an indicator for how much a human being has merited or sinned. Retributive justice, a conventional view of God’s judgment that regards human suffering as punishment, is denied.

Earthquakes and tsunamis, floods, hurricanes and tornadoes regularly involve people and cause casualties. We call them natural disasters. They are the workings of nature of which we are a part.

¹ Martin Luther, “The Bondage of the Will, 1525,” in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 3–295.

Job's experience shows us ways to look at the calamities and sufferings caused by natural disasters. First and foremost it is not retributive justice that God enforces to punish evil people. They befall anyone at any time, regardless of who we are. Jesus made this very clear when he met the man who was blind from birth and his disciples asked him who had sinned so that this man was born blind. Jesus said, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (Jn 9:3). Let us remember what we have learned from the Book of Job. God revealed Godself and God's works when Job severely suffered. This blind man is another Job in the New Testament. Retributive justice is by no means biblical.

11 MARCH 2011, 2:46 PM

A massive earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale jolted East Japan. It triggered powerful *tsunami* waves that reached heights of up to 40.5 meters and hit the coastal areas of Tohoku (northeastern), Japan. This was the moment that changed the history of Japan. In Tokyo, three hundred kilometers away from the epicenter, big shocks triggered explosions of gas tanks and soil liquefaction, plunging the city into chaos. On 12 and 14 March, two nuclear reactors at Fukushima nuclear power plant exploded and spread radioactive substances over large areas of eastern Japan. The largest earthquake ever to be recorded in Japan left behind numerous casualties and killed 18,000 people.

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Takashi Yoshida, a pastor of a Reformed church serving in the affected area, reported that Jesus' cry resonated among the Christian communities of Tohoku district. They could not help but ask, Why Tohoku? Takashi Yoshida had heard people saying that this was God punishing the greedy Japanese people. His own reply to this was the following: "I thought at this very moment that this is not the punishment to those who were killed, but this is God punishing me since I took the easy cozy life with the economic prosperity that was built upon the hard work of many victims for granted." His response reminds me of Job, when, at the very end, he said to the Lord, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). Having said above that theologically retributive justice does not help us to understand the tragedy and ease the pain of the victims, it still happens that people who have suffered under major (natural) catastrophes, tend to interpret their sufferings this way.

It was Friday when the earthquake occurred, two days after Ash Wednesday in 2011. The following day, there was deadly ash from radiation fallout. When

the nuclear power plant exploded and the radioactive substance leaked into the air of Fukushima, pastor Yoshida thought that this world had changed completely, from the beautiful creation of God’s land to the place of sorrow and pain, where no human beings or any living creatures ought to live. The earthquake needs to be examined from another perspective. The earthquake and tsunami are indeed natural, but we must never forget the fact that the explosion of a nuclear power plant is a human-made disaster. This human-made monster irrevocably damaged the land, left it contaminated and barren, and robbed the local people of their houses and property.

God created us in God’s own image and we hold this image inside ourselves in various ways. One of the facets of such a blessed image of God is human creativity that produces creative works in the fields of the arts, design, music, manufacturing, buildings, cooking and so on. Such human creativity enriches life and makes it joyful. After the Fall of Adam and Eve, however, such human creativity has not always successfully revealed the Creator’s image. It began to “walk” on its own, without knowing where to go, often turning its back on God. Nuclear energy was a product of human creativity, primarily to win World War II.

Immediately after the earthquake, the four Lutheran churches in Japan together set up a rescue program. Japan Evangelical Lutheran Relief (JLER) sent a group of people to carry out relief work. Its ministry is closely related to the victims of the disaster who have suffered spiritual, psychological and physical damage and its mission includes listening and deeply caring for the victims and providing the necessary support so that they may find a future life of hope and joy. In March 2014, the JLER’s three-year program came to an end. Although the program itself has ended, the JELC decided to continue the work, as much as possible focusing on the victims of the Fukushima radioactive emissions and accompanying them by listening to their stories and supporting their daily needs. We know this is not a “once for all” support, but a continuous, long-term support over several decades. In the future, to serve as the church for our suffering neighbors will be another missional challenge. This ministry has become another mission that God has entrusted to us as a part of God’s continuing creative activity.

The Australian theologian Frank Rees experienced the earthquake and tsunami that hit the southern part of Western Samoa on 29 September 2009. Later he wrote a theological reflection on the catastrophe, in which he quoted two historic theologians, Jürgen Moltmann and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Both have a common theological understanding of God working in the suffering world. Moltmann writes of “the accompanying activity of God”²

² Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation. The Gifford Lectures, 1984-1985* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

who also suffers the painful reality of the modern world with the suffering people. God is not only the one who created the whole universe, but also the one who continuously accompanies the suffering people through the new creation.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, “only the suffering God can help.” By quoting from Bonhoeffer, Rees asserts that only God who is actively and lovingly engaged with the suffering world can help us,

God is a full participant in the life of the world. To suffer, here, means to be subject to the choices of others. To suffer means to be able to receive and to accept what others decide, as well as to have one’s own capacity and wishes and purposes.³

These two theological statements about God are encouraging and inspiring as we continue to carry out our Christian mission to serve people in need and in pain. Both theologians affirm a suffering God who accompanies people in pain. God accompanies those who strive to serve as well as those who suffer. At the same time, we should note that suffering and pain are not something cursed or that God denies. God accepts and willingly suffers such hardships with us while continuing to create new life despite confusion and darkness, sometimes caused by human creativity. This ministry of connecting and staying close to the affected people is our participation in the *missio Dei*.

THE IMAGE OF PRAYER

“God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them” (Gen 1:28). According to Genesis, being created in the image of God is something that is only granted to human beings. It presupposes our ability to think about, to remember and to believe in our Creator. This gives human beings the ability to respond to God’s call and to create a relationship with God. The response to God’s call may express itself in witness and prayer. Prayer can thus be seen as indication that human beings are created in God’s image. This image was only granted to human beings. Prayer as the tool for us to communicate and engage with God is consequently something that makes us distinctively human. No other creature is gifted with prayer. We know that some other capabilities characterize human nature such as speaking languages or using tools. But apes are known to be intelligent

³ Frank Rees, “God of the tsunami: A theological reflection on the experience of disaster and some implications for how we live in the world,” at www.ttgst.ac.kr/upload/ttgst_resources13/20124-270.pdf

enough to understand some simple words and to communicate with their breeders. They know how to use sticks to pick bananas from the tree. Speaking languages and using tools do not prove that human beings are exceptionally gifted with God’s image.

Prayer can also mean lamentation; in the Old Testament Psalms we often encounter expressions of lament (Ps 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—the words Christ cried out on the cross according to Mark 15:34), desperate questions asking God, Why does this happen to me? Most often there are no straightforward and quick answers to these questions, yet bringing them before God may be the beginning of a healing process. And one day we might even receive a response to our lamentation.

Sometimes it might be difficult to bring those questions and laments before God on one’s own. In the aftermath of the horrendous tsunami, some non-Christian families came to visit churches, seeking help. In most cases they came because they had lost someone in their family. One day a pastor received a phone call from a mother who asked him, Where is my son now? Why did it have to be my son? Is it because he did something bad? Tell me pastor, where is he now, heaven or hell? The pastor could not answer anything at first. The conversation lasted for about an hour and towards the end he said to her, “I can pray to God and this is the best I can do for you now. If you don’t mind, may I pray for you and your son?” The request to allow him to pray calmed down her troubled mind. She replied in tears, “Yes, please do. Please pray for us.” It is nothing special that a pastor prays for others. But the pastor later remembered this conversation and said,

I never thought before that prayer was such an effective pastoral caring method. I thought my primary calling for ministry would be to preach and teach the Bible to the congregation. But now I know intercessory pastoral prayer is so powerful for spiritual healing.

Intercessory prayer is not only for pastors who are professionally trained and theologically equipped for such grief counseling. It should not be confined only to pastors—it should be practiced by every Christian whenever people are grieving among us. We are all privileged with the gift of prayer and commissioned to use it for our neighbors. It is God who created God’s image in us. This image was created so that we can connect with our Creator who wants us to use this image through prayer for God’s purpose, for God’s mission.

