

Storm of hope

ChristianEcologyLink

Think global, act local with Christian Ecology Link

2012

God's green kingdom

► It's easy to think, after decades of trying, that the human race is just not up to resolving our most intractable global challenges. The trends for economic injustice and inequality, climate change and the plunder of nature are all heading the wrong way. The rich mainly gain from it, and it is overwhelmingly the poor, future generations and other species who lose.

The forces driving these trends can seem beyond human control. But don't give up! Even if we are now 'in too deep' to help ourselves, it is not the end of the story. In fact, Christians believe that it is only when we acknowledge our helplessness that the new story will come to birth. Jesus called that new story the 'good news' – and it is good news for both people and planet.

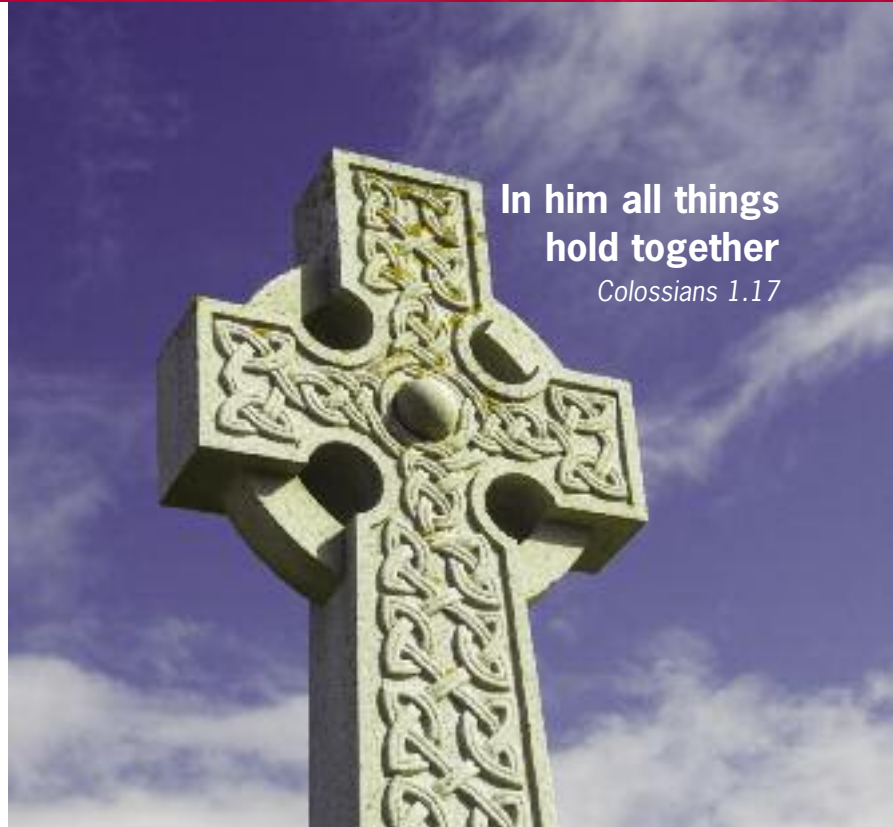
Yet for centuries the church had little to say about the earth. 'Mission' often meant education, healthcare and social justice, all of which are good in themselves. We are the better for that work. If the gospel was preached, it was often to promise a rescue from life on earth. Even secular 'environment' and 'development' groups until recently lived parallel lives.

Those days are over, and now Christians are beginning to make room for the earth in the Kingdom of God. We know that without a flourishing planet, there is no dignity, health or justice. Creation is at the heart of God's plan of salvation.

*Christ, alpha, omega
avatar of hope
whose heart in spite of all
hopes on in spite of us
hopes on for us, in spite of us –
rain, rain on us
untamed, unconstrained
your wildfire storm of hope.*

From *That Intransitive Being* by Daniel Berrigan

If, when contemplating climate change, injustice and environmental degradation, you feel daunted and fearful, allow yourself to be swept up in and sustained by Christ's passionate, compassionate, exhilarating, energising Hope, which is Love given in spite of us.



