

The theology of creation: A position paper for the Church's investment policy relating to environmental ethics

1. Introduction

Many of the Church's areas of ethical concern relating to investment, such as armaments, alcohol, or tobacco, are long standing. In contrast the whole concept of ecology is relatively new, the word having been coined by a German scientist a little over a hundred years ago. (the word 'ecology' is derived from the Greek word 'oikos' meaning 'household', which is also the root behind 'economics'.) General popular concern about the environment is younger still. Many people would attribute it to the 1961 publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, a warning about the dangers of modern industrial chemicals such as DDT to the natural world.

However, while ecology itself is a relatively modern secular topic, theological consideration of the mystery and wonder of creation is not. Creation theology can therefore be used as the basis of a Christian analysis of environmental issues. A proper analysis of the theology of creation is a complex issue beyond the scope of this paper, which aims to detail the scriptural basis for creation theology. (All Bible quotations are from the New International Version.) It also notes that modern Church teaching takes a more positive view of the created world than some older traditions. It is hoped that the conclusions drawn can be used to set out policy guidelines to direct investment, particularly in the extractive industries.

2. Creation and Fall

One of the major aims of the Old Testament is to set out the relationship between God, the natural world, and humanity. In its essence this relationship is simple. God is the creator, while creation, which includes both mankind and the physical world, is created by him alone. From a Christian perspective therefore, any act that damages the created world not only harms the physical environment in its own right, but also damages the work of the creator, i.e. God. Theologians have noted the uniqueness of the Christian theology of creation, due to the insight that God created the universe out of nothing. Whilst most cultures have stories of creation, in them the creator is seen working within set limits. For example, the ancient Greek Platonists and their Gnostic followers saw the framework of the universe, i.e. Time and space, as given. This was then shaped by the 'divine worker', or 'demiurge'. (this led the Gnostics to a dualistic belief that the world itself is evil, and that spiritual progress consists in raising oneself to a higher 'spiritual' plane.) In contrast the conclusion that time and space themselves are aspects of a spiritual reality created by God is therefore one distinctive aspect of Christian thought. This is beautifully expressed in the first two verses of Genesis, while John 1: 1-3 takes it further:

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the face of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.'

'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.'

The Old Testament stresses that God alone is eternal and infinite. Creation is a purposeful act of God, deriving from his love and for his purpose. While it may be anachronistic to apply the modern concept of 'ecology' to Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament is dominated by this whole question of the relationship between creator and created. It notes the unique position of humanity in this relationship. Adam is created separately from the rest of the natural world, which seems to imply a special status. Genesis 1:28 states that after creating men and women in his own image:

'God blessed them and said to them, "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground".'

This clearly implies a delegated sovereignty from the creator of all to humanity, but always within the recognition that the world belongs to God and to him alone. In other words, humanity's destiny is to work as a steward of the beautiful earth and its inhabitants made by the creator. Genesis 1 describes God's creation of the natural world, with the repeated refrain: *'and God saw that it was good'*. Genesis 2 does not use the word 'dominion', but describes God's plan for Adam as 'taking care' of the Garden. It shows the world from humanity's point of view. It is noticeable that Adam is enjoined to eat plants rather than animals, and that the name 'Adam' is related to the Hebrew word 'adamah', 'earth'. The key points from Genesis are that the created world reflects the mind of its creator and must therefore be good. Humanity has a unique position in relation to the natural world by being created in the image of God, and having a designated responsibility to act as a good steward of it.

Genesis 3: 17-19 also shows however, that right from the start men and women totally failed to live up to their intended role. The Fall narrative explains how human selfishness and arrogance resulted in disobedience to God's will. It was this that disrupted the originally intended relationship between Adam (humanity) and the natural world:

'Because you have listened to your wife and eaten from the tree which i forbade you, accursed shall be the ground on your account. With labour shall you win your food from it all the days of your life. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, none but wild plants for you to eat. You shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground; for from it you were taken. Dust you are, to dust you shall return.'

