



(if there are Oystercatchers, there must be God! - DJMC)

# Oystercatcher#2

**manifesto** for **BIBLE reading.**

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## **POST COP<sub>26</sub>, CODE RED EDITION**

(In English only: other languages have other challenges and opportunities)

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*First of all: Things **HAVE** changed:*

printed Bibles & commentaries presume a world **without** climate crisis. None lack their own agenda and slant, all of which is fine...BUT never be content with just one translation of the Bible, even if you are fluent in Biblical Greek. Even the best, most conscientious translators translate only into the idiom they're *expected* to.

The nuances revealed by the discerned slants, prejudices and mistakes of others may be instructive. But, simply: the Bible is only ever **interpreted**. Get used to it! ***Which is the best slant to choose?***  
***Your choice matters, more than high-profile scholars!***

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### **1) Experiential, Pedestrian Terrestrial**

Scripture majors on imagery powerfully rooted in actual **experience**, rather than detached abstracts. This stops us looking down on the writers as 'primitive'. Experience is 'on foot' not from a car or plane.

The 'dome of heaven' (Gen 1) is how the sky actually **looks** when you look up. From this standpoint - and with environmental concern - '**outer space**' is a welcome source of wonder, but can become a distraction from urgent engagement with what faces us here and now.

[Hint: what do billionaire playboys like Musk, Bezos and Branson mess about in?]

## **2) When you hear 'Earth'....**

-Not just a **location**, but next to God, (or Jesus in NT) the **character** most mentioned in the Bible. Also consider '**Heaven and Earth**', (**Sky and Soil**) which, taken together are the **entirety of Creation** that the Bible is bothered about. This is an undivided dynamic unity which God has made: think "bottle-garden". Everything affects everything. AND- try spelling Earth every time with a capital "**E**". It makes a difference to how you relate.

\*\*\*\***Advanced option:** only ever use "who" rather than "it" for EARTH.

## **3) So: when you hear 'Heaven' ...**

look at the sky, and what is happening today. The sky is perhaps 'out of reach', but not remote to your experience. It's always there. It doesn't need to be talked about to be brought to mind. Heaven's in danger, same as the Earth! In the Bible, Heaven/Sky are the same word, most of the time. Heaven and Earth are **one** Creation, and belong together, in the same breath. Look it up! Next time there's thick fog, have a walk in Heaven! Heaven is not 'another dimension' - that's science fiction, not the Bible. But if you do insist on separating them, experience Sky first of all, and only then bring your imagination into gear for 'Heaven'. "Angels" are not aliens, but fellow creatures. (And sometimes, vice versa?). *It's science fiction, not scripture, which is obsessed with a separate dimension.*

\*\*\*\***Advanced option:** *If the 'Kingdom/Reign of Heaven' is also 'the Way the Sky works', ponder the significance of the cycles of water, carbon, oxygen and more, cf Isaiah 55: the Word of God alongside the Water cycle.*

**4): Give us this day:** *In the Our Father/Lord's Prayer: are you praying for God's will to be done throughout both "Heaven & Earth"? In climate crisis, both realms of God's Unified Creation are in need of that prayer. We can't take it for granted that 'heaven' is invulnerable and in balance*

## **5) When you hear 'World' ...**

touch the Earth, stroke an animal, drink water. Eat bread, exchange a sign of Peace. Don't be funnelled down only into the - genuine, but not universal- narrower meaning of 'human culture'. **'World'** includes every living thing, every creature. This is our starting point today. This is what God so loves that God 'gave his only Son' ... And the depths of the word's meaning suggest something worth delighting in.

## **6) When you hear 'Spirit' ...**

go outside and stand in the Wind and feel their movement. Breathe in and out. **Spirit, breath** and the wayward gusty **Wind** belong together in the Bible, and require no additional rapture to step into. But if you *are* given some sort of rapturous vision, remember, *the community needs to interpret it*, rather than just you yourself. Spirit is reality, not abstraction. Without them, the Bible is just an old book.

(Whilst we're on 'Spirit' - when you hear "dove", think of all the statues which have been 'visited' by pigeons. **Dove = pigeon**)

## **7) When you hear 'Redemption' ...** always first

substitute '*liberation*'. Christ and the truth (both, without conflict) set us free! Freedom goes with finding your place and purpose.

Don't wait till you're dead to find it. And don't hesitate to start looking when the world is scary [cf Luke 21:25ff]

## **8) When you hear 'obedience ...'**

obediently and faithfully question who or what it is that you are being asked to be obedient to. When at Christmas someone sings '*Christian children all must be/mild, obedient, good as he*', read again the only story we have of Jesus' childhood, when he disappears in the middle of a crowded city and drives his parents to distraction. Can you serve Church best by obedience, or by **loving** challenge? If so, when?

## **9) When you hear servant/slave** remember that it is the useless ones that do only what they're told. [cf Luke 17:10] And check to see if translators have made 'good' **slaves** into '**servants**' and kept the bad one '**slaves**'. [See no 10 on legacies of slavery, abolition of which was delayed by similar strategies to the delay of climate action] .

## **10) When you hear of God in Christ Jesus ...**

remember and respect with gratitude and wonder, how the Church has insisted on (though also often ignored) the full and unreserved humanity of Jesus, revealing the holiness of that of which he was made. How much of this is shared with other creatures? Even to a cellular level?

Feel your own body. Go to the toilet. Get hot, get cold. Swim in the sea. The radical implication of the Incarnation, if you don't limply pass it off as a mere metaphor, is that Jesus also shares our evolutionary history – thus also that of all living things.

## **11) No more othering.**

..After 'Black Lives Matter' and with the recognition of the legacies of slavery, churches are more than ever aware of the 'othering' of races, gender identities, different abilities etc. 'Stewardship Christianity' which identifies our calling as 'looking after (God's) property' without allowing that Creation has feelings or an opinion, has been well past its sell-by date since before the Paris Conference and the Pope's **Laudato Si** encyclical of 2015. To borrow the slogan of the Poverty Truth Commission, "Nothing about Earth without Earth is for Earth". And God's Rainbow Covenant is with '*All Flesh*' and '*The Earth*' rather than just with us. **We are** the Earth. So is all life. From which follows....

**12) "Climate denial"** needs to be no more acceptable in churches than racism: 1) It's stupid, and God is no protection against stupidity. 2) It does real harm, and not just to others. 3) It's deeply engrained in our (church) culture, and will stay that way unless named and challenged.

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**13) Up a tree...** .It's no accident that the **Cross** is **also always** the **Tree**: ancient stone crosses present the Cross as a fruitful habitat for the Birds of Heaven. God meets Abraham & Sarah under a tree. Isaiah bemoans the abuse of the holiness of trees in the abusive cults of Israel's neighbours. Just imagine what it might do if you brought a tree into church on a special festival - like Christmas, perhaps ?;)  
A sermon without trees may be a crime, because it deprives people of what they need to respond to the signs of our times.

**What do you think?**