In him all things
hold together

Colossians 1.17

Cross-shaped living

For Christians everything created is held together in Christ and will ultimately be united in him. All the disunity, conflict and degradation which humanity has caused is reconciled on the cross. Everything that lives is waiting for us to wake up to that promise.

So the arms of the cross embrace not only all nations but all species, in fact all generations and evolutions of species in the story of life on earth. It is their hope that each of us will model that embrace in our own lives, whatever the cost to our self-interest.

The cross on which Jesus of Nazareth was executed was planted in the ground at a city rubbish dump. I will not be part of the reunion of people and the earth unless I find my root in my place, in my time. That means learning to live in a place again. It means making choices in daily life to draw from, and invest in, the 'bio-region' in which I live, observing its seasons by eye and by diet, and not exporting harm elsewhere. It is a life of gratitude rather than entitlement.

The stake of the cross is planted in the surface of the present – my present – and the soil of the past – my past. Looking up, it reaches for a life beyond my own. But on the way it passes the beam of the cross, the outstretched arms and the wounded hands, opening a generous space so that the whole earth will witness what Jesus called the 'Kingdom of God' coming in our midst.

In other words, the cross invites us to 'think global, act local'.

Learning to love the earth

It's three o'clock in the morning. You've been confined to a windowless conference hall since 10.00 am on the last day of an international summit on climate change – and you've no idea even what the weather's like outside. The last proper meal you had was during a chaotic lobbying session earlier in the afternoon. The rich countries won't consider a deal that doesn't bind the poor, while the poor reckon that would lock them into inequality and economic servitude for ever. So you agree to disagree for another five years. Meanwhile scientific advice on the long-term viability of life as we know it goes unheeded.



That pretty well sums up the experience of delegates to any of the major environmental summits of the last few years. There was a different mood back in 1992. Then at the first Rio Earth Summit nations made a commitment to 'Agenda 21', a global plan that would integrate human development and the environment. Communities round the world played their part by developing their own local response.

Since then the repeated failure of global environmental summits has made politicians pin their hopes on voluntary

initiatives from the international level right down to the personal.

In fact both are needed – they are not opposed to each other but depend on each other. Even business leaders say they need politicians to set clear regulations so that they can plan their investment.

Now as a result of the Durban climate conference in 2011 there is the possibility of a global agreement by 2015 to reduce carbon emissions. The pressure is now on to secure an heroic deal which will be enough to avert dangerous climate change, and that will not happen unless everyone plays their part.

That's the sort of globalisation that the people and the planet really need - people and governments working together.

Westley says ...

Recently some of the ecocell community were considering Christ's telling a man of some means to give away all he had to the poor. It occurred to me that as one of the richest men in human history and geography I seem to give away all my money to the rich. I am now in the process of changing bank accounts to something a little less brutal but since I have not flown in some years I am having trouble finding my passport and it seems even ethical banks want photo ID.



With our **ecocell** programme, CEL invites you on a lifetime 'journey in carbon-free discipleship'. To find out more, visit www.greenchristian.org.uk

What's new about globalisation?

Eco-theologian Edward Echlin writes...

All things are created, reconciled, and present in Jesus. In the words of St Paul, 'in him all things hold together' (Colossians 1.17). Earth creatures are therefore a created community, interdependent, and precious. In Annie Dillard's words, 'If I cut a tree my arm would bleed'. That tree, all plants, animals, the soil mites in humus, they all nourish us. They sequester carbon emissions, and provide a pleasant climate wherein they and we flourish. Small farmers and growers, including town gardeners like many of us, preserve the habitats of our fellow biodiverse creatures.

Yet greedy agribusiness pushes small growers off the land and into towns and cities dependent on imports. Powerful people among our contemporaries, oblivious that all things hold together in Christ, encourage 'food and air miles', transport of food, wine and holidays, battering biodiversity and our climate. In fact all earth creatures are a 'soil community' – whatever flies in the sky, swims in the sea and moves on the land. We need each other for sustainable living on earth securing a future for our endangered children. Each of us can help.