Redemption from this fallen condition could not be made by mankind itself, but only by God Himself in a 'new creation' through the Incarnation and redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This topic will be dealt with later. The message of Genesis is that the world is not the product of some chance sequence of events, but deliberately created by God. This means that the world is purposeful rather than meaningless, being based upon spiritual values rather than a value-neutral product of chance factors. This interpretation does not depend upon a literal creationist approach, nor does it rest upon creation being conceived only as a unique event rather than a point in time being followed by a continuing process.

Christianity is sometimes accused by environmentalists of being 'anthropocentric', here used as a pejorative term suggesting that the earth and its creatures are regarded as objects of no account to be used and exploited by mankind. A classic example of a green attack on Christianity is a famous and often quoted article by Professor Lynn White, published in science in 1967, which put the blame for the growing ecological crisis on Christianity. The article was called the *Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis*, and stated:

'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen....it insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends....by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. The spirit in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated. Man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions on the exploitation of nature crumbled.'

The above hardly seems an unbiased account, with a loaded repetition of the term 'exploit'. It also seems to call for a return to nature worship, i.e. Pantheism, if not paganism. Nevertheless, it must be accepted that such views are not uncommon within the green movement. Such a negative perception of Christianity can make it difficult for the churches to engage in free and constructive dialogue with NGOs working on environmental issues. Such attacks are normally based upon the verse from Genesis 1:28 quoted earlier. However, this interpretation seems misguided. Christian theology is the opposite of 'anthropocentric'. It puts humanity firmly in its place between God and creation. (this is not to deny that historically many Christians may have shown a deplorable attitude towards the exploitation of nature.) While God cannot be equated with creation, damage to the created world goes against the will and divine plan of the Creator, so it must be wrong. The narrative of the Fall illustrates the consequences of human disobedience.

3. **From the fall to the new testament**

However, God did not abandon humanity after the Fall, but set the redemptive process in motion through a series of covenants, beginning with Noah after the Flood. It is worth noting that the covenant given to Noah is not just made with men and women, but also with the earth itself and the creatures living upon it. God says to Noah in Genesis 9:9-11:

'I will now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that was with you - the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals -every living creature on earth.'

The promises and responsibilities were then confirmed, first through Abraham and his family as stated in Genesis 17:2-8:

"I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase you numbers". Abram fell down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you. You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram, your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God."

They were repeated to Moses and the nation of Israel as described in Exodus, and finally to all of humanity by the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The old covenant of the children of Israel was replaced by the new covenant with the people of God, as stated in Hebrews 8:8-13.

The theme of good stewardship of nature recurs throughout the Old Testament. The Book of Proverbs states 12: 10: *'the righteous man cares for the needs of his animal'*. A similar concern for the natural world is shown in the Sabbath and Jubilee laws, e.g. Exodus 23: 10-12:

'For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unploughed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.'

This point is reinforced by being included in the Ten Commandments, i.e. Deuteronomy 5:12, as well as being expanded in Leviticus 25:6, where the earth itself is specifically mentioned: *'The land is to have a year of rest'*. The same book reminds people that they are only tenants of the land, e.g. Verses 23-24:

"The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land."

Such a vision persists throughout the Old Testament to the lesser prophets at its end. Hosea for example uses very similar language. He prophesies that Israel would be punished for unfaithfulness: *'I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land and slay her with thirst'*, Hosea 2:3. However, once Israel repents:

'In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle i will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.' Hosea 2:2

'Israel shall dwell again in my shadow and shall grow corn in abundance; they shall flourish like a vine and be famous as the wine of Lebanon. What has Ephraim any more to do with idols? I have spoken and I affirm it; I am the pine-tree that shelters you; to me you owe your fruit.' Hosea 14:7-8

Hence the Old Testament teaches that God, rather than humanity, is the centre of the universe, but that the cause of the Fall, i.e. human pride and greed, lead people to an egotistic, instrumental view of the earth. Humanity is designed to live in harmony with nature, but this is frequently undermined by human sin. Isaiah describes the coming of the redeemer from the root of Jesse as characterised by harmony across the natural world when *'the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord'*. Isaiah 11: 1-9.