QUESTIONS

Do you think the conventional understanding of theodicy (explanation of why a perfectly good, almighty and all-knowing God permits evil) is meaningful in witnessing God in today's world? If yes, why and how?

Besides prayer, are there other ways in which the image of God in human beings is being expressed?

Why is important for us as citizens of the earth to maintain God's good creation?

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF GOD'S CREATION: ADVOCATING FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

*Martin Kopp*¹

Take a deep breath—I mean, really, do so before reading any further. You have felt air fill your lungs and then being expelled back into the atmosphere. There is maybe no other experience that is more common than this one. Breathing is so normal that one generally does not even think about it. One actually forgets that one breathes—it is so perfectly normal.

Yet, one minute ago, something exceptional happened. You may not be aware of it, but you belong to the first generation of human beings ever to inhale 400 parts per million (ppm) of CO₂ with each breath you take. That means that 400 of one million molecules that entered your lungs were CO₂ molecules. It is a first in human history. Indeed, since the first *homo sapiens* was born, the concentration of CO₂ has oscillated between 180 and 280 ppm.

This is not the kind of firsts to celebrate. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) report underlines that the reality of climate change is "unequivocal." It states that there is a 95–100 percent probability that, since the mid-twentieth century, human activity is the main driver of climate change due to the exponential increase of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions. Human societies emit GHG mainly by burning fossil fuels that are, or used to be, carbon stocked in the ground until human beings put it into cars, power plants, planes... and released it back into the atmosphere.

This is not trivial. The rise in GHG levels in the atmosphere increases the greenhouse gas effect. It is true that this effect is normally very posi-

¹ Martin Kopp is the LWF's delegate to the UN climate conferences.

tive: it allows life on earth as we know it. It can be compared to a blanket put over the planet and without it the mean surface temperature would be -18°C instead of $+15^{\circ}\text{C}$. The problem is we are making the blanket bigger. The atmosphere has already warmed by 0.85°C and if we fail to shift toward low-carbon societies by the middle of this century, surface temperatures may well increase by between 4°C to 8°C .

This is not harmless. Such increases would have tremendous consequences, including an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events (heat waves, floods, droughts, hurricanes and typhoons, wild fires); rising sea levels; the acidification of the oceans; changes in rain patterns; the loss of biodiversity. In other words, a complete upheaval in our ecosystems, which would provoke the destruction of livelihoods (houses, fields, livestock); famines; water shortages; serious economic crises and costs; thousands if not millions of deaths; massive migration and social as well as international conflicts. Climate change may be the most serious threat confronting human societies today.

That having been said, why exactly is climate a matter of “justice”? And, why should Christians feel concerned? Is there a strong theological grounding for action by believers and churches? If so, how can they advocate for climate justice?

CLIMATE CHANGE: AN ISSUE OF JUSTICE

Climate change constitutes an issue of justice in a threefold way: it is a matter of international, intergenerational and social justice. Let us explore those three angles.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE

The second part of the IPCC’s report is dedicated to the impact of climate change on human societies, the adaptation they demand and the vulnerability they expose. The latest IPCC report underlines the fact that while **all** countries will be affected by climate change, the maximum harm will probably be done in the so-called “developing” countries as well as in the so-called “least developed” countries.

Historically, it is developed countries that have emitted the most GHG. This is why climate change is a matter of international justice: the countries that have emitted the least carbon will be the most affected. This poses obvious questions of distributive and restorative justice between nations, i.e., not only ecological but also economic justice. One should not forget for instance that some countries may disappear completely under water. The

President of the Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, is already looking to buy land for the population of his country.

But it needs to be pointed out that the levels of GHG emitted by the global South since 1850 is about to reach the levels emitted by the global North.² In 2010, the global South was responsible for 48 percent of all emissions and this figure is expected to reach 51 percent by around 2020. China, for example, has become the first worldwide emitter.

This raises the question of whether this solves the question of international justice. I do not think so because, first, in the global South many countries that have low emissions are among the main victims of climate change. Second, and more importantly, the countries of the global North consume a considerable portion of what the South produces—polluting industries have merely been relocated. It appears that the question will soon have to be reformulated: it will no longer be “developed” as opposed to “developing” countries, or the global North as opposed to global South, but rather emitters versus victims.

INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

Here the data is crystal clear: Previous and today’s generations have emitted significant amounts of GHG and it is the coming generations who will suffer the most. Although models and scenarios for the future generally stop in 2100, Andrew Dessler states that “many scenarios have significant emissions and warming that extend into the twenty-second century and well beyond.”³ If our generation fails to cut emissions in time, human-induced climate change will last for centuries and affect the lives of many generations to come. Our current use of fossil fuels and land poses serious questions of intergenerational justice.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Climate change raises issues of social justice: those who suffer first and foremost are the poor and most vulnerable among us, for instance the unemployed, migrants, women, children, elderly and disabled. Most of the time, they have not even had access to the activities that cause most of the GHG emissions.

² Den Elzen, Olivier, Höhne and Janssens Maenhout, “Countries’ Contributions to Climate Change: Effect of Accounting for all Greenhouse Gases, Recent Trends, Basic Needs and Technological Progress,” in *Climatic Change* 121/2 (2013).

³ See Andrew Dessler, *Introduction to Modern Climate Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 123.

Two reasons explain this. As has been pointed out, on the one hand it is the “developing” and “least developed” countries that are located in geographical areas that will be exposed to the most severe consequences of climate change. On the other, it is easily understandable that poor countries and populations are less able to face the challenges brought about by climate change. For instance, the Netherlands is wealthy enough to try to protect the coast against rising sea levels. The same does not apply to Bangladesh where rising sea levels will displace millions of people who will become “climate refugees.”

Whereas this is blatantly obvious in the global South, it applies universally. When hurricanes Rita and Katrina struck New Orleans, that is to say a city in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, it was the poorest who suffered the most. Wealthy people did not live in neighborhoods that can easily be flooded, had enough money to flee the disaster and the resources necessary to start over elsewhere. Poor people saw their houses destroyed and had to stay in a deserted city, unable to pay for a new house. I worked in New Orleans with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s Lutheran Disaster Response. It took our twenty-five-person French youth group two weeks to clean three houses. I remember very clearly that the family we helped had been living for months in a small caravan, parked in the garden beside the rotting house. This experience will remain imprinted in my mind as proof of the vulnerability of countries we generally judge “too wealthy to fail.” We must not forget the inequalities among their populations.

Today, one can no longer separate the fields of social and ecological justice. It was very appropriate that on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the IPCC, UN General Secretary, Ban Ki-Moon, identified climate change as a serious threat to reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

GREEN AND JUST: A THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

At the theological level, the relationship with creation and the utmost importance attributed to justice are the two legs of a Christian stance on climate change. Both perspectives can be included in a broader spiritual climate of recognition, grace and love.

A RENEWED UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEOLOGY OF CREATION

Over the last few decades, academic research has reworked the most famous biblical texts and founded a renewed theology of creation. Also, theologians have rediscovered the richness of the Reformers’ theology and the underestimated tradition of dialogue between faith and the natural sciences.

The world is God’s creation (Gen 1:1-2:25). The first article of the Apostles’ Creed confesses, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.”⁴ All forms of life are confessed to be creatures. We are no gods. We cannot ground our relationship with the rest of creation as if we were the owners of it. God is the true owner of creation. And this creation is confessed to be “very good” (Gen 1: 31).

We are responsible for God’s creation. Our relationship vis-à-vis the other creatures is indeed defined by four verbs in Genesis 1 and 2: “to subdue” and “to have dominion” (Gen 1:28); “to cultivate” and “to keep” (Gn 2:15). The first two verbs have been misinterpreted as constituting a command to exploit nature. For instance, the French philosopher, René Descartes, famously spoke of the human being as the master and owner of nature. In his article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,”⁵ American historian Lynn White Jr. has even identified the Western Judeo-Christian tradition as one of the main roots of the current ecological crisis. What is often forgotten is that at the end of his article he also identified resources in this tradition that would help to overcome the pattern of domination.

