

“What is the Christian responsibility towards the environment?”

1. Reclaim our spiritual tradition:

Is it true that Biblical teaching is responsible for the mess we are in?

No.

a. Earth is God's. And we are Stewards, not owners

We call it “Creation” as opposed to accidental happening. Intentional instead of random. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. Humans have a role and responsibility on earth, not just to multiply and be happy, but to tend and look after the earth, being mindful that we are earth and come from earth, and to earth we shall return. As far back as 1554, John Calvin had interpreted gen. 1:26 :”have dominion” to mean a “responsible care and keeping that does not neglect, injure, abuse, degrade, dissipate, corrupt, mar, or ruin the earth” (1) Yet the Spanish and English and French explorers and settlers called them heathens and understood little of this biblical tradition, even though almost all were nominally Christian...! Just as in Europe, lands in the “new world” were claimed by the crown, distributed and sold, as if they were theirs.

Non-Indigenous people including Christians have tended to see themselves as” land owners” and land as a commodity to be bought and sold, even an asset to make profit from. We speak of “vacant” land as if the land were empty, unfinished or raw, ignoring the undreds and thousands of life forms already in place.

Aboriginal people however have a relationship to the land that is closer related to the biblical understanding of the land as something that belongs to the creator and in which the creator is glorified.

For aboriginal people rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human – all are formed of the same substance by the ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. The land for first nations people could not be owned, bought and sold. Very much in the spirit of Leviticus.

For Christians, our spirituality pints us back at God's ownership:

The bible stories tell us Over and over how God sends prophets who remind humanity about poverty, racism, abuses, now environmental chaos. It is sinful behaviour that leads us to the mess we are in, not biblical teaching. God knows our tricks...Jubilee year.

Do we listen?. Some have, many haven't. Some do, many don't.

So, our responsibility is to take our role as stewards seriously. The churches should not be lagging behind as many of us do in trying out and practising best ways to be the best stewards we can be, we should be showing the way! Plant butterfly gardens! Have solar panels on the roof and carpool to church! Sponsor land stewardship! Serve church suppers without plastic!

Why is so little happening in churches?!

Arguments from within the church that lead us astray:

“Christians need to fit in”

“This world is not our home”

“ Environmentalism is a new religion and therefore bad”

“Christians need to fit in” Where ever did we get that idea from?

In the days of severe persecution perhaps, but now? Our threat is not to upset people but to have a church die from perceived irrelevance and boredom!

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:12

“This world is not our home” This world is just an in between station on our way to heaven.

Such thinking denies major strands of biblical teaching: Gnosticism was identified as heresy in early church

John 3:16 God so loved the world/cosmos

God is known and glorified in the world, and precisely in nature.

Countless Psalms testify to this, Book of Job, Wisdom, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, the gospels, Paul's letter to the Romans, Colossians ...just to name a few.

For the biblical writers it was in the unfathomable mysteries of nature that God was glorified,

for us today we understand so much more and many things that were a mystery to our ancestors are no more scientifically, yet, are they any less wonderful? Every day we learn something new about the intricate dependencies and networks of nature, when the book of Job (amazing chapter 38!) questions ironocally (*“Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths?”*) (suggesting the answer of course must be NO!) Sure we can now send robots to the darkest and deepest places of the ocean and space telescopes to probe the galaxies and see the stars of the past – but does what we see there become any less amazing? On the contrary.

“Teach me, God, to wonder....” Let us always remember: When we teach one another, ourselves, our children and grandchildren to wonder.. we do it in the name and presence of God.

“ Environmentalism is a new religion and therefore bad”

One wonders what is behind this:

What is the core of our Christian religion? What is the responsibility of every Christian?

We are to love God and we are to love our neighbour as ourselves Mark 12:31

Apply the love of God and the love of neighbour to our current times!

How do you love God? With your heart? Look at the immense role nature plays in

moving us to love God! Ask yourself honestly:

How can you love God when the last butterfly is gone?

How can you love God when there is one homemade catastrophe after the next? Floods and draughts and forest fires?

How will you love God, when the creeks you loved are dried up, the trees you marvelled at diseased, and the hills you lift your eyes toward are stripped bare with mining?

How will you love God when the great fish in the sea have all been fished and consumed, and the bees have been decimated and the food becomes sparse...

and: has it not already become harder to love God? Because we've put ourselves so much at the center of everything and suffer from our innate propensity to mess things up terribly?

Love your neighbour:

How do you love your neighbour as yourself when your resource extraction puts money in your pockets and fills your gas tank but devastates the neighbour in the Philippines or on the first nations reserve?

These are difficult questions, but necessary ones. Love for God and love for neighbour and love for a healthy environment go together!!! Example:

At our AGM last weekend we found out that the money the pension fund generates is still dependent on Canadian Mining Companies that have a lousy environmental and human rights record in Guatemala. For 15 years Maritime United Church people have loved their neighbours in the Guatemalan villages by uncovering environmental crimes, (poisoned water, devastated landscape, forced removal of people from ancestral lands which leads to sickness, depression, substance abuse) assassinations and intimidations of villagers who protest, and all this linked to these companies.

Ministers across the United Church have said we can not continue to profit from Goldcorps and others through our pension fund investments like that while our sisters and brothers in the church in Guatemala have their lives wrecked by these mining practices. Yet...we were told...No, we can't divest... we have an obligation to the plan.....difficulties!!!

Love your neighbour as you love yourself.

The environmental disaster is a Moral Crisis. The greatest moral crisis we have faced as humanity yet.

None other than the current pope made this extremely clear.

Our consumer lifestyle serves only ourselves, and that very blindly, very short term . Oil oil and gas. And we are so slow to come around.

