

Storm of hope

From denial to activism with Christian Ecology Link

2008

ChristianEcologyLink

Christian Ecology Link – empowering agents of change

The planet is dying. Where does our hope come from? Faced with the crisis that human beings have created, we can easily fall into despair and paralysis: what can I do?

To be sure, the environmental challenges that face us are beginning to look apocalyptic. Yet, throughout the world people are becoming conscious of the urgent need to change lifestyles and attitudes if there is to be a future for life on Earth.

Christian Ecology Link (CEL) is a community founded on the belief that we have it within our faith to discover hope for the future and power to act and change. Our aim is to facilitate networking amongst members and friends who share common concerns and who wish to act together. We can:

- ▶ put you in touch with other members who share your particular concern, for example, in starting a discussion group or letter-writing campaign. We can help you set up ways to communicate, electronically or otherwise.
- ▶ work with you to develop resources for churches, or to collaborate locally or nationally with other organisations to spread the word about the vision we share. We have a scheme which offers grants to enable groups or initiatives to get going.

CEL belongs to you, the members, so tell us how we can help you. Whatever you want to do, CEL's aim is to provide the support – theological, spiritual and practical – to enable you to get going and keep going.



Pippa says ...

As a Christian who cares passionately for God's creation, I have often felt alone in my despair about our ecological crisis and frustrated by the overwhelming apathy that I have experienced in the church.

Through CEL I have met a group of people who share my desperation about the way God's Earth is being treated. In this way I have begun to discover glimmers of hope, which I trust will grow, as we Christians wake up and find ways to care for the Earth community.

A praying community

Join with others in praying in the midst of the storm by joining the CEL community of prayer. We are a group within CEL who:

- ▶ pray for creation and/or take action for ecological justice, at some time between 6 and 9am or 9pm and midnight each Wednesday
- ▶ share prayers, poems and thoughts with others via the CEL website
- ▶ use the CEL daily prayer guide.

The prayer guide is circulated every month and is available to anyone, either free of charge by email, or by post for an annual subscription of £8.

We seek to enliven and make this community tangible by providing an email group (CELprayer), by which you can receive daily extracts from the prayer guide. You can also use it to make requests for prayer or suggest actions which members can take either individually or collectively. To join CELprayer, email jo@christian-ecology.org.uk



The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment warned that 60% of the world's ecosystems are in decline, with six 'tipping points' threatening irreversible human damage:

- ▶ Climate change
- ▶ Destruction of coral reef ecosystems
- ▶ Irreversible depletion of fish stocks
- ▶ Alien species introduced by humans
- ▶ Algal blooms caused by artificial nutrient enrichment
- ▶ New diseases.

Storm of Hope: prophetic discipleship for today

Our planet is under threat as never before. All around us are signs of the pressure that we have put the Earth under: species extinction, water, land and energy shortages, and accelerating climate change, to name but a few. Even as we grieve the loss of our fragile environment to human acts of devastation, we choose to have a vision of hope. When we share God's sorrow over our desecration of Creation then we come alive to the resurrection. Our hope is for new life in Christ for the whole Earth community if we can seek and accept a different abundant life. Our hearts are not changed by facts alone, but rather by engaging visions and empowering values.

If we are to find meaning again then let us stop fooling ourselves that there is a cheap, easy or comfortable way out of the planetary crisis we have created. Let us bring nature and grace together again. Creation is the context for our lives of faith; the grace of God provides the means by which we can restore the balance of life on Earth. Life with God and life on Earth are shared ventures.

'It lies within the power of human societies to ease the strains we are putting on the nature services of the planet, while continuing to use them to bring better living standards to all. Achieving this, however, will require radical changes in the way nature is treated at every level of decision-making and new ways of co-operation between government, business and civil society. The warning signs are there for all of us to see. The future now lies in our hands.'

Directors of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

As disciples of Christ let us find again the rhythms of nature within our own beings, honouring God's gift by living in ways which show gratitude and reverence for the beauty of the Earth.

A life of committed prophetic discipleship is full of grace and grit, grief and growth. Here, we offer four principles that are integral to prophetic discipleship. We invite you to use them as 'tools' to frame and guide your prophetic witness. Let them deepen your convictions, impel you to action, and provide the motivational 'sparks' that inspire your passion for Christ and all life on Earth.

Ruth says ...

Thomas' future is dire. If you look at the spiralling carbon dioxide emissions and compare the paltry efforts to contain them with what the scientists are saying needs to be done, the situation is hopeless. I went to my CEL friends with my despair, wanting to be told it was all going to be OK but I didn't get the platitudes I was hoping for. I got something better: honesty, understanding and a path through the mire.



Fr Peter says ...