As for the verbs used in Genesis to illustrate our relationship to other creatures, today we recognize that those terms actually express our responsibility when it comes to the fate of creation. In particular, the verb “to subdue” is used in Hebrew to describe the relationship of a king toward his subjects, and the Old Testament perspective is one of responsible care. As for the two other verbs, they express clearly the fact that we are to be good stewards of God’s creation.

Hence, the Bible offers an anthropocentrism éclairé and limited by the dignity of other creatures. It does not open a space for total liberty, but one of responsibility.

THE THEOLOGY OF JUSTICE

Justice irrigates the entire Scriptures, from the very heart of the Law to the essence of the gospel. It is of utmost importance in the eyes of God. Guillermo Kerber quotes a few relevant verses in his article *La justice climatique*.⁶ In the Old Testament world, the widow, the orphan and the stranger exemplify the figure of the vulnerable person and they are the object of God’s special love and care: “The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he

⁴ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 21.

⁵ *Science* 3767, vol. 155 (1967).

⁶ Guillermo Kerber, “La justice climatique,” in *Sources* (Janvier/Février 2011).

brings to ruin” (Ps 146:9). There can be true and sustainable peace only through justice:

Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps (Ps 85:11–13).

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ’s ministry is understood as an accomplishment of justice. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus states at the beginning of his sermon on the mount: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Mt 5:6). At the end of his ministry, Jesus shares a parable that is a call to act on behalf of the vulnerable in this world (Mt 25:31–46).

FROM RECOGNITION TO GRACE AND LOVE

In the face of climate change, these theological considerations determine a clear ethical stance. Climate change is the result of a corrupt relationship with the whole of creation, including one’s fellow human beings. By regarding creation as a stock of resources to be extracted, exploited and burnt until the last remaining accessible molecule, whatever the price in human and creational terms, a minority has put itself in a situation of sin. To take Martin Luther’s metaphor, big emitters have turned inward on themselves (*incurvatus in se*). Anyone who has tried to walk in a city while looking at their own belly button knows, being turned or curved inward on oneself inevitably leads to bumping into another person: we cannot see others and the environment around us, who and which we fatally harm. The former president of the LWF, Mark S. Hanson, used strong words when he identified this general situation as spiritual blasphemy.

This anthropological position is dangerous, if not lethal. Many sisters and brothers have already died due to extreme weather conditions and the future of everyday life is threatened. This is also true for many animal and plant species. The loss of biodiversity is steadily increasing and as Robert Barbault points out,⁷ it is estimated that we are on the verge of the sixth great extinction of the species, in which climate change plays a significant role.

As Christians we know how vital it is to be able to recognize our sin and to repent. This will help us to be committed: God forgives, and as we are liberated by God’s grace, we can turn to the world and start on a path

⁷ See Robert Barbault, “Loss of Biodiversity. Overview,” in *Encyclopedia of Biodiversity* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2013), 656–66.

of courageous action. We are at the heart of Luther’s view regarding the Christian commitment. This still applies today and our deeds flourish out of the reconciliation and peace brought about by God’s gracious mercy.

However, I am afraid that this will not suffice to bring high-carbon societies and ways of life onto a sustainable path. Those of us living in the so-called developed countries need to change how we look at the world, and those living elsewhere should be cautious not to adopt a Western social imaginary.⁸ We should learn to pause, contemplate, be grateful for what is given to us and love. Yes, we should love creation, including our neighbors. We protect that which we love, but neglect that to which we are indifferent. If creation is reduced to videos on a flat screen or figures in a WWF report, there can be no true conversion and, consequently, no effective personal practices and public policies. But love requires time. I believe that there would be significant progress if we were to spend more time outside, in direct contact with and in awe of God’s good creation—this is all the more relevant as humankind increasingly lives in urban areas. We need to be in actual relationship to creation. This shift is the precondition for a shift in our economic paradigm toward a frugal and hopefully just society. Here we reach the very core of the issue: with regard to climate change, it is our values and views of the world that are at stake.

CREATION—NOT FOR SALE?

Unfortunately, the dominant social imaginary only recognizes value through price. Incentives to fight climate change that seem to work best are economic ones. Nowadays, money is the true good. Proof of the fact is that one of the main political tools to tackle climate change is to put a price on carbon emissions through a cap-and-trade strategy. And a sign of the hegemony of the economy is the fact that civil society is currently shifting its advocacy narrative. Indeed, up to now it had insisted on the moral obligations of the emitters toward those who suffer from the consequences of their emissions. This strategy has failed. The trend is to change the discourse and to tell states and companies that tackling climate change is in their own economic interest, a strategy known at the level of individuals. For instance, people seem much more willing to insulate their houses

⁸ The term “imaginary” comes from the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. Theories of the social imaginary seek to explain the way imagination, not simply reason, figures in the construction of central social institutions, representations, and practices.

because it will reduce the heating bill rather than because it will prevent the displacement of somebody living far away and in the future.

So, creation—not for sale? But what if the best way to save creation from severe climate change and its impacts were to underline the financial advantages of taking bold action on this issue? Should we, as Christians, use an economic argument in order for people and governments to make the morally right choice? Would this be true to our identity as a communion of churches? This is a tough question. At the time of writing these lines the issue has not been debated within the LWF, and I myself have not yet made up my own mind. Nonetheless, as civil society is changing its narrative the question will have to be discussed and the LWF will have to come up with its own position.

Personally I realize on the one hand that the timing is extremely short: the new treaty is awaited in 2015 and the world's emissions are expected to peak in 2020 before beginning a decline that would cut the world's emission by 80–95 percent in 2050. This is a very ambitious target. Both the urgency of the need for action and the well-known catastrophic consequences of runaway climate change could speak for the efficiency argument: we do not have time to overthrow the social imaginary and make it more sensitive to moral rather than economic arguments— provided this were even possible. This is why we should use what currently moves the targeted audience.

On the other hand, I clearly see that a Christian advocacy based on financial incentives could be seen as contradictory: are we not using as a tool the exact same element that has created the crisis we are in? Can a communion of churches rely on the economy, when Jesus himself had a harsh discourse on wealth and was an example of a frugal way of life? Can the communion use the egoist trigger, when its mission is to be the voice of the voiceless, the poor and vulnerable?

In this section, we have clearly moved from the why we should address climate change to the how we should advocate for action, raising a challenging overarching question. One of the current advocacy initiatives is the fast for the climate,⁹ to which the LWF is fully committed. Since the UN climate conference COP19 that was held in Warsaw, Poland, thousands of people around the world fast on the first day of every month, both in solidarity with the victims of climate change and to put pressure on governments toward an ambitious treaty to be signed in Paris, France, in late 2015.

Fasting has changed the way I look at the world. Living in a “developed” country, I had never gone to bed hungry; now I do so once a month. I realize that this is the daily experience of hundreds of millions, some of them because of extreme weather events, others because of the decade-to-decade

⁹ See www.fastfortheclimate.org

shift in climate patterns. Fasting made climate change real for me, opened my eyes and brought me closer to my neighbors. This is one of the reasons why fasting once a month is interesting: climate change appears to us in the global North as a distant reality, both in space and in time. Through the concrete feeling of hunger, the distance between me and the victims is cancelled. My empty stomach makes me think of them all day long and experience actual compassion.

But also, coming back to the economic question and the angle of our advocacy, fasting sets a symbolic gesture of moderation. In the so-called “developed” countries we live in societies that need growth to keep going, societies that are based on ever-increasing production and consumption. Through fasting we symbolically show that the path towards a sustainable and just future requires us to change the societal paradigm—“system change, not climate change!,” says a famous slogan. In short, as Gandhi stated very truly: we need to learn to live more simply, so that others may simply live. There is enough on earth for everybody’s need but not for everybody’s greed.

QUESTIONS

Does your country already experience the consequences of climate change?

Is your church committed to the issue? How could it address climate change further?