The psalms frequently mention the natural world in terms of praise. Psalm 148 instructs animals and plants to join both angels and humanity in praising the Lord. Indeed, the psalms end with the call: *'Let everything that has breath praise the Lord'*, from Psalm 150: 6. It is noteworthy that it says everything, not every man and woman. Many of the psalms sketch out a vision of God for whom every part of creation has a significance and purpose in its own right, rather than as raw materials for human use (e.g. The frequent descriptions of the cedars of Lebanon). The psalms also reaffirm the point made in Genesis, that all this beauty comes from God alone:

'Thine are the heavens, the earth is Thine also; the world with all that is it is of thy foundation'.
Psalm 89:11-12.

The book of Job is perhaps the one of the most 'ecological' books of the old testament, second only to Genesis in this respect. Job and his friends are asked by God a series of rhetorical questions which reveal humanity's limited knowledge of, and small stature in relation to, the natural world. This is particularly true when God speaks to Job from the storm in chapter 38-39. Job is told how the most basic foundations of the world were set by God. (Incidentally, a growing number of physicists have stated that the universe shows evidence of design in its most fundamental laws. In other words, analysis of what would have happened had there been slight differences in the power and relationship of the basic nuclear forces can be shown to lead to a universe inimical to the existence of life.) The approach of the Book of Job can surely not be called anthropocentric or egotistic. Rather the underlying message is that it is humanity's attitude to nature that is wrong. The righteous man is told that:

'You will laugh at destruction and famine, and need not fear the beasts of the earth. For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the wild animals will be at peace with you'.
Job 5:22-23

Major prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah emphasised the fact of the shortness of human life, its brief tenure of the land, and of the human obligation to act as a responsible steward of what has been entrusted to it. The people of Israel were farmers raising crops and livestock on the thin soil close to the Judean and Sinai deserts. As such they had an implicitly ecological view of the earth and its fragility. Much of the land of the great powers that oppressed Israel such as Assyria and Babylon has subsequently turned into desert as a result of environmental degradation. For two thousand years great cities such as Nineveh and Babylon have been mud heaps lying desolate in a sandy waste. Isaiah and Jeremiah warned that it is human sin which leads to the devastation of the earth, e.g.

'The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth, its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.'
Isaiah 24 v4-6:

'How long will the land lie parched, and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. Moreover, the people are saying, "he will not see what happens to us".' Jeremiah 12: 4

This could be rephrased in secular language as saying that humanity is the 'caretaker' of creation, and our actions and attitudes have a powerful impact upon it. Surely a fairly 'green' vision. Jeremiah 50: 12-13 accurately prophesied that the 'frolicking' of the Babylonians would result in catastrophe for Babylon:

'She will be the least of nations- a wilderness, a dry land, a desert. Because of the Lord's anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate.'

Before leaving the allegation of 'anthropomorphic instrumentalism', it seems relevant to note that the ecological crisis in the officially atheist Soviet Union and its satellites was much more devastating than anything ever experienced in the West. One newspaper commented: *'When historians finally conduct an autopsy on the Soviet Union and Soviet Communism, they may reach the verdict of death by ecocide.'* In 1985 the Czech president Vaclav Havel wrote an open letter on the region's ecological catastrophe:

*'I think that the environmental desolation created by the Communist regimes is a warning for the world today. I think that the message that is coming from this part of the world should be read as a challenge to defend ourselves against all those who despise the secret of being, either cynical business people pursuing nothing but profits, or left wing saviours who have succumbed to the drug of cheap ideological utopias. **Both of these lack a metaphysical anchor. I mean, a humble respect for the whole of creation and awareness of our obligations to it.***

A study of the Bible forces us to recognise our own fallen nature, and to accept that this is a necessary first step if the created world is to be saved. The appalling environmental record of atheistic Communism shows what can happen when Man rather than God is exalted. Havel's words in fact show his recognition of this fact. Communism may have collapsed in 1989, but this has led to the apotheosis of global capitalism, a system that at its worst could be as exploitative as Communism unless ethical limits are imposed upon it. Pope John Paul II lived under Communism and expressed similar views in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, written after the fall of Communism:

'Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though the earth does not have its own requisites and a prior, God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray.'

