

# EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

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Bishop James Jones

When talking about the environment we are always open to the charge of hypocrisy. There is no human activity which is environmentally neutral.

There is a generational difference in attitudes to the environment.

My own encounter with young people challenged me to think again about my own attitude to the earth.

I considered the question:

“Did Jesus have anything to say about the earth?”

The Chief Rabbi told me that Jewish environmental ethics begin not with Genesis but with Deuteronomy and the injunction to the children of Israel not to destroy any fruit bearing tree as they entered the Promised Land. He also drew attention to the title that Jesus took to himself, “The Son of Man”. In Hebrew this means the child of Adam, the one hewn from the earth (adamah).

This led me to read the Gospels and to see if there are any times when Jesus calls himself the Son of Man/Child of Adam and in the same breath talks about the earth.

There are at least seven occasions, which give us a unique collection of Son of Man/Earth sayings. For example,

- a) Matthew 12 verse 40. “Just as Jonah was in the belly of the Whale three days and three nights so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.” When they laid him in the heart of the earth the earth quaked and when God raised the Son of Man from the heart of the earth it quaked again. The earth was more eloquent than the Temple Curtain. It tore once, the earth quaked twice.
- b) Mark 2 verse 10. “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” In Genesis we are told that it was Adam’s sin that led to the cursing of the earth. The Second Adam comes bringing forgiveness to humanity and therefore healing to the earth. It is only when humanity is ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven that the earth can begin to flourish.
- c) Luke 18 verse 8. “When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth.” The faith that he speaks of is faith in the God who delivers justice on earth to the widow and orphan. This is relevant to today’s widows and orphans who are victims of climate injustice.

As far as I am aware no one has done a study of this collection of Son of Man/Earth sayings.

We need to study what the Gospels say about the earth in order to persuade Christians to care for the earth. It is not sufficient to draw on the Old Testament.

At the centre of the Lord's Prayer is the petition, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This is a prayer for the earthing of heaven. Sadly in English there is a division between "Your will be done" and "On earth as in heaven". The way we pray reinforces a separation of God's will from what happens on earth.

For 2000 years Christianity has for many believers been about escaping the earth to bag a place in heaven. But the Lord's Prayer is about the fusing together of heaven and earth.

The bodily Resurrection of Jesus shows that God has a plan for the material world. There's a continuity between Genesis 1 with its affirmation of the material and Luke 24 with its 5 bodily resurrection appearances.

N.B. The last irony in the Gospel of John is when Mary thinks she has seen the gardener. In fact, she was not wrong. She did see the gardener – it was the gardener of Eden, not the gardener of Gethsamene. It was God who planted the garden in Eden.

The earthing of heaven is about establishing a Kingdom of Justice and mercy.

"The whole point of justice consists precisely in our providing for others through humanity what we provide for our family through affection." (Lactantius).

When it comes to justice God knows that because it is so slow in coming we are tempted to give up. This is the context for Jesus telling the parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge.

The plea of the widow is "Grant me justice". It echoes the cries of today's climate widows and orphans.

There is climate injustice. In Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Malawi the average carbon emission is less than 0.1 ton per person per year. In Europe it is over 10 tons, in America it is in the region of 25 tons.

The injustice is that those most affected are not near the structures of power to change the situation and those who have the power do not as yet feel the full force and effects of the changing climate.

I often think that if the City of London with all its banks and the Parliament in Westminster had been flooded as many times as the Thames Barrier has been raised in the last ten years then there would have been greater attempts to mitigate the reality of climate change.

Five Practical Points related to the Church's tasks and responsibilities facing the challenges of Climate Change and Energy Scarcity.

#### 1) PRAYER

The leaders of the European Churches must follow the example of Our Lord and teach the faithful to pray. At the heart of the Lord's Prayer is the petition that God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This is a prayer for the earthing of heaven.

Jesus also taught that the Son of Man/Child of Adam would be central to the “renewal of all things” (Matthew 19; 28).

So teach us to pray two prayers:

“Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.”

“Holy Jesus

Child of Adam

Come in Glory

And renew the face

Of the Earth.”

## 2) PERSONAL

The leaders of the European Churches must follow the example of Our Lord and teach the faithful to live accountable lives. We shall all of us give account to God for how we have treated the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the displaced and the destitute (Matthew 25; 44). The changing climate is causing famine, drought, disease, and environmental refugees.

Through the choices we make as citizens and customers day by day over energy, food, water and transport we contribute to these ecological impacts.

The life and choices of a Christian should be shaped by the insight that it is in the hungry, thirsty, sick, displaced and destitute that we come face to face with the Son of Man/Child of Adam. To add to their misery is to heap further suffering on Christ.

N.B. I have not used the word ‘consumer’ or the phrase ‘consumer society’ which means ‘to eat, devour and destroy’.

## 3) PAROCHIAL

The leaders of the European Churches must teach the second great commandment to love our neighbour as our self. Global issues can seem beyond the reach of the individual. Yet local Christian communities are set in neighbourhoods where we can show the love of God in action through caring for creation and restoring the local environment.

It is at the parochial level in our local parishes that we can live out the Covenant between God and all the creatures of his creation (Genesis 9; 12).

The Parish is where we localise the earthing of heaven.

## 4) POLITICAL

The leaders of the European Churches must demonstrate through word and action that there is an inextricable link between the doctrine of justification by faith and the ethics of doing justice in the world. How can any Christian claim to be by grace at one with the God of Justice and Mercy and not be caught up in the divine dynamic of acting justly and loving mercy in God’s world?

If therefore we are committed to seeking justice we cannot ignore the victims of injustice and of climate injustice.

The injustice lies in the reality that those most affected by climate change are powerless to stop it; but those with the power to do something do not as yet feel the full impact and are slow to change.

Lactantius a 4<sup>th</sup> Century North African theologian defined justice as: “The whole point of justice consists precisely in our providing for others through humanity what we provide for our family through affection.”

The climate widows and orphans echo the plea of the widow in the Parable of the Unjust Judge “Grant me justice”. (Luke 18; 1-8).

Jesus told this parable so that we would not give up or lose heart in the face of injustice.

That is why we support the moves to seek international agreement on Climate Change and Carbon Emissions in Paris 2015.

## 5. PLANET

The leaders of the European Churches must encourage priests and ministers to enter into local alliances with imams and rabbis and other religious leaders, and lead their congregations into friendships that find common ground from our sacred texts about our shared responsibility for the future of the Earth.

Only through finding common cause as servants and as vice-regents of the earth at a local level will we find the resilience to combat the extremism that threatens the future of the planet.

All of us “live and move and have our being “in the Creator of the Universe. (Acts 17; 24-28).

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[bishopjamesjones@btinternet.com](mailto:bishopjamesjones@btinternet.com)

01653 658 325

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