What would be your position about the problem raised in the last section? Say you were to meet governments and businesses, would your Lutheran advocacy be based on economic or on moral arguments?

CREATION NOT FOR SALE: HOW TO SHARE LAND—PROBLEMS AROUND LAND OWNERSHIP IN TANZANIA

Stephen I. Munga

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that creation is not and will never be for sale. If it were for sale, then there would have to be a seller and a buyer. Who owns creation? Who would want to own and therefore to buy it? Creation is God's free gift to all. Creation includes the land on which most of the world's populations earn their livelihood. We are all aware that the majority of people, particularly in the global South, depend on the land for their very existence. We exist on the land and it is here that we feel that we belong to this world and are part of creation. We also know that there are those who want to own land, at least to possess a large part of it. This denies others a place where to exist and their means of earning their livelihood. God has entrusted creation to us all and the 148,940,000 sq. km. of land area on this earth is a place where all of us can exist.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LAND

In the biblical creation story we encounter God who entrusts humankind with the care of creation. God does so for the benefit of all human beings so that they may take care of creation while, at the same time, using it to sustain their lives. What we see here is the interdependence between humankind and creation—we

are not owners of creation but simply stewards of it. God the Creator remains the author and owner of creation until the end of time. Our relationship to God with regard to creation is a covenantal one—an agreement between unequal parties. God the Creator will always have the upper hand and we are to take care of creation in accordance with God's commands.

Besides the creation story, another biblical text, Leviticus 25, refers to land related issues and speaks about the Sabbath year, the year of rest. The fiftieth sabbatical year is the year of jubilee. This chapter is highly relevant as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) commemorates the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. The LWF will commemorate this historical event with the declaration that we are “liberated by God's grace.” The text from Leviticus gives us a taste not only of how jubilee is related to liberation but also how land stands at the heart of what is to be liberated in the jubilee year. Land is equal to being able to exist—this applies particularly to the poor. The land was given to them by the Creator and any land transaction has to be just so as to please God who is our justice. The year of jubilee is clearly marked by setting free people and property as well as the benchmark for determining prices or for regulating the selling and buying of land and property. The law made provisions that the land should not be sold, but only leased, until the year of jubilee when it was to be returned to the family that owned it or their heir.

When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. All bargains ought to be made by this rule: You shall not oppress one another, not take advantage of one another's ignorance or necessity, but you shall fear your God (Lev 25:14-17).

In the year of jubilee, people return to their own property and it is thus the year of freedom and atonement when property, including land, is freed and the bonds of slavery and poverty are loosened. Property and owners are brought together again. This law enabled people to preserve their tribes and families, while waiting for the coming of the Messiah. The liberty every person was born to, whether sold or forfeited, should return during the year of jubilee. This was a typical analogy to the redemption by Christ from the slavery of sin and of being brought again to the liberty of the children of God. The declaration of liberation by the LWF fits well within the same parameters. It has to be so in order to be realized, otherwise the declaration of the LWF becomes an empty slogan.

PROBLEMS AROUND LAND OWNERSHIP IN TANZANIA

In a country, the backbone of whose economy is agriculture, land is central to the livelihoods of millions of people. Tanzania is among many African countries whose people are mainly small-scale farmers who are the main producers of both food and cash crops. More than eighty percent of Tanzania's population live in rural areas and depend solely on subsistence farming and pastoralism as their main sources of livelihood. Land, therefore, is the most important commodity. It should be remembered that land is the scarcest commodity of all. This is so because we cannot increase its size and are losing swathes of productive land due to various forms of destruction. This being the case means that land has to be distributed justly and used productively so as to sustain the lives of the people.

Land grabbing, *poraji ardhi* in Kiswahili, is a widespread practice in Tanzania. Whether alleged or true this is not a new phenomenon in Tanzania or in other parts of the global South. The exploitation of land and natural resources has had a profound impact on land tenure. During the nineteenth century, European colonizers went to Africa, partitioned the continent and plundered its land and natural resources. The colonizers' policies left a gruesome legacy in their wake, characterized by a series of land and resource conflicts, land litigation, loss of peoples' control over land and natural resources, exposure to alien land tenure systems and natural resources management. Ongoing land disputes in Tanzania have created and boosted a modern neocolonial system that enhances the power of a few wealthy people and companies as well as transnational corporations at the expense of smallholder peasants and indigenous communities who are displaced and dispossessed. The scale, magnitude and discourse around the current rush for land in Tanzania makes this moment unique and important in history and it calls for immediate action.

Among fast emerging deals in the world are the "land deals" that are considered good by some humanitarian scholars, clean by some politicians and profitable/beneficial by some economists and investors. Consequently, these land deals are considered good by the governments of the receiving countries while they deny poor citizens the customary rights that assured them of the protection of their natural heritage and survival. It is paradoxical that in a country such as Tanzania, land is the property of the state and people are given their share to hold and use according to the laws. If land is taken away from a person in the public interest, then that person has to be fairly compensated. Yet, this appears not to have been the practice so far.

There is considerable evidence based on empirical studies about international land deals and their positive and negative impact and the World Bank report 2008–2009 provides eye-opening information on the matter. Land deals worth about 60 million hectares were concluded worldwide, with

two-thirds of the land acquired situated in Africa. In addition, there are some individual deals for very large areas. For example, Liberia recently signed a concession for 220,000 hectares, while by 2010 Tanzania is said to have finalized land deals amounting to more than 1.8 million hectares. This is a shocking amount of land to be given out by a single country. One of the questions that we need to ask is how transparent these deals are. How involved are the people who live in those areas where land is given away on a massive scale? How participatory is the whole process? Can members of the general public access the information about these land deals? These questions regarding issues of justice and transparency lead us to reviewing the legal provisions and the actual implementation of such.

In 1923, the British colonial state in Tanganyika passed the Land Tenure Ordinance in 1923 (later referred as Land Ordinance, 1923) according to which the whole territory, whether occupied or unoccupied on the date of the commencement of the ordinance, was declared public land. It was entrusted to the governor to be held for the benefit of the native communities. On the basis of the Land Ordinance, the independent nation of Tanzania passed its own land laws, which were rather more detailed than the colonial ones, and entrusted the whole land to the president of the country. It should be taken into consideration that here we are not only talking about the laws but also the institutions responsible for executing these laws. For example, the new land laws, introduced in 1999, intended to resolve the land conflicts and to deal with situations that had not been provided for under the old laws. It cannot be denied that the new land laws have made some significant changes with regard to addressing previous land problems. However, the question remains as to whether these new laws have really attended to the realities on the ground and have met the desired ends.

The importance of having good (e.g., just) laws cannot be disputed. Equally crucial is the need for good and efficient institutions that execute the laws. Why do we have the laws but more and more land conflicts? Are these conflicts new in the sense that they are not provided for under the current legislation? Are there really new situations or is something not working properly somewhere? Finally, how knowledgeable are the local communities about these laws? Thinking through these questions opens up debate which can lead to common solutions that guarantee justice and sustainable peace. This is the reason why the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), in collaboration with Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University, prepared a consultative consultation on land justice.

Apart from looking at the challenges from the perspective of the legal instruments there is a need to follow up on what has transpired on the ground, i.e., existential situations. Over the past years, there has been a growing discussion, both nationally and internationally, on various

land related matters. The media and different land forums have alerted the world to the scale of land transactions in many different parts of the global South. Research on land use and land cover has been conducted and reports written on land grabbing, or land acquisition. The challenge related to the matter is the division between investors and communities. There is a marked difference in perception as to the positive and negative effects of the land transactions, now often regarded as land grabbing, and their outcomes. Areas targeted are the forest and other reserved areas as well as other areas on which villagers depend for food, artisanal mining and livestock grazing, all crucial sources of livelihood.

Although the Tanzania Village Land Act of 1999 requires that people are compensated for any land loss, the process for consulting on this and determining the level and manner of payment of compensation has been fraught with conflict. Much of the compensation is paid by the investor through the state authorities rather than directly to the local people. It also takes an inordinately long from the time when the valuation is completed to when the actual compensation is paid. Furthermore, compensations do not consider the dynamic future streams of income but only static values at the time of valuation. In case that the locals are not compensated properly, it causes frustration and can lead to abject poverty. Such complications arise primarily because of the lack of transparency in the deals. These problems are potential critical threats to sustainable peace which need urgent attention.