The poor are suffering from the consequences of climate alteration and choking in garbage and discarded goods from the wealthy countries. How could we be silent as churches? Why is there so much mistrust and unhappiness when even small initiatives are taken?

Do you know who the leading people are in the world about banning plastic?

Not a "first world" country! Not a church.

Kenia. Kenians producing, selling or even using plastic are facing up to 4yrs in prison or

\$40,000 fine!

They're choking in plastic. Bags are now found in the stomachs of slaughtered cows that humans want to eat.

Jesus. Jesus Jesus. Healer, prophet, teacher. We are in a crisis of unprecedented proportions and we need his example. Today, Acting for the environment is acting for our neighbour. Acting against abuse (such as in Canadian mining corporations oppressing& destroying peasants' lives in Guatemala) is living Jesus message today!

Why do you demonize environmentalism? How else would you expect God's Spirit to be at work throughout the world bringing people together for our own healing and the healing of the planet?

The mess we're in is a straight continuum of the story of God's people from the beginning, as told in our holy writings. From a biblical standpoint, human beings have an innate propensity to mess things up (sin"). The Old Testament story of God's beloved people, of gifted and charming and courageous women and men messing things up between themselves, and falling prey to the worship of false Gods such as Mammon (money) the golden Calf (Power and Prestige) or Astarte and Baal (Sex and violence) God's justice allows humans to feel the effects of their actions. God's love continues to offer better ways.

And so, the story continues with the Child of Grace born in Bethlehem modelling a way of life free from these idols .

He retreats to the hills at dusk and prays, he heals and teaches, he breaks bread and drinks wine with the outcasts, he walks everywhere, he depends on neighbourly help, he spends time with children and the sick, he looks at the wild lillies and notices the birds.

The story continues with the church, those who believe that God speaks through him , who trust in him, who want to learn from him. Yet, our propensity to mess things up remains. Just as Peter denied the Lord, and Paul and Timothy had a falling out, Eudia and Syntyche faught over leadership in the early church, the story of the church continues to be one of grace and forgiveness as well as monstrous failures .

The old idolatries of worshipping money, power, sex and violence continued to creep in.

We've seen two millenia of very mixed performance of church, and very mixed performance of humanity as a whole.

God's justice allows us to feel the effects of our actions.

Does that mean that God is done with us?

Not yet. God's love continues to speak through the Spirit of Life. The Spirit is moving, God is still speaking. How? An emerging global voice:

We're witnessing a new age of awareness that spans cultures and religions worldwide .
Humanity is not above nature, we are part of nature.

Our planet is finite and groaning under the human presence. We all depend on one another, we're in this together. As human beings we either survive and thrive together or not at all. We can not afford religious or social strife any more. We must come together in ways that unmask the false Gods of greed, consumerism and power for what they are: demons that wish to destroy us.

We must, each in their own culture and religion, return to the way of healing and harmony and simple living. We Christians know this to be embodied in Jesus., Buddhists to be the way of Buddha, and Indigenous people to be the way of listening to MotherEarth, Muslims may recognize in Allah's prophet and Hindus in their respect for earth, and agnostics can find in a sunset and the wonder of the scientifically known universe.

What is our Christian responsibility?

What I have said before can be summarized in this: It is a new age. Everything is holy now. We are all human together and we know this now. A Christians we need to hold the earth sacred because she is the sacrament of \God's presence

Cathedral wonder,
provider of all things.
We are guests,
We are stewards.

To destroy nature
Is a violence, a violation.
To love nature
Is to heal all that is broken.
Leave only footprints.

Janet Larkman, artist statement May 2018 "Footprints" Exhibit at ARCAC

God became human and showed us what it is to be human. Honor the responsibility we have simply as being humans on this planet in this day and age.

By virtue of being human, eating the same fruits of the earth as everyone else breathing the same air, being made up of the same atoms as other people, Christians obviously share the same responsibility as everyone else for our earth home. In this day and age we share the same concerns as everyone else about the environment, and unless we are completely out of our mind, will make every effort to change our habits dramatically, so that our children and grandchildren have an earth that can support them, as it supported us. All of us are still struggling with the magnitude of the new learning and insights that slowly but steadily reveal themselves to us: The scale of the

environmental destruction, the speed of climate alteration, the speed of species extinction, the fulfilment of what was in the past deemed even the most pessimistic forecasts and warnings sent out by the scientific community over the last 40 years. The facts are so massive that many of us move into the mode that all humans resort to when we receive very bad news: Can't be. Denial. Denial protects us for a while from the massive impact of a changed situation. When I heard a week ago that my husband's cousin was killed in a freak cycling accident, my first reaction was: Not him...?! That's impossible. He is the fittest and healthiest of all of your cousins....” Countless human beings on this planet are still in denial, and sadly, many Christians too. While denial makes it easier on us in the moment, it does not take a science degree to realize that denial in matters of the environment will make the situation only worse for us. Needless to say, that in order to save our own skin as human beings we must face the harsh new reality and use all our collective wits and courage to stop our habits that destroy the planet, and embrace ways of living that will allow the earth to heal.. This requires sacrifices from all of us, and especially from us who use up way way more than the fair share of the world's resources. Christians are no exception here. On the contrary, we confess a God who embraced human nature and became human. Christians ethics start with our common humanity. This we share with all people no matter what their religion or race or their whereabouts on this planet and with the God who speaks to us in Jesus.

For further Reading:

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POINT-COUNTERPOINT: THE CHRISTIAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

by Calvin B. DeWitt and Ronald Nas

(2)ORION Magazine, May'June 2018 Scott Russel Sanders

false arguments:

