



**Noel Moules** is the founder of 'Anvil Trust' and the originator and co-ordinator of its national training programme 'Workshop: Applied Christian Studies', which has been running since 1983 with some 4000 participants to date. He was born in India in 1945, the eldest son of missionary parents, and grew up in the mountains of the Himalaya. He studied theology and education and went on to teach. He was head of department in religious studies for a number of years before starting Workshop. He has been involved in church leadership in several parts of the country. He is a founder member of the 'Anabaptist Network' and also the 'Root and Branch: the radical vision network'. He is one of the directors of 'Peace School: exploring shalom activism' and is also developing the 'PeaceChurch' concept to help people think differently and creatively about being church both locally and globally. He has been a frequent speaker and worship leader at Greenbelt. He is currently producing a workbook for Christian groups on ecology and the environment. Noel loves every kind of wilderness, hill walking, world music and the songs of Bob Dylan. He is a gentle vegan. He would describe himself as a 'messianic anarchist' and is passionately committed to non-violence, social justice and the integrity of all creation. The values of peace, freedom, truth and wisdom are central to his spirituality. He lives in Sheffield with Rowena to whom he has been married since 1971 and they have three adult children.

His personal 'motto' and daily focus is summed up in the words of Colossians 1:28-29: -

*'It is (Jesus) we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.'*

## "Go into all the world and preach the good news to the whole creation"<sup>1</sup>

I stand looking out across a panoramic view of the earth. I hear these wonderful, inspiring, final words of Jesus ringing in my ears. However, what my eyes actually see are the storm clouds of global ecological crisis darkening and deepening. "What good news?" I ask. The news is devastating, it is anything but good.

But, astonishingly, the news is in fact good! As a Christian, I am learning to walk with gentle footfall within creation, following Jesus, who says it is the meek – those whose strength is under perfect control – that inherit the earth.<sup>2</sup> I gladly work shoulder to shoulder with every other eco-activist, whatever their faith or belief, who, like me, are driven by compassion with a mission to bring healing to our planet. Yet, as a Christian, I feel the agony of the earth but refuse to despair, I see the current unfolding catastrophe within a wider more profound vision.

### The vision of creation is distilled in the concept of shalom

The cosmos is not here by chance; it has been created, spoken into being by God's word and sustained every moment by the breath of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> It is neither neutral, nor divine; it is in fact sacred. Its source and origin are in God and so is its destiny. This biblical vision of creation's reality is distilled in the concept of shalom – 'complete and absolute wholeness', the total harmonious yet dynamic integration of all things – the certainty that every aspect of this current physical world has its ultimate future in God. This understanding of shalom is without question the secret of the universe!

If this is so, then clearly something terrible has gone wrong; a cataclysm that has contaminated every molecule in creation. The origins of this cosmic evil are shrouded in mystery within the biblical story, but its presence is acknowledged everywhere. The earth is 'subjected to futility', in 'bondage to decay', and 'groaning in labour pains';<sup>4</sup> it is locked in a prison house. Added to this, human beings – created in the image and likeness of God to serve creation – have wilfully embraced wickedness and increased the impact of evil upon the earth.<sup>5</sup> This stark fact is at the very heart of the environmental crisis we find ourselves in today.

However dark the ecological night seems to be, or may even yet become, Christians have a 'living hope'<sup>6</sup> that shines like the rim of dawn breaking over the curvature of the earth bringing in a new day beyond the night. We know that vibrant all-pervading shalom will come to its fulfilment 'at the renewal of all things' and 'the time of universal restoration'<sup>7</sup>. These New Testament phrases find their roots in the astonishing Hebrew vision of 'the new heavens and new earth'<sup>8</sup>. Traditionally Christians have been taught that this universe will be 'burnt up'<sup>9</sup> and that they will spend eternity in heaven, but nothing could be further from the truth:

'The creation itself will be set free from its bondage and decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God'<sup>10</sup>

### We are not going to heaven!

We are *not* going to heaven! These astonishing words show that the final climax of God's salvation involves the total integration of absolutely everything; it is heaven embracing earth, quite literally, and the two becoming one. We will live as a resurrection body within a transfigured cosmos, as a new creation within the new creation – not somewhere else but here!

This breathtaking experience of justice 'right' - the same powerful and 'elements dissolved' destruction it is fibre of the cosmic torn relationships totality, complete seismic hope!

All this is possible about atonement bringing together reconciliation of and harmony. Jesus and Paul have universal

"And I, when I

'... t  
m

At the moment shatter and the humanity and c aside<sup>15</sup> and a ne in fact a 'tree'<sup>16</sup> Life'.