In this context, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) commissioned Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU), through the Institute of Justice and Peace (IJP), to organize and conduct a three-day conference on land justice for sustainable peace. This conference was held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 10–13 September 2013. This international consultation engaged the government, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), the diplomatic community, international organizations, the business community, members of parliament, the academic and research communities and the media. The main objective of the consultation was to look into the matter by examining various research in this area and to suggest a way forward on how to deal with the situation.

With that objective in mind, the concept note of the conference took into account various points of departure, including the land laws in Tanzania and the conflicts facing the communities. There are a number of existing reports on legal instruments, some of which are based on empirical studies as there are a number of sources reporting on the conflicts. In the context of good governance both the laws and the institutions that execute them ought to indicate the positive benefits for society. In other words, the new laws are expected to be better in terms of distributing benefits and justice to societies than the ones that preceded them.

After three days of serious discussions the land conference gave birth to the Tanzania Land Forum as a platform for key stakeholders. The purpose here was that after recognizing the magnitude of the problem, those who were at the conference decided to deal with the situation in a strategic manner. Therefore, those who were at the conference are the founders of the forum. Much has been done to ensure that the forum takes off. This includes the organizational structure and key guidelines while at the same time attending to the most pressing issues on the ground through the Institute for Justice and Peace of the Sebastian Kolowa University.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The world has frequently fought against dehumanizing practices. During the time of apartheid in South Africa, many countries were in solidarity with the oppressed and told the oppressors that it is wrong to oppress another person on the basis of the color of their skin. Currently we hear the cries of many because of various forms of economic injustice, civil wars, terrorism, hunger, segregation, corruption and new forms of slavery in their countries and the world at large. In the context of these we ask ourselves: whence come such injustices? There are different ways in which people are victimized by their governments: There are those who have been displaced as a result of their land having been taken away from them in order to make way for—often foreign—investment. Others have had their environment destroyed and water sources polluted in the name of investment. We hear stories of people suffering from incurable diseases caused by poisonous chemicals in mining areas. Their cries of pain and agony fall on deaf ears because their governments and those in powers care more about their personal benefit than the lives of those who have put them into power. These people cry because of unjust treatment, because they have been subjected to losses—the loss of their property, their land, their lives, dignity and humanity. They are crying out because their freedom has been taken away and they have been subjected to slavery in their own lands. These are people waiting for the jubilee as the time for God (*kairos*) to set them free. Their cry is God’s calling for their freedom and restoration of their property and dignity. Let their cry be God calling the LWF to attend to their pains and speak up for their freedom and restoration. If the LWF declares that we are “liberated” then it should as a communion of churches attend to those who are suffering. Let this be God’s calling and sending to the special mission of jubilee—liberating those who are subjected to the pains of injustice.

QUESTIONS

Do you think that we have plenty of land in developing countries so that it can just be given away?

Do we need international legal instruments that transparently regulate the issuing of land globally, particularly in light of booming land investments?

Can the LWF play a role in the ongoing scramble for land in different parts of the world, particularly in developing countries?

CREATION IS NOT UP FOR SALE, BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR THEOLOGICAL CONSCIENCE?

Cibele Kuss

O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord [...] I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live [...] (Ezek 37:4–6).

I very much like the symbolism of the dry bones that have the hope of being changed. This dryness affects the whole of God's creation. According to the Christian vision of unity and diversity the whole of creation awaits the resurrection of the whole body, bringing abundant life and dignity for all creatures. We are part of the places and lands where we are born and live. I am writing this article in my *oikos* in Brazil. And here in Brazil, as in many other countries, we are witnessing the blatant destruction of forests and the spread of agribusiness and its devastating effects.

In light of our interdependence with the environment, destroying the bones of the forests in the form of increased greenhouse gas emissions triggering climatic changes such as serious floods, droughts and storms affecting the earth's cycles, contributes to violating our human rights. How are we to approach this? And in what way? The most strategic question is, What are we doing to confront this continuing dryness of the bones of creation? We cannot forget that there are bones that are not, and do not wish to be, indwelt by the Spirit of God, the breath of the divine *ruach*. Those are the bones indwelt by the dark sides of the spirit of capitalism, as represented by the arms industry, agribusiness and a society that is consumerist, misogynist, homophobic and predacious of all the good things of the earth.

In the context of five hundred years since the Reformation, what does theology say to us? The Brazilian feminist theologian, Nancy Cardoso, has asked a timely and provocative question concerning the role of theology:

And what about theology? Well [...]. It is wavering between peace in the church, the comfort zone of the university and the unrest of the people in their struggles. It is high time to remember! And not to forget where we have come from and with whom we want to go forward. These are difficult times, and a theology that merely observes protests from afar, or which is living only with past struggles, which are still alive but are not today's struggles – such a church does not know the toughness and revolutionary passion of the twenty-first century.¹

Looking on and observing do not really tell us much about who we are and with whom we want to journey. Obviously, it is not enough to say in our worship services that we must share land and bread, if all we are doing is observing the struggles of the people from afar. For a long time now, creation, Pacha Mama or Mother Earth has ceased to be sacred and has become a vast valley of dry bones, a creation that is being destroyed, fought over and sold, and far from being venerated and held in reverence for its immense diversity and loveliness.

In the capitalist system, God's creation has a price, an owner and a buyer. A minority of individuals and organized groups, who have lost in their bones the spirit of shared life, rule over and buy plots of land and water sources, that are essential for life on our planet, and fight over the fauna and flora in their diversity. The little creatures are not interesting. They are not even noticed.

Large-scale estate farming assesses the land and calculates the profit of single crop farming of genetically modified soya or how many million head of cattle are going to be slaughtered and sold on the market, where people pay high prices for poor quality food. They do not see that the birds and the trees are important. They never say or understand the poetic words of the Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros, "I listen to the colors of the birdsong."² And they have never even heard of the Bible passage that reads, "If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young" (Deut 22: 6). Millions of species and living organisms are being decimated by the poisonous pesticides that are being used by agribusinesses around the world.

In December 2014 it was thirty years since the explosion in the pesticides factory of Union Carbide, now Dow Chemicals, in the town of Bhopal, India, where over 16,000 died and at least 560,000 were seriously poisoned. These kinds of accidents tend to happen there where the workers' lives are

¹ At <https://www.facebook.com/notes/757117881043910/> 01.17.15

² Manoel de Barros, *O livro das ignoranças*, 3^aed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1993).

deemed not to be worth much and a safe and healthy working environment is not one of the enterprise's priorities. The argument that food for feeding the population can only be produced by using poison had fatal consequences for large parts of the population in this particular case. In 2013, the pesticide market made a total profit of US\$ 11.5 billion, divided between six huge international corporations: Monsanto, BASF, Syngenta, Dupont, Bayer (the company that produced the lethal gas used by the Nazis) and Dow Chemicals.

This sinful use of pesticides in Brazil is poisoning our people. It is in the rivers, the soil and the food. Every day we come into contact with these poisons. Most serious of all is the organization of agribusiness representatives in the field of Brazilian legislation, the so-called *Bancada Ruralista* (rural lobby), allied with the *Bancada Evangélica* (evangelical lobby), known as the 3B (Bala, Boi e Bíblia—bullet, cattle and Bible). Their main aim is to protect agribusiness at all costs—slave labor, deforestation, confiscation of the land of indigenous peoples and former slaves. That group of dry bones is so well organized that in 2014 it succeeded in getting a law passed that allows pesticides to be used that had previously been prohibited in the country because of the high level of harm they were causing.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD BREATHES ON THE BONES OF ORGANIC FARMING

The women and men engaged in small-scale organic farming put ecologically clean food on our tables. Small-scale organic farming is a model of family farming that combines food production with the preservation and conservation of ecosystems and their natural biomes. Organic farming does not use pesticides, artificial fertilizers or genetically modified seeds.

There are groups and organizations in our churches that have not stood aside from the struggles of the people. One example here in Brazil is the Support Center for Small Farmers, or CAPA, founded over thirty years ago by the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB). It has five branches in three of the country's states and receives institutional support from the Lutheran Diaconal Foundation.

In October 2014, representatives from eleven countries, members of the working group of the World Health Organization (WHO), while discussing Articles 17 and 18 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control,³

³ The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is an international treaty approved in 2003, bringing together around 180 countries in adopting measures to restrict consumption of tobacco and tobacco derived products. Brazil has been a signatory to the Convention since 2005.

devoted three working days to examining the work of the Support Center for Small Farmers and decided to present it as a possible alternative for adoption in other countries.

Brazil is a major world producer of tobacco. The largest part of the production of tobacco leaves (a total of 96.4 percent) is concentrated in the southern region of Brazil, where there are approximately 150,000 tobacco producers, 90,000 of whom are in Rio Grande do Sul.

The WHO group meeting took place in Pelotas, RS, in the far south of Brazil, 1–3 October 2014, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MDA). The reason why this particular location was chosen was the result of the work of CAPA—regarded as excellent—in the National Program for Diversification in Tobacco Growing Areas.

The spirit of organic farming has breathed new life into the poisoned lives of so many individuals, who for decades had suffered the effects of the pesticides used in the single-crop production of tobacco. Bones, with flesh, tendons and healthy skin, have changed the life of God's creation in that territory. CAPA is confronting a giant called agribusiness. The spirit of God is breathing on the lives of small families engaged in organic farming. CAPA receives support from the German agency Bread for the World and is a partner of the Lutheran Diaconal Foundation (both of them IECLB organizations) and a member of ACT Alliance. It celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary in 2013.

In these struggles we are witnessing the presence of the church inspired by the Reformation movement and we acknowledge it as an instrument of freedom and of love. That presence occurs in the diaconal activity of theology bringing about change. Diakonia understands that the economy, for example, can only be just if it founded on solidarity, justice and just gender relationships. In a just economy, all people have access to justice and a dignified life (Jn 10:10).

The aim is not the accumulation of goods, but a fair sharing for all (Mt 6:19–21) and the preservation of the environment. Living according to the principles of diakonia implies being committed to being merciful and to live differently. Furthermore, it suggests opposing the current economic system that can oppress and whose social costs are not acceptable to God. From a democratic, ecumenical, inclusive and environmental perspective, economic development must be accompanied by social justice and an improvement in the standard of living for all. Unfortunately, people are living according to the logic of how capitalism functions, with wealth and income accumulation and the destruction of creation.

Creation is not for sale and our theological consciences even less so. Our greatest challenge is to read the signs of the times. To struggle for life

is to struggle for the whole of creation, for people's freedom and for the right to diversity, the right to be different, the right for the well-being of the earth and for the song of the birds. This means reaffirming the God of history, who is still insistently calling us into the future, so that we can continue to be involved in the struggles of the poor for change.

The women and men of CAPA in Brazil are an example of people who try not to sell their conscience and not to betray their faith in God the Creator. Together with so many various diaconal initiatives for change in the world, they represent a radical rediscovery of the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's grace and love for the whole creation. Creation is not merely a passive object and inanimate resource that we are free to use at will, but should be regarded as a living thing. We know from ecologists that in the earth's ecosystem all living things are interdependent. May we become more aware of the consequences of this interdependence and may the Spirit of grace and freedom breathe new life into our bones and into our testimony in this world in its diversity, so that we can experience in the depths of our being the toughness and revolutionary passion of the twenty-first century.

QUESTIONS

What can you share from the territory/oikos where you are living regarding political, economic, environmental and cultural exploitation?

How can transformative diakonia contribute to confronting the capitalist exploitation of natural resources?

What are the experiences of hope existing in our churches that concretely affirm that creation is not for sale and even less so, our theological consciousness?

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH: ORTHODOX THEOLOGY AND AN ECOLOGICAL WORLDVIEW

John Chryssavgis

The world is a burning bush of God's energies.
– St Gregory Palamas (Fourteenth century)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God!
– Gerard Manley Hopkins (Nineteenth century)

INTRODUCTION

We have come to appreciate that the crisis that we are facing is not primarily ecological; indeed, it has less to do with the natural environment and more to do with the way in which we misunderstand or mistreat the world. Nonetheless, our concern for the environment is not a consequence of some superficial or sentimental romanticism. It essentially arises from our effort to honor and dignify God's creation. It is a way of paying attention to "the mourning of the land" (Hos 4:3) and "the groaning of creation" (Rom 8:22).

Tragically, however, we appear to be caught up in selfish lifestyles that repeatedly ignore the constraints of nature, which—we now know—are neither deniable nor negotiable. Unfortunately there will be some things that we learn about our planet's capacity for survival, which we will discover only when things are beyond the point of no return. This is why it would be fair to say that the hallmark of every human effort for environmental preservation should not be success, but humility.

It is the sense of modest realism that ultimately connects with creation. In its own distinctive way, the earth unites us all: beyond any individual or collective efforts, and beyond any doctrinal or racial differences. We may or may not share religious convictions or political principles. But we do share an experience of the environment: we share the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, and the ground that we tread—albeit neither always equally nor always fairly. But by some mysterious connection that we do not always understand (and sometimes choose to ignore), the earth itself reminds us of our interconnectedness.

This is surely the deeper connection between religion and environment. For, healing a broken environment is a matter of truthfulness to God, humanity and the created order. So religion clearly has a key role to play in this critical issue of global concern; indeed, a spirituality that remains uninvolved with outward creation is ultimately uninvolved with the inward mystery too. After all, the environment is not primarily a political, economic, or technological issue; it is a profoundly religious and spiritual issue.

THREE WAYS OF PERCEIVING THE WORLD

How, then, do we reverse the process of defilement or pollution? How do we repent for the damage we have wrought upon our planet? How do we return to the vision presented in the Genesis account of creation? Orthodox theology and spirituality present us with three helpful ways¹ of restoring within ourselves a sense of wonder before God's creation:

- Icons (as the way in which we perceive creation)
- Liturgy (as the way in which we celebrate creation)
- Asceticism (as the way in which we respect creation).

THE ICONIC VISION OF NATURE

A sense of the holy in nature implies that everything that breathes praises God (Ps 150:6). When our heart is sensitive to this reality, then “our eyes are opened to discern the beauty of created things” (Abba Isaac the Syrian). Seeing clearly is precisely what icons teach us to do. The world of the icon offers new insights; it reveals the eternal dimension in everything that we experience. Our generation, it may be said, is characterized by a sense of self-centeredness toward the natural world, by a lack of awareness of the beyond. We appear to

¹ This article draws upon John Chryssavgis, *Light Through Darkness: Orthodox Spirituality* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

be inexorably trapped within the confines of our individual concerns. We have broken the sacred covenant between ourselves and our world.

Well, the icon restores; it reconciles. The icon reminds us of another way of living and offers a corrective to the culture that we have created, which gives value only to the here and now. The icon reveals the inner vision of all, the world as created and as intended by God. For, by disconnecting this world from heaven, we have in fact desacralized both. The icon articulates with theological conviction our faith in the heavenly kingdom. It does away with any objective distance between material and spiritual, time and eternity, creation and divinity.

This is why the doctrine of the divine incarnation is at the very heart of iconography. For, in the icon of Jesus Christ, the uncreated God assumes a creaturely face, becoming “the most handsome of all” (Ps 45:2), a “beauty that can save the world” (Fyodor Dostoevsky). In this respect, the entire world is an icon; “nothing is a vacuum in the face of God,” wrote St Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century. This is why, in icons, rivers have a human form; so, too, do the sun and the moon and the stars and the waters. All of them assume human faces; all of them acquire a personal dimension—just like people; just like God.