4. The good news of redemption

The life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the means by which the effects of the Fall were undone. The message from the New Testament as regards creation is quite clear. God became incarnate in physical matter, and sent his Son to lift up the whole of creation to the Father's glory. The 'good news' of the Gospels promise liberation and fulfilment for the whole of creation. In Matthew's gospel Jesus states that his Father watches over the natural world. *'He feeds the birds of the air'* Matthew 6:26, *'and the sparrows will only fall to the ground through His will'* Matthew 10:29. This is of course within the framework of the vision given in Genesis' that is all created by God: *'The world and all that are in it belong to the Lord. The earth and all who are on it are his.'* Revelation 4:11. The 'new creation' is most fully explained in Paul's great epistle to the Romans. This describes the whole of creation as having been liberated from decay by Christ's sacrifice, i.e. Romans 8: 18-22:

'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subject to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.'

This section of Romans tells us that the creation has eschatological value. In other words, the creation has its own legitimate part to play in God's ultimate plan. The created world is not a tool to be used by humanity to sustain life, and then be discarded at the end of time. Note that Hebrews 11:3 insists that it is faith that reveals this teaching to us: *'by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.'*

The Bible begins with the account in Genesis of the earth's creation. It ends with the book of Revelation, where the eschatological vision is most clearly set out. This repeats the creation teaching of Genesis, but the book

ends with a vision of a redeemed creation, using a description of the 'tree of life' that lifts the curse imposed in Genesis.

'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being'. Revelation 4:11.

'Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever!" ' Revelation 5:13

'And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.'
Revelation 22:2.

Church fathers such as Irenaeus explained that God the Father created the universe by means of what he called his 'two hands', i.e. The Son and the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian aspect of creation implies that God remains in close relation with creation. In other words Christianity does not support the deist image of God as the 'divine clock maker' who set the machine in motion and then neglected it. Creation is through Christ, made by one who himself became incarnate and a part of the created order. Basil of Caesarea described the Holy Spirit as the 'perfecting cause' of creation. What he meant by this was the work of God the Spirit to reconcile the world to God the Father through the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Only thus can the created world be true to its original purpose.

In the two thousand years since the Gospels it is not surprising that varying theological interpretations of the theology of creation have appeared. Modern research has rediscovered how in the Celtic tradition men and women seeking the spiritual life lived closely in touch with nature. St Mungo (Kentigern) founded a number of religious settlements throughout Scotland and Wales. He is best known as the founder of Eglia Cu (beloved Church), now called Glasgow.

'Mungo shared the sensitivity of Celtic Christians to the wild creatures of nature. He learned to understand animals, fish, and birds with his heart. All through his life this gift came to life. At Culross one day some boys started throwing stones at birds, a robin being hit and falling to the ground. The boys ran away. But Mungo ran to the fallen bird, smoothed and caressed its feathers and prayed: "Lord Jesus Christ, in whose hands is the breath of every creature, tame or wild, give back to this bird the breath of life, that your name may be glorified." After a little while the bird revived and flew away. This is why the Glasgow coat of arms includes a robin.'
Life of St Mungo

In the middle ages the writings of abbess Hildegard of Bingen glorified creation:

'Through his creation God encircles and strengthens us.'

.....
*'the earth of humankind contains all moistness,
 All verdancy, all germinating power.
 It is in so many ways fruitful.
 All creation comes from it,
 Yet it forms not only the basic raw materials for humankind,
 But also the substance of the incarnation of God's Son.'*

Two medieval authorities are still influential in the Roman Catholic tradition. St Francis of Assisi praised the created world, notably in his *Canticle of the Creatures (Hymn to the Sun, Hymn to the Moon etc)*. The medieval theologian St Thomas Aquinas wrote:

'God's goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone. He produced many and diverse creatures so that what was wanting to one in the manifestation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness which is in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is

manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participate in the divine goodness more perfectly and represents it better than any single creature whatever.'

Aquinas here expresses a sense of the *pleroma* or fullness of God's creation. John and Charles Wesley took up this doctrine of creation and perfection, a theme expressed in Charles Wesley's hymn *Love Divine all Love's Excelling*. The line of this hymn '*changed from glory into glory*' describes not only individual human salvation but that of creation. In his day John Wesley was noted for his progressive views on social issues. In the eighteenth century, before the Industrial Revolution, animals were generally seen as objects to be exploited for their labour, or for their potential as food. Nevertheless Wesley insisted on the need to avoid cruelty to animals, stressing that humanity has a duty of care for creation:

'Be a good steward of every gift of God' Sermon XXIV.

This line of thought was later taken up by William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1940s:

'Christianity is the most materialistic of all great religions. The others hope to achieve spiritual reality by ignoring matter by calling it illusion, or saying that it does not exist. Christianity, based as it is on the Incarnation, regards matter as destined to be the vehicle and instrument of spirit.'

5. Church teaching in modern times

Respect for creation therefore seems implicit in Biblical teaching and mainstream Christian thought. However, growing public concern over environmental issues has resulted in this point being made in a more explicit fashion by the major Churches in recent years. For example, the World Council of Churches meeting at Seoul in 1990 called on all Christians to respect the integrity of creation and to adopt a more sustainable way of life. In 2002 the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales produced a paper called *The Call of Creation*. The opening paragraph of the first European Ecumenical Assembly - *Peace and Justice for the Whole Creation (1989)* seems a good example:

'God the Creator remains the sole owner, in the full sense of the term, of the entire creation. To understand rightly the special role of human beings as the most privileged creature among all, it is important to remember that the whole of creation is ordered to the glory of God... So, we have to reconsider the prevailing ethics of recent centuries which, in contrast to the real meaning of the Word of God, allowed humanity to 'dominate' the creation for its own ends, when, on the contrary, humanity should act as steward in service, service both of God and of the creation itself.'

Similar views were expressed by Pope John Paul II in his New Year Message for 1990, called '*Peace with God the Creator: Peace with All of Creation*', which was devoted to the subject of the modern ecological crisis. It ended thus:

'Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone. When the ecological crisis is set within the broader context of the search for peace within society, we can understand better the importance of paying attention to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us: namely that there is an order in the universe which must be respected, and that the human person, endowed with the capability of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations. I wish to repeat that the ecological crisis is a moral issue.'

6. **Methodist Church teaching on faith and the environment**

The Methodist Church's environmental deliberations benefit from a major paper produced in 1991 by the Connexional team called *Floods & Rainbows - Christian Faith Concerning the Environment*. It begins with the simple statement that: *'This is God's world. God orders, brings into being, sustains, and will ultimately complete the whole universe.'* It notes the central role of Christ, quoting Colossians 1: 17: *'All things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.'*

Floods & Rainbows states that the created universe has immense value to God, *'beyond our powers to describe or assess'*. It quotes Romans 1:20: *'the things that have been made show God's eternal power and deity'*. *Floods & Rainbows* notes how all life on our planet is just one element in a chain of mutual dependence. It argues that humanity would not, and could not, exist without plants, animals, and other forms of life. Human life is therefore rooted in nature. It goes on:

'This vast complex dynamic ordering of all life causes prophet and psalmist to utter great shouts of praise as in Psalm 104 or Isaiah. Traditionally, Christians have seen human beings as having a distinctive and privileged place within this ordering, being made in "the image of God". Alone of all earthly beings we possess reason and a capacity for self-transcendence, and thus for worship and prayer. We are to be stewards of the world on God's behalf, custodians of its amazing richness, companions to its variety of creatures, its "priests". We are to represent the whole created order to God, and to God within the creation.'

Floods & Rainbows notes however that this teaching may have been misunderstood. Humanity has obviously refused to accept the original role intended for it by God. In so doing mankind has become a 'curse' to the earth and its inhabitants, rather than the intended blessing:

'We have become the greatest abusers of the earth, exploiting it with selfish carelessness, and adopting an attitude of ruthless arrogance towards nature. That attitude, at the core of our sinfulness, is closely linked to our fear and envy of each other, to the injustice and hatred which poison human relationships, and thus to our disobedience towards God.'