That little word 'each' is a surprising challenge. For people ask, and to be honest I ask myself, what good are my little efforts – my little 'each' – compared to the juggernaut of agribusiness, energy industries, car, air, nuclear, construction lobbies, and even TV 'political reporters' in their denial. That challenge is one of the reasons Christian Ecology Link was founded and thrives. We realise that we and all things hold together in Christ, our little acts can make a difference. In words of a song we sang before a climate march, 'Come on, there's work to do, God's gonna see it through. Come on we've work to do, me and you.' I like Mother Teresa's response to the little 'each' challenge, 'What each of us does is only a drop in the ocean. But the oceans would be smaller without our drop.' Imagine some (comparatively) small deeds like, for example, planting an indigenous insect-friendly wildflower in a biodiverse hedgerow. Think of the good that one plant does and how far it reaches! Its insects travel and pollinate afar.

There's a lot of earth-loving wisdom in our Old Testament. The norm for living is a land-friendly, even loving, lifestyle, what conservationists call agrarian. We and our children can heal the world injured by a 'market' driven culture of endless 'growth' in a finite soil community, by living in community caring for the land. The market puts a price on land, squeezing once fertile fields into sprawling exurbia and intensive farms. Christian farmer Wendell Berry says, 'Whatever the market may say, the worth of the land is what it always was. It is worth what food, clothing, shelter, and freedom are worth, it is worth what life is worth'.

We can also learn from our New Testament. Jesus lived a sharing, itinerant lifestyle, his metaphors sparkling with seeds and plants, sheep and chickens, sun and weeds, storms and cereals. Luke says Jesus grew, lived, and died in a culture appreciative of 'wisdom'. Biblical wisdom includes observing how one's local soil community works, and how one should cherish and use soil's gifts.

People, including 'each' of us, living in crowded towns and cities, in high rise cultures, nevertheless can live sustainable Christian

lifestyles alternative to contemporary consumerism. Each of us, supporting farmers markets, can buy and encourage local food, drink, and necessities, holiday bio-regionally and in depth rather than flying to distant swimming pools. We can use renewable energy, install solar panels, harvest rain, returning water to aquifers and plants. We can preserve biodiversity by growing food organically in gardens, allotments, and community gardens, roofs, or even a plastic pot. We can also do some 'reparation' by removing some leylandii, some slabs, cement, some impermeable shingles and asphalt from around our homes and churches, letting rain sink in again. We want to live in sharp sustainable counter-culture to 'pave your garden', more runways, car parks, bypasses, link roads, and the whole black death culture of creeping asphalt.

We don't walk alone. We have Jesus to guide us. We also have admirable contemporary examples of genuine 'globalisation' including the shared gardens of Havana and Vancouver, 'Hope takes Root' in Detroit, 'Edible Hackney' including Hackney's 'London Field Honey', 'Incredible Edible Todmorden', Brighton's 'How to feed a city', and the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on agro-ecology on sustainable food production in countryside and towns.

The prophet Amos, a tree surgeon and God's perennial spokesperson in our evolving earth still encourages us, 'They shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.' (Amos 9.14).



Maria says

'I moved to Britain 11 years ago from Romania. In Bath, I fell in love with the land itself, the rolling hills and all the trees tied up in knots. It all looked so clean and tidy, so much more colourful than the grey industrial city I had left behind. I wanted to start afresh and put the place I had left right out of my mind. Yet suddenly at least once a day I had to tell people: 'I am from Romania'.

Where was home? The place under my feet or the place far away I could no longer help or change or affect?

My CEL friends and other Climate activists I met in the past five years have helped me feel like I can belong and feel completely at home as a 'local Romanian'. The things I do here, on my street, are the 'butterflies flapping their wings - I can influence events and create opportunities not only in my back garden but far away.'

Economics for people and planet

It has been said that people should be put before nature. It's a false opposition: people depend on nature, just as nature fares best when people have plenty.

The vision below is based on principles for a green economy set out by the stakeholder forum for this year's Earth Summit at Rio. They give everyone who cares about the world – its humans and other living creatures – something to aim for. Are you a part of this emerging economy?