THE LITURGY OF NATURE

What an icon does with matter, the liturgy does with time. If we are guilty of relentless waste in our world, it is perhaps because we have lost the spirit of worship. We are no longer respectful pilgrims on this earth; we have been reduced to mere tourists. Our original sin lies perhaps in our prideful refusal to receive the world as a sacrament of communion. The truth is that we respond to nature with the same sensitivity, the same tenderness, with which we respond to human beings. Moreover, the way in which we relate to other people on earth reflects the way we pray to “our Father in heaven.” There is a profound connection between heaven and earth.

Liturgy, then, is precisely a commemoration of this innate connection between God and people and things. When we recognize this interdependence of all persons and all things—when we celebrate this “cosmic liturgy,” as St Maximus the Confessor described it in the seventh century—then we can begin to resolve the environmental crisis. For, then we will have acquired, as St Isaac the Syrian noted in the same century,

A merciful heart burning with love for all of creation—for humans, birds, beasts and demons—for all God’s creatures.

The world in its entirety comprises an integral part of the liturgy. God is praised by trees and birds, glorified by the stars and moon (Ps 19:1), wor-

shipped by sea and sand. There is a dimension of art and music in the world. This means, then, that whenever we reduce our spirituality to ourselves and our own interests, we forget that the liturgy implores God for the renewal of the whole polluted cosmos. And whenever we narrow life to our own concerns and desires, we neglect our vocation to raise creation into the kingdom.

THE WAY OF THE ASCETICS

Of course, this world does not always feel or look like heaven; a quick glance at the suffering inflicted through war alone is sufficient to bring us to our senses. Still, St Paul writes:

Through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1:20).

Reference here to “the blood of the cross” is a clear indication of the cost involved. There is a price to pay for our wasting. And this is the value of *ascesis*; for, genuine asceticism leads to a spirit of gratitude, to the rediscovery of wonder in our relationship with the world. The ascetic is one who is free, uncontrolled by abusive attitudes and habits, characterized by self-restraint, as well as by the ability to say “no” or “enough.” Without asceticism, none of us is authentically human.

In his now classic article entitled “The Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” Lynn White already suspected—although he did not elaborate on—the truth behind asceticism, noting that:

The Greek saint contemplates; the Western saint acts. The Latins [...] felt that sin was moral evil, and that salvation was to be found in right conduct. [...] The implications of Christianity for the conquest of nature would emerge more easily in the Western atmosphere.²

It appears that the contemplative approach leaves a softer, gentler impact on creation. Paradoxically, then, ecological correction may in fact begin with environmental in-action. This is what the discipline of asceticism is all about: it is the way of silence, vigilance and detachment. It is the way of humility, of learning to tread more lightly on this planet.

Consider one example of asceticism, namely fasting. We Orthodox fast from dairy and meat products for half the year, almost as if to reconcile one half of the year with the other, secular time with the time of the kingdom. To fast is to learn not simply to give up but to give. It is not to deny but

² *Science* 155 (March 1967), 1203–07.

to offer; it is learning to share, to reconnect with human beings and the natural world. Fasting means breaking down barriers with my neighbor and my world; it is recognizing in others faces, icons; and in the earth the very face of God. Ultimately, to fast is to love; it is to move away from what I want to what the world needs. It is to be filled with a sense of goodness and God-likeness, to see all things in God and God in all things.

THREE MODELS OF CARING FOR CREATION

Now, if our ecological prayer is to move from the distant periphery of abstract theology to the center stage of practical living, if our spirituality is to become “incarnate,” then there are three complementary models that are proposed in the Orthodox tradition.

THE BIBLICAL MODEL

According to this model, the church is called to be in solidarity with the weakest parts of the body of Christ. It must stand for the most vulnerable, the helpless or voiceless elements of this world, which according to St Paul has been “groaning in labour pains, awaiting to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21f.).

Furthermore, the earth is a member of our body, inseparable from our flesh and life. In the same way as the God of Israel once heard the cry of the poor and the oppressed (Ex 3 and Jn 4), God also hears the silent cry of the earth. This is the biblical covenant, God’s promise to the people of Israel: that God listens to the world, God attends to the world, God tends to the smallest details of this earth.

THE ASCETIC MODEL

In the second model, we might think of the three Rs of spiritual life: renunciation, repentance and responsibility.

- **Renunciation** is an ancient response (even pre-Christian) as well as a universal response (even non-Christian). As we have already seen, renunciation is a way of learning to share. Therefore, it has social consequences; it reminds us to use material goods respectfully. Renunciation is about living simply and about simply living.
- **Repentance** is a return to a God-given life “according to nature,” as the desert fathers and mothers would say. In repentance, we confess that

we have sinned. Moreover, we confess that do not share, that we are self-centered, that we in fact abuse the resources of the earth. Through repentance, we recognize that we have fallen short of our vocation “to till and keep” the earth (Gen 2:15) which I like to interpret, in a manner more literal to the Greek translation, as “to serve and preserve.”

- **Responsibility** is a challenge, a choice. Having renounced whatever clutters our mind and our life and, after repenting of our wastefulness, we can direct our lives toward creation and its Creator.

THE SACRAMENTAL MODEL

Orthodox Christians achieve all this precisely through the sacraments. Unfortunately, in many church circles, the sacraments are often reduced to ritual observances. Yet, the sacramental life is much more than a way of pious inspiration or individual reward. It is crucial that we recall the sacramental dimension of the whole world, recognizing that nothing whatsoever is secular or profane. God is—and is within—the very constitution of our world. If God were withdrawn from the world, the world would collapse. Such is the depth of a sacramental worldview.

Orthodox Christians in fact prefer to speak of every moment and aspect of life as being sacramental—from birth through death. So the sacraments do not work in some magical manner; they function “mystically,” silently permeating the hearts and lives of those who choose to be open to the possibility of encounter with God—much like the flow of blood in the human body, or the flow of water in rivers and oceans.

CONCLUSION

We normally call this crisis “ecological,” which is accurate only in so far as its results are manifest in the ecological sphere. Yet, the crisis is not first of all about ecology. It is a crisis about us; it is a crisis about the way in which we envisage and imagine our world. It is a spiritual battle against—to quote an Eastern Christian mystic—“movements and powers within us, which are disordered, unnatural, and hostile to God’s creation” (Maximus the Confessor in *To Thalassius*, chapter 51). We forget that we are less than human without God, less than human without each other, and less than human without creation.

Therefore, what we ultimately need is a discipline of humility. For, pride is a uniquely human attribute; it belongs to Adam. Whereas humility through simplicity can reconcile a world otherwise divided by pride; frugality and

communion will preserve a planet otherwise exploited by greed. If we are guilty of relentless waste in our world, it may well be because we have lost the spirit of simplicity and the spirituality of compassion.

ECOLOGICAL SIN: THE ARROGANCE OF DOMINATION

It is no wonder, then, that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew surprised the theological and secular worlds alike when he identified carelessness or indifference to the natural environment as tantamount to sin. It is plainly wrong to regard sin only as the negative impact of our behavior on other people, whether individually or collectively, while disregarding the ecological and cosmological consequences of our behavior. As His All-Holiness remarked at Santa Barbara in 1997:

For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation, for humans to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, stripping the earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands [...] for humans to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life with poisonous substances—all these are sins.

The vocation and covenant to cherish and care for the creation is the principal reason for which God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen 2:15), namely “to till it and keep it”—a phrase I like to translate (based more faithfully and literally on the Greek translation of the Septuagint) as “to serve and preserve it.” It has not, of course, helped in the least that we have also misconstrued the biblical term “dominion” (Gen 1:28, Ps 8:5-8) as “domination” in an unashamedly self-centered and self-serving manner; after all, “dominion belongs to the Lord” (Ps 22:28). Anthropocentrism is an entrancing temptation to which we are all guilty of surrendering at one time or another, and which has detrimentally burdened our perspective and practice.

RESPONSIBILITY: WHAT CAN I DO?