The document states that this 'dreadful outcome' is traditionally identified as a result of Adam's sin, of a Fall from God's original high purpose. It also notes however that sin never has the last word, that: *'God has established a covenant with the natural world, promised to sustain it, and never wreak total destruction upon it (hence genesis 9:8 -17)'*. *Floods & Rainbows* rebuts the idea that it is Western civilisation, motivated by a distorted Christianity, that is solely responsible for the exploitation and destruction of the natural world. It notes that all human cultures have abused and exploited nature. The report also stresses the central role of Jesus Christ in God's redemptive plan. It quotes Hebrews 1:3 that Jesus reflects the glory of God and upholds the universe by his word of power, and also John 1:14 that Jesus is the Word through which all things were made. It states: *'Jesus in his ministry delighted in the world, in nature, and taught us to see in it the signs of God's providential care....he represented all creation.'* *Floods & Rainbows* concludes:

'With terrible urgency, all human beings are now called upon by God to repent, to renounce all claims to careless dominion, to be remade in Christ. Most especially this applies to our appalling treatment of nature. God demands of us a radical change of attitude, so that at last we recognise our collective responsibility to become its stewards, custodians, friends, servants, priests. ...the new covenant holds good. The energising power of the Holy Spirit is given to us. This should encourage all Christians to help create the new political will which the nations so desperately need, the will to respect nature, heal its wounds, cleanse its pollutions, control the demands made upon it, and develop new appropriate lifestyles.'

Floods & Rainbows was followed in September 1999 by *Caring for the Earth*, an Environmental Policy for the Methodist Church. This referred to the Mission Statement adopted by the Conference in 1996, which affirmed that the Christian mission includes caring for God's earth. The policy was adopted by the 2000 conference which endorsed its objectives. It states:

1. The Methodist Church affirms that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and will endeavour to develop both theology and the practical implications of this on a continuing basis.
2. The Biblical creation stories give human beings privilege and responsibility in relation to the earth and every living creature. We are called to be partners with the rest of creation, and co-creators in the ongoing activity of God. Such partnerships go wrong when human beings act as if the whole world were simply for their present benefit. God's way, revealed in the Bible and particularly in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, is a generous sharing of the divine love to serve the needs of God's creation until its fulfilment.
3. Christian mission includes sharing in putting right the relationships within God's creation that have gone wrong, and growing towards the balance and good stewardship envisaged in the Biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.
4. The Methodist people are challenged and encouraged to care for the earth by following sustainable practice and taking into account global and local environmental considerations for present and future generations.
 - in the conservation and use of resources in the Church and at home
 - in helping to develop more sustainable lifestyles
 - in active involvement in Local Agenda 21 and other community initiatives
 - in concerns for action on global environmental initiatives

The Policy also urged Methodists to have regard for the opportunities for co-operation, joint initiatives with other Churches or environmental initiatives, and of the potential to contribute Methodist insights.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The theology of creation proclaims the consistent message of Christian stewardship, of humanity's obligation to care for the whole of the earth and its creatures. While historically some groups may have emphasised human 'dominion' over creation, modern Church teaching explicitly denies this interpretation. Biblical teaching and modern theological thinking give ample support for the Churches to work positively on environmental issues.
- 7.2 The Methodist Church can base its environmental deliberations on a major paper produced in 1991 by the Connexional team called *Floods & Rainbows - Christian Faith Concerning the Environment*. The 1991 conference welcomed and adopted this report, encouraging Churches and circuits to study it. *Floods & rainbows* concluded by calling upon Christians to create a new political will to respect nature, heal its wounds, clean up pollution, control the demands made upon it, and develop new appropriate lifestyles.
- 7.3 More detailed advice was provided in the 1999 paper *Caring for the Earth*, an environmental policy for the Methodist Church. This affirms that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and commits the Church to develop both theology and the practical implications of this on a continuing basis. It encourages Methodists to take into account global and local environmental considerations for present and future generations, to look for opportunities for co-operation and joint initiatives with other Churches or environmental initiatives, and to contribute Methodist insights.

- 7.4 We note that the Church's decisions have an effect on the conservation of the world's resources, and so form part of the Church's stewardship of the earth. Integrating environmental guidelines into the ethical standards used in the management of the Church's investment assets is an important part of this task.
- 7.5 Epworth has always believed that part of its task is to act as a Christian witness in the world of finance and business. The witness of actions suggests that a deeper understanding of environmental issues relating to investment is a challenge that Epworth is obliged to meet.

November 2002