Jesus strides across finished!<sup>18</sup>, wa following his re news<sup>19</sup> again su

# Gentle Footfall Seismic

in suffering, ach standing on tip- for? For us, the the time God ultimate purpo prison, which a natural world, heaven and ear

It is true that cl hope. Clearly G without crisis. B

### We must learn

We must learn t of God yet shap environment. W one 'with the w biblical eco-wor earth. It also r

ing transformation will be the result of the awesome judgement. The Hebrew word is *mishpat* – ‘putting everything right’ – the word that is used for justice. The biblical images are apocalyptic; ‘heavens passing away with a loud noise’, ‘everything done being revealed’.<sup>11</sup> This is not just a new creation; the cleansing fire of the Spirit purging every corner of the cosmos from evil, corruption and wickedness, every thing ripped and torn and restored – nothing is hidden or escapes; creation becomes a new whole. God putting everything right – this indeed is

possible only because Jesus’ life, death and resurrection brings about the new covenant – that wonderful *shalom*-word, ‘at-one-ment’ – the healing of everything fractured and broken, the healing and bringing together of all things; the whole creation in integrated peace, justice and harmony. Jesus does not just die for people, but for the whole creation. His death and resurrection both make it quite clear that the crucifixion and resurrection have implications for both humanity and the cosmos:

“I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw all things* to myself”<sup>12</sup>

“through (Jesus) to reconcile to himself *all things* ... by making peace (*shalom*) by the blood of his cross”<sup>13</sup>

At the moment of his death Jesus is locked in conflict with evil, the rocks of the earth and the sky is black<sup>14</sup>. His resurrection sees sin’s powerful hold on creation broken forever; an earthquake flings the tombstone away and a new day dawns at this central ecological moment. The cross is not just a symbol of root and branch salvation – truly the ‘Tree of

Life” – across the earth ‘proclaiming shalom’<sup>17</sup>, his dying cry, “It is finished” – the Hebrew word *shalem* (*shalom* as a verb); his resurrection Jesus sends us out into creation with the good news of the Kingdom of God summed up in the one word, *shalom* – the gospel compact and explosive.<sup>20</sup>

## // – Hope by Noel Moules

So the challenge and inspiration for us today are clear:

‘... the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God’<sup>21</sup>

The image is powerful; the whole cosmos incarcerated and waiting to be released, tense in its waiting and longing, virtually vibrating in eager anticipation of being set free. What is it waiting for? We, the people of God! We are continually waiting for God, when all of creation and we are waiting for us. We are central to God’s plan for creation, we are like ‘the key’ in the lock of nature’s door; we ‘turn’ and live in harmony with God’s character and the door of hope begins to swing open towards the new creation.

Clouds of mystery obscure much of the detail of our unfolding story, but God will do something dramatic, as there is no eschatology without us playing our role:

### How to live as priests in harmony with creation

To live as priests in harmony with creation. Made in the image and likeness of God from the earth’s red clay; we are servants of God and the world. We are to be one with nature, like Jesus in the wilderness with the wild beasts<sup>22</sup>. This word ‘*with*’ is one of the most exciting of all words, stressing ‘relationship’ and ‘companionship’<sup>23</sup> with the world. It reminds us of the strong biblical theme that truly righteous



people live in harmony with wild animals<sup>24</sup>. As priests we hold a ‘deep ecology’ that embraces ‘all things’ including people, animals, plants and the whole natural environment. We teach the truth; we serve the poor, the weak and the vulnerable and work to restore the covenant between God and creation wherever it has broken. We move with the authentic ‘dominion’ of ‘meekness’<sup>25</sup>, recognising that:

“Everything is sacred;  
live gently within the sacred world with wisdom”<sup>26</sup>

Sacredness, gentleness and wisdom, are the essence of true Christian priesthood; the excitement is in exploring what happens as we put them into practice!

### We must act as prophets in solidarity within creation

We must act as prophets in solidarity within creation. Our message of hope is breathtaking; we cannot keep silent and must work for transformation. This means much more than changing from ‘eco-worrier’ to ‘eco-warrior’; but rather standing energised as a ‘shalom-activist’ – working together with God, empowered by the Spirit, to hasten in the new heaven and earth. We are to be strident campaigning voices in the face of global injustice. We feel creation’s pain and work tirelessly to assuage it. We embrace despair with love. We work together with others with different motivations; encourage and enriching one another, and praying that our witness may encourage at least some of them towards discipleship of Jesus.

Ours is a seismic vision of hope. May it inspire and energise you; but remember that to play our part in its astonishing fulfilment not only calls us to energetic action but also to walking with gentle footfall one day at a time.

<sup>1</sup> Mk 16:15

<sup>2</sup> Mt 5:5; cf Zec 9:9-10

<sup>3</sup> Ps 33:6; cf Job 34:14-15

<sup>4</sup> Rom 8:20-22

<sup>5</sup> cf Gen 3:17

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pt 1:3

<sup>7</sup> Mt 19:28 and Acts 3:21

<sup>8</sup> cf Isa 65:17-18

<sup>9</sup> The usual mistaken reading of 2 Pt 3:10

<sup>10</sup> Rm 8:21

<sup>11</sup> 2 Peter 3:10

<sup>12</sup> Jn 12:32 the phrase ‘all things’ (Gk: ‘panta’) means ‘absolutely everything’ not just people

<sup>13</sup> Col 1:20 see previous note

<sup>14</sup> Mt 27:45-51

<sup>15</sup> Jn 20:1

<sup>16</sup> cf Acts 5:30; 1 Pt 2:24 (et al)

<sup>17</sup> Eph 2:17

<sup>18</sup> Jn 19:30 cf Jn 17:4

<sup>19</sup> Mk 16:15

<sup>20</sup> cf Lk 10:5-6; Mt 10:12-13

<sup>21</sup> Rom 8:19

<sup>22</sup> Mk 1:13

<sup>23</sup> Replacing the popular notions of exploitive ‘dominion’, hierarchical ‘stewardship’

<sup>24</sup> cf Job 5:22-23; Is 11:1-9

<sup>25</sup> cf Zec 9:9-10

<sup>26</sup> This is a maxim I coined in 1998 and seek to live by daily