- ▶ **Wealth is distributed equitably** within nations and among nations, leaving sufficient space for wildlife and wilderness. The economic partnerships between them are based on **equity and fairness** in order to minimize the gap between rich and poor, and support the environmental sustainability of both. Environmental and social standards are applied in **co-operation between countries** to promote a 'race to the top' rather than the bottom.
- ▶ Natural ecosystems are safeguarded so as to meet the needs of **future generations** and allow them to flourish. A **precautionary approach** is used so that scientific uncertainty does not lead to action being avoided. Sustainable development is achieved if people have a right to **develop in harmony with the environment. Biodiversity**, the rich variety of species, is safeguarded through a system of governance that prevents irreversible damage.
- ▶ Tax regimes and regulation allow **external costs to be internalised** so that market prices reflect real social and environmental costs. Countries acknowledge that actions at home can make them **liable for environmental impacts abroad**, and make judicial remedies available. All citizens have access to **information and the opportunity to participate** in decisions affecting the environment, with access to legal remedies for injustice.
- ▶ **Sustainable production and consumption** is promoted by reducing, reusing, and recycling materials, and minimising unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Civil society and governments work together in **strategic, co-ordinated and integrated planning** to deliver the green economy and alleviate poverty.
- ▶ **Social and environmental well-being** is measured, instead in Gross Domestic Product which is boosted by environmentally-damaging activities such as fossil fuel exploitation and financial speculation. **Gender equality** is a prerequisite for a green economy. The vital role which women play will be rewarded accordingly and their skills enhanced. And it will be a **just transition** to the green economy envisioned here, so that those who are can afford it pay the costs and the most vulnerable get help.



'They shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them.'

Martin Davis, free range photography

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 (less with a standing order). Send your details to our Information Officer using the form below.

To find out more before committing yourself, visit our extensive website: www.greenchristian.org.uk, sign up for our free monthly news e-mail or contact us for a free introductory pack.

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CEL gatherings in 2012

Saturday 10 March, Bristol

Treasure in the field: spiritual capital and sustainable living with Jonathon Porritt and Tim Gorrington

We are spending the natural capital on which our children depend – not to mention the other species in our trust. Whether oil, metal, water or nutrients, it's time to 'leave it in the ground' and become treasurers, not consumers, of the earth. That requires investing in the source of ultimate value: spiritual capital.

Christian Ecology Link's 30th anniversary conference will explore alternative, sustainable ways of being that will heal our ravaged world.

19-21 October, Noddfa, North Wales

Is your ecology too small?

From the great story of the universe we learn that there is no disconnection and we are kin in the kin-dom of God with all that is. What will our faith look and sound like when we embrace that revelation?

Our time will be a Christ-centred and biblically-informed journey in that great story. We will travel with prophets, psalmists and cosmologists, singing their songs and telling their stories of homecoming. We will reflect together on our emerging vocation to be co-creators with God, asking forgiveness for the plight of the earth and making straight the way of the Lord in the damaged but still beautiful world in which we live.

Saturday 17 November, London

CEL's Annual Members' Meeting and workshop, close to Euston Station. An opportunity to contribute to the work of CEL, and gain inspiration for your own.

CEL brings together some 900 people in the UK and beyond who are praying and working for the earth and all that lives in it. We offer:

Gatherings: Members meet in at least two conferences, retreats or workshops each year.

Local groups: 18 groups are directly affiliated to CEL, and we are pleased to offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: Each month we publish a daily Prayer Guide available by e-mail, on our website or by post.

Campaigns: Our LOAF campaign promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. We also support the climate change campaign Operation Noah, which we established in 2001.

ecocell: Join a group of CEL members on a pioneering journey towards carbon freedom, learning how to reduce our footprint to a level the earth can truly sustain.

Green Christian magazine: Published twice a year, *Green Christian* is packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews and resources.

Exhibition materials: We can provide a range of leaflets, banners and posters for events and displays giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics.

On-line: Members can join a discussion forum and social network to exchange news and advice. CEL has a Facebook page.

E-news: We publish regular e-mails for members and non-members on events and resources from CEL and other Christian environmental organisations.

Website: You can find further details of all the above at www.greenchristian.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at the address above.

Rosy says



Something I enjoy doing is preparing the room at the Parish Centre for monthly meetings of our City Climate Coalition. Energy management professionals, climate campaigners and Transition members plan questions to ask Councillors or how we'll run the next public meeting. There's quite a few tensions due to our different perspectives but also trust and respect built up from recognising that none of us has a complete view.