The Bible tells us that if we want to know what someone is like, we look at their works, so if you want to know what God is like then just look at any untainted environment. Isaiah wrote of the sounds of 'trees clapping their hands and mountains and hills bursting into song,' and for many they do, because their greatest spiritual experience is in the woods, forest, hills and mountains. An environment that is untamed and unsullied sings to the glory of the God that created it. God formed us from the dust of the ground, so we are a part of the Earth, and in environmental destruction we destroy ourselves. CEL is for those who want to preserve the work of God's hands.

Seeking abundant life

To find the abundant life spoken of by Jesus, we must lose one kind of life and gain another. Our heart's desire has been taken captive to serve the appetites of an economic system which consumes ever more of the riches of the natural world. But the truly abundant life is one of self-discipline, free from the compulsion to consume more and more material objects. Following Christ in a consumer society means liberation from the demands of consumerism as a way of life.

'Sufficiency' is the norm for our Christian living. When our true heart's desire is revealed through discipleship with Christ, we can make amends, voluntarily letting go of our wealth and connecting with the suffering of peoples, species and lands. When we live justly and within the limits of Creation we make peace with the Earth and enable Creation to flourish.

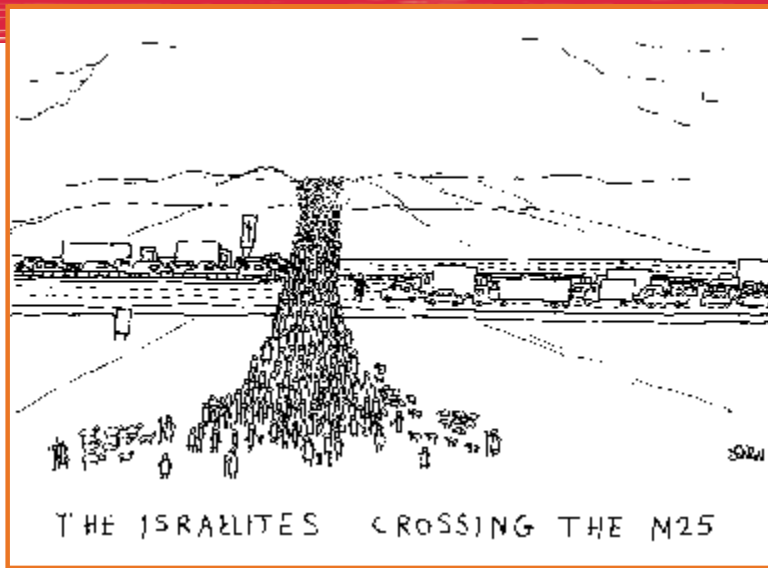


CEL at international day of climate action.

Accepting interconnectedness

All things in Creation are connected. Humans are part of the natural world, and together we exist in one Earth community. This can be understood in physical terms: all materials, air, soil and water have been recycled since the beginning of the Creation, atomic elements influencing and being influenced by one another.

Interconnection is also a sacred reality: 'the Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves. Every part of the Earth is sacred, for all belongs to our Creator' (Words attributed to Chief Seattle).



Cartoon courtesy of Dave Walker www.cartoonchurch.com

► Walking with humility

The first human being, Adam, was created from *adamah*, humus, the soil of the Earth. We are made in the image of God, but we are first and foremost earthy, sharing our planetary home with the diverse creatures that make up the entire Earth community. An Earth-centred humility is central to Christian faith. To act with humility means to act in accordance with our status as earthbound creatures rather than living arrogantly as if we were a superior species with a right to exploit every other being. In so doing, we acknowledge that we must change our human behaviour and simplify our lives or risk losing our precious earthly home.

► Doing justice

The vision of justice which we find in the Bible is not just social. It is concerned with the restoration of relationship throughout all Creation. When justice is done, relationships with God are healed throughout the whole Earth community. Anything we do, individually or collectively, that severs these relationships is injustice. Our endeavour, in the words of Amos, is to *'let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream'*.

This is the way some of us are seeking today, and we are discovering it step by step. We hope you will share with us in CEL your experience of living the Christian life in this era of crisis.

'Storm of Hope' describes a form of discipleship that enables us to respond to the cry of the wounded Earth.

'Storm' refers to the sorrow we feel in our hearts at the signs of the Earth's demise, and our struggle to change our lives so that we tread more lightly on the planet.

The 'Hope' is the spiritual energy that empowers us to choose to engage in acts of discipline and worship that allow us to safely feel the pain of ecological devastation and yet sustain our passion for activism.

'Storm of Hope' is an intentional, determined and continual 'way of being' that enables us to grieve but still remain sufficiently angry, humble and hopeful to be true to our calling as faithful Earthkeepers.

'We are spending Earth's natural capital, putting such strain on the natural functions of Earth that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted.'

Dr Walt Reid, lead writer of the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*.

'How wonderful are your works, O Lord, in wisdom you have made them all.'