There are of course numerous practical ideas available and readily accessible today for parishes and people that would like to become aware of their ecological impact on the planet and on others. Indeed, some churches and congregations have already undertaken steps or even made considerable progress toward this goal. Moreover, parishes and parishioners can make a difference by becoming sensitive to what they use (energy efficient light bulbs and heating/cooling systems), what they can reuse (recycled paper, bags, ink cartridges, glassware and cutlery), what they waste (electricity,

water, heat, energy, even cups and plates), and what they do (carpooling or support of local products).

Most importantly, however, we can all learn to do and live with less. In order to alter our self-image, what is required is nothing less than a radical reversal of our perspectives and practices. It is the only way that we can envision “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). The balance of the world has been shattered. The ecological crisis will not be solved with sentimental slogans or smiley stickers but by proposing self-denial as a solution to self-centeredness, by exercising self-control and self-restraint.

And here, I think, lies the heart of the problem. For we are unwilling—in fact, we violently resist any call—to adopt simpler lives. We have misplaced the spirituality of simplicity and frugality. The challenge before us is this: How do we live in such a way that promotes harmony, not division? How can we acknowledge daily that “the earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1)?

ACCOUNTABILITY: STEWARDSHIP OF GOD’S CREATION

While there are numerous passages in the Old and New Testaments that provide insight into the principle and practice of environmental awareness and stewardship, it is a message that acquires increasing urgency in light of our ultimate accountability on Judgment Day. This is particularly evident in Christ’s parable about the faithful and prudent steward in Luke 12, which concludes with the following warning: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Lk 12:48). This is a verse that might not meet with general agreement at a political level; yet it is a statement that deserves close attention at a spiritual level: “Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives” (Lk 12:43).

Like the servant in the parable, we, too, will be held accountable to the Master: “What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management” (Lk 16:2). We will surely be judged for the abuse of the earth that has been entrusted to us “to preserve” as well as for the unjust distribution of its resources to human beings that we are called “to serve”—namely, for the devastation of God’s creation by human beings unjustly usurping the right to control it and arrogantly presuming the right to manipulate it, as well as for the exploitation of the poor (and the poor nations) by the rich (and the rich nations).

Nevertheless, if we open ourselves—if we avail ourselves and become sensitive—to all people and to the whole creation, then we shall recognize our history as inextricably linked to the destiny of the whole world. We shall also begin to perceive the universe in its unfathomable interconnect-edness. And we shall feel the spirit of God as a gentle breeze and hear the seal’s heartbeat as the pulse of our own life.

QUESTIONS

What elements of your tradition do you share with the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church in experiencing and expressing the sacredness of God's creation?

What elements of your tradition are unique in perceiving our relationship with and responsibility toward our planet?

How can you/your congregation/your community change hardened habits related to your attitudes and practices toward the natural environment?

BIBLE STUDY: ROMANS 8:19-21

Elena Bondarenko

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:19-21).

As we read this passage we return to the Old Testament story of the creation of the world and the sad consequences of Adam's Fall. At the beginning God created a wonderful creation that is called to bring forth other living creatures.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures [...]" (Gen 1:20).

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind [...]" (Gen 1:24).

God created creation so that it could bring forth life on its own. In the end, God created human beings "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27)—a special creature called to take care of God's other creation and to be God's interlocutor. However, the story continues: the first human beings, Adam and Eve, fell; they were disobedient and became careless. Without thinking they virtually destroyed the tree "in the middle of the garden" (Gen 3:3), which was forbidden for them. The consequences of this carelessness and lack of thought affected not only guilty human beings, but also the other part of creation:

And to the man [Adam] he [God] said, [...] "cursed is the ground because of you [...]" (Gen 3:17)

The curse applied to both—human beings created in the image of God and the nature that surrounds them. It is in the massive exploitation of animals

reared in terrifying conditions, the prodigious destruction of nature for economic benefit (e.g., tropical rainforests), the pollution of whole landscapes by the mindless exploitation of minerals, highly poisonous industries and frequently insufficient waste management that rational human beings can palpably feel the curse on creation. Attempts to point the finger at the problems are usually regarded as naïve and backward. Critics are always in danger of being made ridiculous and sometimes even have to fear for their lives. It seems as if the curse expresses itself in greed and the inability to differentiate between good and evil. It is not always the spoilers and sellers of creation who are ruthless. Frequently there appears to be no alternative or people lack the necessary education to consider the results of their actions. Nevertheless, as the Apostle Paul reassures us, not only the curse but also the gospel of salvation is addressed to both human beings and nature.

Paul writes that creation eagerly awaits revelation. The emptiness and futility of creation are the consequences of human sin. The corruption and decay of creation know no freedom and often serve sin, and just as servitude is related to corruption, freedom is one of the elements of glory. Just as corruption embraced the whole of creation, the gospel of liberation will embrace human beings and nature, as we see in our passage from Romans.

The Apostle Paul has his own understanding of the gospel, which differs from the concept of the gospel in the synoptic tradition. Paul understands the gospel not in the tradition of the coming reign of God (continuing the Old Testament tradition), but for him the gospel unfolds in a variety of ways:

- christologically: “the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3);
- ecclesiologically: “[...] the word of faith that we proclaim” (Rom 10:8, the witness of the early church);
- soteriologically: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

Central to Paul’s theological discussions on the gospel is the idea of God’s reconciliation with human beings and creation through Jesus Christ alone. This reconciliation transforms human beings, bringing them to witness in work: the Word of the gospel becomes flesh in the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion (1 Cor 10:1-5, “sacraments” were mentioned here for the first time) and the witness of the Christian community is realized in life (2 Cor 6:4-10).

Thus, as Christians we are aware that we are responsible for our witness. We know that not only we, but the whole of creation, look forward to salvation from corruption. We know that creation does not belong to us simply because it surrounds us and we are strong enough to exploit it; creation belongs to God.

In our world we have become used to creation being for sale or, even worse, creation being used for destructive purposes. We have developed sophisticated weapons and dangerous technologies. Over the last 100–150 years, the progress in all scientific areas has been stunning when compared to the slow development over the previous thousands of years. The progressive development of certain technologies has often directly or implicitly included an increased ability to destroy the integrity of the environment. This is not to say that technological progress is bad as such, but one should always be aware of the possible misuse of certain technologies.

Creation was not meant for sale, just like human beings and their achievements. Creation was meant for life in honor of God. Human beings were destined for profound and divine life in dialogue with the Creator. A careless attitude to creation, particularly to the Creator, became the starting point of a path to destruction and greed.

“Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?” (Mt 22:18). “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others” (Mt 23:23). With these harsh words Jesus condemned the hypocrisy and commercialization of faith practiced by the religious leaders of his day.

The affirmation that creation is not for sale is closely linked to the nucleus of the Lutheran Reformation—justification by faith and the grace of God. This is particularly relevant since in today’s consumer societies there is sometimes the perception, rather like during the Middle Ages, that blessings can be bought and sold. We need a renewed awareness of this core Reformation concept, especially in countries, such as Russia, where there was no Reformation movement per se but only a meeting of cultures, starting with the time of the Russian Empire and the Romanov royal family. Lutheran congregations existed in every major city and we still find traces of this influence in St Petersburg and to some extent in Moscow.

Unfortunately, throughout recent Russian history, reformation has always been considered to be a strange, Western concept, designed to enslave the Russian people to a Western way of thinking and life. For this reason, it was time and again attacked by the czarist authorities and later the Communist rulers. In general terms, no reformation movement as such took place in Russia and the concept of justification by faith and God’s grace alone is still new and attractive. Despite powerful opposition, some

people are happy to find support in the church for their protest against a culture where everything is for sale. Those who recognize that in the long term creation is not for sale may well discover the Lutheran heritage that sends out the powerful message about God's liberating grace. Within the framework of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation the LWF sends out a compelling message: salvation, human beings and creation are not for sale. They are not commodities and must not be treated like this. They are God's good creation and must be treated accordingly.

QUESTIONS

In what way is the message that creation is not for sale relevant in your country and cultural context?

Is there a way to connect creation-not-for-sale with the development of social and diaconal institutions?

How can we implement the message that creation is not for sale in our lives? (give concrete examples)

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