But now we risk damaging the Earth beyond repair. Whole ecosystems are threatened by climate change, which is even now ravaging the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable.

Technological fixes, political action and economic reform are proving inadequate to the challenge, important though they are.

True sustainability – abundant life for the earth and everything in it – requires a change of heart and life.



Caroline says ...

I campaigned two years ago with the Make Poverty History campaign, and now I have realised that if I want to do anything significant to eradicate world poverty, I need to tackle climate change. And with two kids, I feel responsible for the world I will leave them with.

'Go out into the world and preach the good news to all Creation.'

The good news which Jesus came to announce is not only for people, it is for the whole Creation. One day, it will enjoy the freedom of the children of God.

But this is no cheap hope. Creation is in bondage because we are: it is we who need liberation.

Christian Ecology Link helps people learn, pray, struggle and act so that God's kingdom can be realised in our damaged, exploited and unjust world.

*God, help us to change.
To change ourselves and to change our world.
To know the need for it.
To deal with the pain of it.
To feel the joy of it.
To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.*

(Michael Leunig, *The Prayer Tree*, HarperCollins Publishers)

*May the God who shakes heaven and earth,
Whom death could not contain,
Who lives to disturb and heal us,
Bless us with power to go forth and proclaim the Gospel.*

Making a world of difference

Pioneering practical discipleship

LOCAL GROUPS CEL supports a growing network of groups in towns round the country. We can help you set one up if there is not one near you.

STUDY GUIDES Groups in your church are welcome to use our Christian environmental awareness course or EcoCells programme.

FOOD AND FARMING Use our LOAF campaign to get your church talking about 'Locally grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly, and Fairly traded' food at their next meal.

RECONNECT Ringsfield Christian Eco Study Centre can offer your church's youth group a life-changing weekend on behalf of CEL.

EXHIBITION MATERIALS You can borrow our posters and leaflets free of charge for your next fête or open day.

COLLABORATIONS Christian CND and Student Christian Movement are just two of the other organisations which we have supported through joint events and resources.



Ed says ...

In Christian Ecology Link I have met a lovely group of people who share a passion for the environment and who know the joy of living simply. CEL events and retreat weekends are warm and welcoming, and I find they help me maintain hope and motivation to keep campaigning for the protection of God's Earth.

OPERATION NOAH We have been campaigning on climate change through this campaign, which we founded in 2003, and which has now been launched as an independent charity.

WHAT'S ON Our listing of forthcoming Christian environmental events is probably the most comprehensive on the world-wide web.

Empowering agents of change

PARISH MAGAZINE ARTICLES Feel free to use our selection of articles to get a 'green column' started in your parish magazine.

COMMUNITY OF PRAYER Members round the country pray each day, share reflections and ideas, and commit to a weekly collective act of hope where they live.

SEASONAL RESOURCES We have hymns, prayers and liturgies for Creationtide (which includes Harvest Festival and St Francis' day), Rogation Sunday, Environment Sunday, and Lent.

SERMON NOTES You will find ideas for every week of the Revised Common Lectionary in our green pointers for preachers.

NEWS EMAIL Subscribe free of charge to our monthly 'Members and Friends' news bulletin from CEL.

CELINK Make friends, ask questions, offer answers and find help through our email discussion group.

Paul says ...

I joined CEL after having what I can only describe as an 'awakening'. We had severe flooding a few years ago, and the more I learned about climate change, the more horrified I was. CEL helped me use my faith to make sense of what is going on.

But it's more than that. I wanted to see a Christian campaign on climate change in which everyone could take part. In CEL I found people with whom I could share my ideas. Together we developed Operation Noah. Now Operation Noah has a professional staff team and is becoming a separate charity.

I was impressed by the trust which CEL puts in its members – if you've got something to talk about, there are people who will listen and help make things happen.



Equipping prophetic witness

GREEN CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE Our magazine of news, views and inspiration is sent to members twice a year.

PRAYER GUIDE A reading each day on environmental issues, and a prayer each week, helps you find the power of prayer.

CONFERENCES AND RETREATS We regularly organise conferences and retreats to which everyone is welcome; members receive a discount.

TOPIC LEAFLETS Download free briefings on a wide range of topics, from energy efficiency in churches to Christian attitudes to shopping.

JOIN US

Since 1982 CEL has been working with Christians, churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

You can become a member for £18 a year, or £10 if you are on a low income. Ask for details.

Just send your contact details to our Information Officer, and we'll send you information with no obligation.

To find out more before

committing yourself, sign up for our free monthly news email at www.christian-ecology.org.uk/membersandfriends

Donations, payable to 'Christian Ecology Link' can be sent to the above address, and will be gratefully received.



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According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, around a quarter of all mammals and plants, possibly more, are threatened with extinction.